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People's Assembly Hearing with the Minister of Education

English translation of the livestream transcript (Al-Souriya TV), 14 September 2026.

Translated from auto-generated Arabic captions. Caption lines are merged into sentences, with the timestamp of each segment's first line. Speaker labels in square brackets are added by the translator based on context; (?) marks uncertain names or words.

[00:00:00] **[Studio commentator]** ...it would just be guesswork or speculation. There won't be any tangible or clear results, because the session is a hearing. Today an MP has no right to question or interrogate [the minister].

[00:00:11] **[Commentator]** This comes from the rules of procedure they adopted. Regardless of whether people agree or not, that is what was adopted.

[00:00:17] **[Anchor]** I see.

[00:00:18] **[Commentator]** So it will be a hearing: a reading of the report prepared by the minister, that is, the Minister of Education.

[00:00:25] **[Anchor]** Yes. Apologies for interrupting, but we now go directly, dear viewers, to these pictures of the People's Assembly session, which has just begun.

[00:00:35] **[Chair]** ...as we received it, the other way round. Now Mr. Abdulfattah, we agreed on this, Mr. Waddah. Go ahead, Mr. Abdulfattah.

[00:00:45] **[MP Abdulfattah Obaid, Education Committee]** In the name of God, and prayers and peace be upon the Messenger of God. Ladies and gentlemen, honourable members of the People's Assembly, His Excellency the Minister of Education, peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. Today's session carries exceptional and qualitative importance, as it is the first hearing held by the first People's Assembly after the victory of the great Syrian revolution. It stands as a practical testament to the beginning of a new era that entrenches the principle of transparency and effective parliamentary oversight,

[00:01:13] which places the interest of the nation and the citizen above every other consideration. Inviting His Excellency the Minister of Education to this session is a response to pressing needs imposed by the situation on the ground. The school year began early this year, accompanied by acute challenges and imbalances that have accumulated on the ground, foremost among them the deteriorating infrastructure of educational institutions and the crises

[00:01:43] relating to teaching staff: those arbitrarily dismissed during the blessed Syrian revolution, contract holders whose contracts were not renewed, and students whose books have not reached them, and whose schools still lack a complete teaching staff. It was not possible to overlook the enormous volume of complaints received by members of the People's Assembly across the governorates, which clearly reflects the depth of the suffering and problems facing the

[00:02:13] education system. It is almost the ministry that receives the most complaints, comparable only to the Ministry of Energy, because both ministries touch the concerns of every Syrian household. These complaints concern the student's right to adequate education, or the pressure on teachers in their work environment and their noble mission. Add to that complaints about the rehabilitation of those whose hands are stained with writing [security] reports on fellow teachers and who supported

[00:02:46] the defunct regime. In conclusion, we affirm that committee members will, during this session, pose specific and direct questions within core themes that have been carefully identified, and we hope His Excellency the Minister will answer them with full transparency and precision. We also wish to clarify that this session will not be the last; it is the beginning of an extended process that will be followed by further sessions to assess the implementation of what is raised today. Peace be upon you and God's mercy

[00:03:20] and blessings.

[00:03:22] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague. Thank you. Now colleague... Ahmad Murad, yes.

[00:03:42] **[MP Ahmad Murad]** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your Excellency, I have three, four, four points I want to address. The first point concerns the examination method currently used in Syria, especially for the ninth-grade and baccalaureate certificates. Frankly, these methods have fallen far behind. A student studies for 12 years only to sit an exam on a single day, in a single hour. This has become a psychological

[00:04:16] and financial burden on students and parents, and most of the state's ministries are mobilised for the exams, and even so, controlling them is extremely difficult, especially given technological development, the information revolution, and communication devices that have even become children's toys. From our point of view, does the Ministry of Education have a plan to introduce a cumulative assessment system,

[00:04:55] as is followed in most [clears throat] most countries of the world? And we here in the People's Assembly, I believe we could provide legislative cover for this. Minister, is the ministry preparing a comprehensive national strategy for education that goes beyond day-to-day solutions and clearly sets priorities for curriculum reform, teacher training,

[00:05:22] infrastructure, technical and vocational education, digital education, and linking education to the labour market? The third point I would like to raise: we know the Ministry of Education is currently developing new curricula. What is the ministry's strategy for building a Syrian person who holds values of citizenship and an inclusive Syrian identity? What is the ministry's plan regarding inclusive (?) schools?

[00:05:55] Minister, last year, the previous school year, in the Jazira region or governorate and the city of Kobani alone, 654,000 students sat exams in, or studied under, the curriculum of the former Autonomous Administration. Most of these students, or many, or to be precise thousands of them, frankly do not master Arabic. Now, language aside, every person has the full

[00:06:31] right to study in their own language on their own land. But frankly, the executive instructions for Decree No. 13 were not flexible enough to integrate these students so they can continue their studies in state schools. Thank you.

[00:06:51] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Ahmad Murad. I hope His Excellency the Minister will focus on the questions and note them down, because we need an answer to every question raised in this session. Colleague Shawakh Ibrahim al-Assaf. **[MP Shawakh al-Assaf]** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your Excellency the Minister of Education, I will go straight to the point, which is the restoration of schools, or school infrastructure. The question: is there a clear plan for restoring schools, and how much of it has been completed

[00:07:25] so far, given the absence of clear statistics and data on damaged schools? As a simple example, in the eastern regions, whether Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, Hasakah, Ain al-Arab, al-Shuyukh, not a single school has been restored so far. Second question: in the 2026 state budget, the share for services, sorry, for the Ministry of Education and Health, was 40%,

[00:08:03] 10.11 billion. So what is the Ministry of Education's share, how much has the ministry received, and how is it distributed between wages, investment and restoration? [clears throat] Minister, in January 2026 new tracks for education were announced: digital education tracks, platforms, channels

[00:08:38] on YouTube and virtual study, while even the most basic infrastructure is lacking, from the school desk up to electricity and the internet. Where has this project reached and how much of it has been completed? Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Your Excellency.

[00:09:01] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Shawakh. And now colleague Mohammad Fadi al-Halabi.

[00:09:08] **[MP Mohammad Fadi al-Halabi]** Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings.

[00:09:09] **[Chair]** And upon you peace.

[00:09:10] **[MP al-Halabi]** Minister, the questions I would like to raise: first, what exactly are the decisions you have taken to build a single national education system and curriculum across Syrian territory, and what has been implemented so far, particularly regarding an inclusive identity? My second question: when, and the timing matters to me, will we see modern curricula that stimulate creativity in our students and do not rely on rote learning, memorisation and cognitive overload, but on research and critical thinking,

[00:09:42] linked, as my colleague said, to market needs, not just to production and filling seats? And also curricula, I want to ask when, in terms of timing, we will see curricula free of the rot and contamination of the Baath, not just in the pictures but in the narrative, the mindset and the methodology? The third question: what progress have you made, with figures, in addressing the language and curriculum gap for students returning to Syria from abroad?

[00:10:15] The fourth, procedural question: have the 24 million books been secured, as you previously announced? Thank you.

[00:10:22] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Mohammad Fadi. By returnees you mean students who were expatriates or refugees in neighbouring countries and elsewhere, in foreign countries, and who need to learn Arabic. Thank you.

[00:10:34] **[Chair]** Colleague Ibrahim Khalil al-Taleb.

[00:10:39] **[MP Ibrahim Khalil al-Taleb]** Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. Your Excellency, regarding the file of those dismissed because of the revolution: this is the file that most troubles [us] in the Assembly. Hardly a day passes without us being asked about it, either by phone or through social media. There are also colleagues in the Assembly who were dismissed and don't know when they will return, and we find no answer, neither in the Assembly nor elsewhere, as to when those who were wronged will return, whether

[00:11:08] they stayed with the revolution, and who have still not returned except through contracts. First question: some of these dismissed teachers have returned on contracts, and some have not returned because they are outside Syria. What is the ministry's plan to ensure the return, the dignified return, of these dismissed teachers? And is there an intention to count their service for all 15 years?

[00:11:37] As for financial compensation, will financial compensation be paid to them? God bless you. The contracts of the young people, second question: the contracts of young people from 2010–11 or 2011–12, will they be made permanent and given their financial and administrative rights on a par with their colleagues who were with the regime? Third question: there are around 25,000 male

[00:12:02] and female teachers in rural Aleppo who have been integrated, and the integration decisions have been completed, but the Central [Authority for] Financial [Control] has still not approved or signed off. There is weak communication between the ministry and the teachers. Some dismissed teachers go to the ministry, and the responsible official tells them: go to the branch, what we call Branch 105, which deals

[00:12:31] with terrorism. The teacher tells the official that this branch no longer exists, and he says: that's not my business. So they don't know; they go to the ministry again and again and find no solution. Another case, or the second-to-last question: there are teachers who were

made permanent on the basis of a secondary-school certificate. Does the ministry intend to let them complete their education, for example obtaining an institute or university qualification within five years? Education directorates have submitted requests to you at the ministry to open such

[00:13:00] institutes and have received no reply so far. The last question: there are sons of the revolution in the north who were substitute teachers before the revolution, and during and after it remained substitutes, but have still not been made permanent, even though most of the young people, the male and female teachers who were in SDF areas or in the north, have been integrated, except the substitute teachers, who have not. God bless you.

[00:13:28] [Chair] Thank you, colleague Ibrahim Khalil al-Taleb. But at the start of your intervention you said you did not find the answer in the Assembly. We are holding this hearing with His Excellency the Minister precisely so that you find the answer.

[00:13:40] [MP al-Taleb] No, that's not what I meant. I meant the answer is not with us, it is with the Ministry of Education. If we had the answer, we wouldn't have needed to invite the minister.

[Chair] Colleague Mervat Fat...

[00:14:00] [MP Mervat] Peace be upon you. Your Excellency, I have four questions I would like to raise. Regarding dismissed teachers who have passed retirement age: what is the mechanism for addressing their situation, and will their years of service be counted, along with the related legal and financial matters? The qualitative raise: why did it not cover all workers in the education sector, instead being limited to those teaching in the classroom? Is there a plan to compensate the families of teachers who were martyred during the years

[00:14:27] of the revolution by providing a pension to their relatives? Support for rural areas: is there a plan to support rural areas by giving teachers incentives or transport allowances? May God reward you.

[00:14:44] [Chair] Thank you, colleague Mervat. Colleague Tareq al-Diyab. **[MP Tareq al-Diyab]** Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. Minister, first point: what is the ministry's plan to complete the granting of self [employee] numbers and financial numbers to integrated teachers and to regularise their employment and financial status? Second point: after the liberation, a promise was given to open applications for teachers who had previously worked in camp schools, in the liberated areas and in

[00:15:15] Turkey. Official interviews were indeed held and their files were submitted to the ministry, but later new conditions were issued, including proof of more than 300 days of service, the existence of a vacancy and a financial allocation. What is their fate, especially given how scarce vacancies are? The last point concerns Quneitra Governorate. The students of Quneitra, frankly, carry a message to you, Minister, given the repeated attacks they are subjected to

[00:15:45] and the disruption of their studies. Secondary students hope that you will classify Quneitra as a remote governorate, as it was previously, which would increase their chances of university admission. As for middle-school students, they hope you will issue a special exception for them this year, to admit them to general tenth grade in the public sector regardless of their marks, especially since there is no industrial secondary school in the southern sector

[00:16:12] of the governorate. Thank you very much.

[00:16:15] [Chair] Thank you, colleague Tareq. Colleague Abdulhasib Khaled.

[00:16:31] [MP Abdulhasib Khaled] Has the ministry set equivalency procedures for returnees from abroad who were displaced by the war...

[00:16:38] [Chair] Please, the sound. Repeat the question from the beginning. The microphone is on, but the sound on your end...

[00:16:46] [MP Khaled] Has the ministry developed a plan to simplify equivalency procedures for returnees from abroad who were displaced by the war? Despite decisions on conditional registration, families face impossible administrative obstacles in authenticating documents of previous years of study issued abroad. What firm facilitation measures and direct instructions have been given to education directorates to speed up the regularisation of their status and protect them from losing their school year?

[00:17:14] What is the approved scientific mechanism for assessing the actual level of students who do not have official transcripts, so they can be placed in the grade appropriate to their age and ability, rather than sent back to lower grades that do not match their age? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[00:17:31] [Chair] Thank you, colleague Abdulhasib. Colleague Suhail Habib Fadel.

[00:17:38] [MP Suhail Fadel] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your Excellency, what happened this year is astonishing. Education directorates asked the educational complexes to draw up lists of substitute teachers directly, one week before the start of the school year. The complexes prepared those staffing lists. Then the directorates circulated an online

[00:18:08] registration link, thereby scrapping the substitute staffing tables. So [the teachers] turned to the link, which did not work for all applicants. Days after registering on the link, and at the start of the first week of the school year, the directorates instructed the administrative complexes to cancel the substitute appointments

[00:18:39] and renew the contracts of contract teachers, except for the contracts of teachers in Idlib, who number 800, even though Your Excellency had stated in a video clip that contracts are not binding for renewal. Here a new phase began: contract holders were asked

[00:19:10] to first report to the centres where they had been contracted. The administrative complexes were caught between a rock and a hard place: on one hand they had dismantled the substitute staffing lists, and on the other they were waiting for contract holders to report to their contracted centres. The complexes gave them a 15-day grace period, and if a contract teacher didn't report, their dismissal would be processed and they would be replaced with an hourly-paid teacher.

[00:19:42] And here the vacuum in the schools occurred. I want to ask, Mr. Speaker, how the school year... Sorry, first we need the ministry to justify the conduct that created this vacuum and congestion. Second, how did the school year begin without the school staffing lists being completed to this day, and without securing

[00:20:17] replacements, leaving students without lessons? Bear in mind that 19,000 teachers from the Autonomous Administration were integrated into the Hasakah education staffing at maximum speed. What is the solution to restore balance in Hasakah education after integrating this huge number of Autonomous Administration teachers? God grants success. Thank you.

[00:20:45] [Chair] Thank you, colleague Suhail. Colleague Qutaiba Issa.

[00:20:49] [MP Qutaiba Issa] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, I want to talk about vocational education, not as a marginal educational sector but as one of the most important sectors Syria will need in the phase of reconstruction. But, frankly, after seeing the scale of the problems, the question is no longer how to develop it, but whether it is still capable of performing its function at all. To begin with, there is reluctance to enrol in vocational education and a decline in the level of students

[00:21:19] entering it. In Homs, for example, there were 6,000 students; this dropped to 1,400, and those who continued number around a thousand. Society no longer sees vocational education as a respectable professional choice and a successful future, but often as the option for those who could not get into general education, especially since it has lost a crucial component, on-the-job training, due to challenges including weak

[00:21:51] resources, electricity and so on. So what measures has the ministry taken to overcome these challenges since it began its work? As for curricula, does the ministry have a

real system that tells us what the Syrian labour market needs, which specialisations need expanding, and which are no longer needed? And is there clear coordination with higher education? Many messages have reached us complaining

[00:22:23] that the National University of Security and Defence Sciences does not accept the vocational secondary certificate, even though many of its subjects overlap with the university's subjects, while it does accept the literary [humanities] secondary certificate. Perhaps the most serious issue is staffing. We face a long accumulation of weak vocational qualification among teachers, shortages in some specialisations and surpluses in others, and contracts that were not linked to schools' actual needs; many

[00:22:55] of them were made for personal benefit in the days of the defunct regime. The question is how the ministry has dealt with this problem, and what oversight and evaluation mechanisms it has followed. It would be good if the minister had statistics at hand: how many cases of conflict of interest or financial and administrative violations have been referred for investigation in vocational education since the liberation, and how many ended in actual measures? Regarding the administrative side,

[00:23:24] the position of assistant education director for vocational education was abolished. We'd like clarification of the justification for abolishing this position, and what administrative alternative now has authority to coordinate between vocational education, informatics, school buildings, statistics and planning. And who is responsible for linking the needs of vocational workshops with buildings, equipment, electricity and so on? In conclusion, I hope the ministry treats vocational education

[00:23:56] as a national project for reconstruction and production, not merely a branch of secondary education. Thank you. **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Qutaiba. But I want to clarify something for colleagues who are putting their names down. We agreed that the Education Committee speaks, and all these are members of the Education Committee, and then the minister answers. After the minister answers, if some answers are not clear, we will take

[00:24:23] interventions, and names can be registered then. Registering names now is out of place. Colleague Abdulfattah Obaid, as colleague Abdulfattah Obaid is deputy chair of the Education Committee, he takes two turns.

[00:24:36] **[MP Abdulfattah Obaid]** Two turns. Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. I will talk about something I live, since I still live in the camps, so I will talk about the camps. Just three complexes, I won't mention all of them: Sarmada, Dana (?), Maarrat Misrin and Qah. They have more than 200 schools in the camps. Some camps are still tents, some caravans, and some buildings with no

[00:25:01] courtyards or anything that serves the students. Of course, we are in a campaign to return [people from] the camps, but they remain. They may remain a year, two years, maybe three, and some may become permanent, like the Kammouna camps and others, or Mashhad Rouhin and so on, the settled ones. So what is the ministry's plan to help camp residents with this? After organisations left the camp schools, the educational level dropped to its lowest in

[00:25:29] these schools. There are children studying in these schools with no teachers: no English, no science teachers, a major shortage of staff, a major shortage of logistics. Camp residents cannot pay the cooperation and activities fee, so there is no water in the school, no toilets, nothing hygienic in the school. So what is the ministry's plan to support these camps? Is the ministry's plan, like other ministries', not to support the schools until the

[00:25:54] people return to their villages? [snoring sounds] Or is there a specific plan to support the camps? Does the Ministry of Education have accurate statistics on dropouts in the camps, and what is the mechanism for returning these dropouts to education? May God reward you on our behalf.

[00:26:12] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Abdulfattah Obaid. Colleague Ammar Tawous... colleague Yasser Mansour. **[MP Yasser Mansour]** Mr. Speaker, Your Excellency the Minister, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, peace be upon you. Your Excellency, there is the issue of

private schools that have received warnings, or whose licences will not be renewed this year because they have not fulfilled certain conditions. Yes, we support applying the law,

[00:27:01] and we support schools meeting health, educational and infrastructure requirements and so on. But those running them appeal to Your Excellency to grant them a grace period, at least this year, so that students are not left without schooling and employees are not left unemployed, until they complete the remaining conditions next year. Certainly there are conditions that cannot

[00:27:33] be waived or overlooked, even temporarily, and there are conditions that can be overlooked in these circumstances. I returned a week ago from Qamishli. It doesn't have ten [proper] schools for a large city. Half the schools housed displaced people from Ras al-Ain, Afrin and Ain al-Arab; there were thousands of students there. When these schools were vacated, they were ruined schools with no windows,

[00:28:06] no doors, no desks. On the other hand, there are private schools that certainly lack some conditions. One of the very large secondary schools, where honestly I studied years ago, a private school with three floors, every classroom has a digital air conditioner, central heating, five-star desks compared with [public] schools. Yet because this school does not have a sufficient student courtyard,

[00:28:41] since one of the conditions is one square metre per student, meaning if a school has 150 students its courtyard must be 150 square metres, this condition is not met. I say, or we propose to Your Excellency, that this year there be a grace period for them, so students are not left in the streets and those running them are not left unemployed. We want to hear Your Excellency's opinion on this. Thank you.

[00:29:12] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Yasser Mansour. We return to colleague Ammar Tawous; please go ahead. **[MP Ammar Tawous]** Mr. Speaker, Your Excellency, colleagues, peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. Private education is a fundamental pillar of the educational and national structure. It accommodates a broad segment of students, provides tens of thousands of jobs and eases the burden on public education, in addition to supplying the treasury with tax revenues that support

[00:29:59] public schools. At the same time, this sector still faces exploitative practices by some institutions, along with administrative and legislative obstacles resulting from outdated laws in force, and some corruption in their application. This reality requires the ministry to clarify its vision for the place of private education in the new Syria: is it a complementary and welcome development partner, a commercial investment that burdens citizens, or a competitor to public education?

[00:30:38] To entrench the principle of partnership over competition, the public interest requires reshaping the legal and regulatory environment of the sector along the following lines. First, modernising the legal environment and facilitating licensing: reviewing Decree 55/2004 and its amendments to keep pace with current requirements, and simplifying and speeding up licensing procedures without compromising quality and safety standards, while directing investment incentives

[00:31:07] towards areas suffering a capacity deficit, to relieve pressure on public schools. Second, reforming the system of penalties and safeguards for educational institutions, by adopting a classification list that clearly distinguishes administrative violations from those affecting students or the quality of education, and applying graduated penalties, granting sufficient time to correct violations that can be

[00:31:41] remedied, with closure limited to serious cases that pose a real danger to students, the educational institution or national security. Third, directing oversight towards actual quality indicators: moving from formal, routine inspection to evaluating educational outcomes and the competence of staff and school equipment, with stricter accountability for struggling institutions and sufficient time to move from the emergency

[00:32:19] situation to a sustainable one. Fourth, regulating fees and entrenching social justice. Fifth, institutionalising integration with public education: moving the relationship with public education from the logic of competition or administrative distance to systematic institutional partnership, through permanent coordination frameworks that harness the private sector's capacities in support of the state's comprehensive educational plans. May God reward you.

[00:32:53] **[Chair]** May God reward you. You went on a bit long, Sheikh Ammar. Colleague Hamza Qablan. **[MP Hamza Qablan]** Honourable Minister of Education, with the dawn of liberation, the role of the local community in building the new Syria became clearly visible. According to Article 88 of Local Administration Law 107, in force since 2011, neighbourhood committees are the direct link between the citizen and

[00:33:30] the decision-maker. The local community has played a prominent role in building Syria in several fields, particularly education. Neighbourhood committees contributed to restoring and rehabilitating schools and to the return of thousands of students to their seats. The same was true in Damascus Governorate. We have received word from residents and neighbourhood committees in Damascus that they had coordinated with Damascus Governorate to work on

[00:33:59] restoring some schools, and also with the governorate's education directorate. After a while, they were surprised that the education directorate halted the committees' restoration work and barred any committee, supporter or funder from entering, even though they had met all requirements and coordinated between the governorate and the directorate. Of course, the directorate's argument is that some committees interfered in school affairs, and this may be expected.

[00:34:30] But we ask Your Excellency, and perhaps I can offer a proposal to get out of this problem: establish a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and its directorates and the Ministry of Local Administration, which oversees these committees' work, to legitimise and properly frame the committees' work, and to bring the committees and local community back to contribute to rebuilding schools

[00:35:01] and help the Ministry of Education out of this major predicament, since a very large number of schools are still dilapidated. Stay well, and I ask God Almighty to grant you success in completing this journey, God willing.

[00:35:13] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Hamza Qablan. Truly, when an intervention or question comes with a proposal, it is complete, and we become partners in serving the nation and the citizen. Colleague Rula Dayeh (?).

[00:35:31] **[MP Rula Dayeh]** Your Excellency, does the ministry have national data, disaggregated by governorate and educational stage, monitoring the situation of children of martyrs, the wounded, the missing and the forcibly disappeared, including enrolment and dropout rates and educational needs? If such data is not available, what basis does the ministry rely on in setting its policies and allocating its resources, and what is the timetable for establishing

[00:36:00] a clear data system for these groups? For children of the missing and forcibly disappeared specifically, what mechanism ensures that the inability to provide a death certificate or complete certain civil documents does not deprive them of registering, continuing their studies, sitting exams, or later obtaining certificates and educational entitlements? And if conditional registration is available when documents are missing, what

[00:36:28] is the solution when the inability to complete them results from the loss of a parent in the first place? Will the ministry, in coordination with the National Commission for the Missing and the competent authorities, establish a clear transitional framework that protects these children's rights and grants them the necessary educational facilities and entitlements until the fate of their relatives is determined? Most importantly, are there support or psychological counselling programmes specifically for them,

[00:36:59] in addition, of course, to people with disabilities in general, not only children of the wounded and the missing? Thank you.

[00:37:08] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Rula Dayeh. Thanks also to the Education Committee and its members for these questions and this truly comprehensive presentation. I believe you have a lot to say, Your Excellency, and we will give you enough time, because the questions were comprehensive and sufficient, and we want transparent and sufficient answers too. We want to help: if there are difficulties or obstacles, we in the People's Assembly can, if there are legislative or legal obstacles, be of help

[00:37:43] to the executive authority in serving the Syrian citizen. Your Excellency, please go ahead and answer the questions raised.

[00:38:04] **[Minister Mohammad Abdulrahman Tarkou]** Mr. Speaker of the People's Assembly, honourable members of the Assembly, it is my honour to stand before you today to speak about education, a sector whose story does not begin at school alone, but in every Syrian home, with every child who carries a dream and every teacher who carries a mission to build the new Syria, [00:38:34] a Syria of science and knowledge. That the Ministry of Education is the first ministry to present its plans before your honourable Assembly is a strong signal of the interest and awareness of the members of the People's Assembly regarding the importance of science and education in building Syria and its future. I will try to present figures, and within the presentation I will answer all the questions raised by the honourable deputies.

[00:39:07] I'd like the presentation on the screens, please. OK. I insisted, frankly, on having a presentation so I could show you the figures and data, so the presentation is transparent and you know the scale of the challenges. The presentation covers five pillars: the student, the teacher, the school, the curriculum and the laws. For each pillar we'll cover the current reality, what has been achieved and what is being worked on. The education system:

[00:39:39] the ministry's core goal within its strategic plan is to move from addressing gaps to building a stronger and fairer education system across its five components. At the Ministry of Education we are currently working on two plans: an emergency plan and a strategic plan. The goal of the emergency plan is to secure the right to education for every child in Syria. As for the

[00:40:06] strategic plan, we are working to develop the education system. As they say, there is first aid and there is strategy. We'll start with the student pillar. The reality, as you can see on the screens in front of you: the big challenge for the Ministry of Education is accommodating students in schools. After the liberation in 2024,

[00:40:37] at the end of 2024, the number of students in schools was 4.3 million. Last year the number was 5.3 million, meaning an increase of one million students. This coming year, which began a week ago, we expect the number to be 6 million students. So the core challenge facing the ministry is securing schools, seats and teaching staff for, in addition to the existing number, the

[00:41:12] growing number, which amounts to about a million students. What is the reason for the increase? The return of refugees, internal displacement, dropouts returning to schools, and natural population growth. So the biggest challenge, speaking about the reality now, is the increase and the return to school. Of course, it is a positive thing that everyone is returning to school.

[00:41:40] The second challenge is the influx of returning students and their problems: missing documents, language difficulties, and differences in the curricula they studied. The third challenge is school dropout. According to estimates (frankly we don't have precise statistics; we haven't conducted a survey because the numbers are constantly changing), it is estimated at around 2 million students

[00:42:10] who have dropped out. What are the causes of dropout? Is it just the absence of a school, or are there economic and social reasons? This is also under discussion, and we are working on a plan with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the government team on this issue. So

that describes the students' reality. Now we'll talk about what has been achieved in the student pillar. The first thing we did was facilitate students' return.

[00:42:38] A decision was issued last year on conditional admission. What does conditional admission mean? Any student who returns to school, even without any document, any document at all, can register, and the parent or whoever registers them pledges to complete the paperwork within a year. And if they don't bring papers and we have no proof? We have an exam we created, the placement exam; we determine the level and grade, and they join that grade.

[00:43:09] Yesterday we issued a decision: more than 200 people, frankly, were referred to [internal] oversight for failing to implement ministerial decisions. We are talking about 19,000 schools, so when decisions are issued, what is the rate of implementation? We follow this up with internal oversight and the Central Authority for Control and Inspection. So first, we offered conditional admission. Then certificate equivalency: these returnees sometimes

[00:43:39] have a certificate and want to enter university, or have a ninth-grade certificate and want to continue to the baccalaureate. For the first time in Syria, registration for certificate equivalency is entirely electronic. They don't need to come to us: they register, upload the certificate, upload their ID and data, the equivalency committee processes it and transfers the database to the Ministry of Higher Education. The student doesn't need to visit us at all unless data is missing.

[00:44:12] Another facilitation offered to returnees struggling with language: many who returned from Turkey have difficulty with the language, and many failed at school. What did we do? In the summer we ran a course and held an exam, an Arabic language exam. A large number of students benefited, 83 thousand (?) benefited from this exam and the courses

[00:44:41] we held in the summer. [snoring sounds] Also achieved: addressing interrupted schooling. The placement exam has been rolled out to all schools; anyone with interrupted schooling takes the placement exam and joins the grade matching their ability. We also launched the catch-up curriculum, the "Arabic is Life" series. We launched it and, God willing, it will now be activated in schools and in courses

[00:45:16] outside school hours. [snoring sounds] Care for the gifted: we always stress the importance of caring for gifted and outstanding students. We have the Distinction and Creativity Authority, a partnership between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. Over the past year our students also won awards and medals in international Olympiads.

[00:45:45] Now we'll talk about what we are working on for students. First, activating compulsory education, Law No. 7 on compulsory education for the basic stage. Comprehensive support and empowerment. One of the honourable members spoke about exams and the current assessment system.

[00:46:14] More than three months ago we submitted a draft decree on the cumulative average. I stated last year, during my tour of the exams, that we were working on the cumulative average. God willing, this decree on the cumulative average will be issued soon. We are also working on expanding inclusive classes

[00:46:40] for students with special needs. We have a large proportion of students with special needs. Are our schools ready to receive all of them? Is the infrastructure able to accommodate that number? We are working to accommodate the largest number possible within existing means. Behavioural and health care: a decision was issued to open activity halls. If you follow the media, we have focused on this a lot. We at the Ministry of Education,

[00:47:11] frankly, historically they worked on teaching [ta'lim] but there was no upbringing [tarbiya]. So at the ministry we set a plan for values and behaviour, what is called extracurricular education, through activities. These halls were created, and the activities curriculum will be launched soon, God willing.

[00:47:38] Linking data and pathways: we want to link Ministry of Education data with the civil registry so we know the number of births and where they are, so we can use the number and location of births to track enrolment and non-enrolment rates. We are also working on opening

educational tracks in secondary education. So we won't just have scientific and literary streams; we're working on having an engineering track, a medical track and a track

[00:48:08] for the humanities. Of course, opening these tracks requires trained teachers and specific curricula capable of fulfilling their role within each track. Now we come to the most problematic pillar, staffing. There were many questions about teachers and administrative staff. The reality: the number of employees in the Ministry of Education is 239,374...

[00:48:42] **[Chair?]** He'll repeat the number: 239,374...

[00:48:48] **[Minister]** Sorry, 339,000. Of these, 232,919 are permanent, so 232,000 permanent. We have 63,000 contracts, of three types: administrative and teaching contracts, contracts of northern teachers, and contracts of dismissed teachers; I'll talk about the dismissed in detail. We have 43,000 who are integration teachers from the former Autonomous Administration. In addition, last year we had

[00:49:24] more than 60,000 substitute appointments. So with teachers we have a quantitative and a qualitative problem. I have a large quantity, but quality needs work: about 40% have university degrees and 60% have sub-university qualifications, meaning institute diplomas and baccalaureates. That's the qualitative problem. Quantitatively,

[00:49:55] I have a problem in distribution: some governorates have a surplus while others have a shortage. We have taken a set of measures, which I'll talk about in the next section: what measures we took to address the quantitative and qualitative problem. I'm just describing the reality. Now let's start with the dismissed, since many questions were about them. The Ministry of Education

[00:50:24] was the first ministry to issue a decision reinstating the dismissed, and this is not a favour from the ministry but in honour of the teacher. The number of dismissed teachers reinstated by the ministry is around 14,000. Then a decision was issued giving a dismissed teacher the right to work at the school nearest their residence. For example, if they were dismissed in Raqqa and live

[00:51:00] in Deir ez-Zor, they have the right to work in Deir ez-Zor. The most sensitive point: why haven't we made them permanent? I'll ask you, members of the People's Assembly: as the executive authority, do I have the right to make them permanent? I don't. So you will help us with this. Work is under way on a legislative instrument, and as far as I know it is in its final stages and will be referred to your honourable Assembly. I hope you will do justice to this group, in terms of making them permanent and counting their years

[00:51:37] as service. Some of them, as one of the colleagues in the Assembly mentioned, were dismissed before the liberation and reached legal retirement age before the liberation. They are also covered by the law, in terms of how they'll be treated: their years will be counted and they will be enrolled in the Social Insurance and Pensions Institution under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. So this issue, God willing, will be discussed

[00:52:03] in your honourable Assembly. Now, sometimes we hear that a dismissed teacher hasn't returned, that "the ministry didn't reinstate me." I hope any dismissed teacher who hasn't returned will come to me, except those without qualifications. We reinstated all dismissed teachers who had qualifications, who were in schools and had qualifications. But there are people, frankly, who don't even have a sixth-grade certificate. How are we supposed to reinstate them? They also need a legal

[00:52:36] provision to deal with them, to secure dignified work for them and so on. But can they become teachers? I'm asking you: can someone without a ninth-grade certificate be a teacher?

[00:52:48] **[Minister]** OK. How did we get the data? We created a link in cooperation with the Ministry of [Administrative] Development, where every teacher dismissed because of the revolution registered. I believe about 22,000 registered. The Ministry of Development, to its credit, took the data and verified it. Some of them, a large number, turned out to have nothing to

do with the revolution; some had no qualifications; some submitted incorrect documents. After filtering, we arrived at around 14,000 teachers.

[00:53:17] Also in the teacher pillar, we had great difficulty unifying the education systems in Syria. After the liberation there were four education systems in Syria: the Damascus system, Idlib, the [local] councils, and the Autonomous Administration. I had four education systems that differed from one another in curricula and salaries (some paid in dollars, some in Turkish lira, some in Syrian pounds) and in values. So in the first year after the liberation we had [00:53:49] extremely great difficulty, frankly, with unfair salaries and incompatible curricula. The first step the ministry took was unifying the curriculum. This year, God willing, will be the first year we have a unified curriculum in Syria.

[00:54:08] **[Minister]** OK. Regarding teachers, a law has also been referred to the drafting committee at the General Secretariat of the Presidency: the Teachers' Affairs Law, providing the legal framework for dealing with teachers. We set a framework based on progression, meaning a teacher isn't at a single grade; we set six grades. OK,

[00:54:36] how does one move from one grade to another? Each grade requires earning points, and these points come from training courses and evaluation, the evaluation of the teacher, so we can support our education system with good teachers. Top university graduates have been appointed without a competition exam; there is a law governing this, and God willing, within 10 days the lists of appointed top graduates will be issued in the specialisations

[00:55:10] in demand: mathematics, English, physics, chemistry, science. These were appointed without a competition because they are the top graduates, the elite. OK, in the teacher pillar, what we haven't been able to achieve, or what we want to work on more in the coming period, is passing the Teachers' Affairs Law, which will come to your Assembly and includes career grades, fair promotion, and procedural

[00:55:39] immunity. Frankly, teachers need immunity. You know that in every country in the world a lawsuit cannot be filed against a teacher over a school matter except through the Ministry of Education, right? It's procedural immunity, as we call it, just as you have procedural immunity for members of the People's Assembly. In this law we included procedural immunity

[00:56:01] for teachers, because there have been many accusations, or sometimes defamation of teachers with false charges, and teachers, frankly, have felt vulnerable in the face of the current social media revolution, which is affecting a large number of teachers. So we included procedural immunity on this. Localising education:

[00:56:29] we are adopting a policy of localising education, and here I'll talk about contracts, since some honourable members mentioned contracts. In February 2025 there was a mass transfer from directorates to [people's] original places of residence, of more than 15,000 contracts. It was a temporary measure resulting from the conditions after the liberation.

[00:56:59] As a result of this measure, and the measure was unequivocally illegal (even the Central Authority for Financial Control did not sign off on a single contract, because the contract is with, say, the Damascus directorate, and he applied to transfer back to Homs or Latakia or Aleppo, while his contract is with Damascus because Damascus needs him), we at the Ministry of Education issued a decision to extend contracts in the places where they were contracted.

[00:57:31] Contracts were renewed according to this criterion: place of contracting and need. As for the Idlib contracts, someone asked me about the Idlib contracts: the Ministry of Education instructs directorates to renew contracts according to need, localising education. We approved all the lists that came from the directorates, all of them. Each directorate assesses its need and sends us the lists, and on that basis

[00:58:02] they were approved. We are also working on training and digital transformation. You'll find this in the Teachers' Affairs Law too: courses taken in this area earn points and motivate teachers to move to a higher grade. We are also working with the Teachers' Union and the relevant ministries on health insurance. That also needs a long

[00:58:31] discussion: health insurance for teachers, housing, retirement. These are the files we are coordinating on with the relevant ministries. The third pillar is curricula. I said a moment ago we had four curricula. We gave a transition period, a two-year transition period, for those who studied the old curriculum to reach the unified curriculum. So at the end of this year, this year,

[00:59:07] someone who studied under the former Autonomous Administration curriculum has the right next year to sit the baccalaureate and ninth-grade exams on the Administration curriculum, because if he studied eighth grade under the Administration, I can't tell him to sit the certificate on a different curriculum. This applied in the councils, in Idlib and in all the education systems, as a two-year transition phase. The curricula, as you said, need updating and development.

[00:59:33] We now have a council; if you follow it, you've surely seen its sessions: the Supreme Council for Education. This council includes the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Awqaf, and is chaired by His Excellency the President. This council sets education policy in the country and addresses strategic issues, and one of the most important issues

[01:00:01] is curricula. Six months ago the Ministry of Education completed the national standards for building the new curricula, and they are currently with the council. As soon as the council approves them, authoring of the curricula will begin. One of the members asked me when you'll start writing the curricula. We've finished the first stage, the standards; then comes approval of the standards, then authoring. [snoring sounds]

[01:00:30] Vocational education: one of the members also addressed this, and his description was accurate, frankly. We have dilapidated infrastructure in vocational schools, old curricula, no machines, outdated trades. Last year we completed an assessment in cooperation with the European Union. We have vocational education development in cooperation with the European Union and the chambers of industry in Syria.

[01:00:58] We finished the assessment and will now start on teacher training, curricula, and removing and adding trades. I'll have good news for you soon, God willing: something will come out on opening vocational tracks in this field. As for curricula, last year the number of books printed was 28 million; this year 41, 41 million books.

[01:01:34] Our ambition is for all students to receive new books, meaning 5 million receive new books. We are trying within our means. We don't have a printing press; as you know, the Ministry of Education still has no printing press, frankly. We resort to tenders, and as you know that involves legal procedures, a long time and high cost. But our goal this year was that everyone from first to fourth grade receives new books,

[01:02:02] God willing, from first to fourth grade. One of the members of the People's Assembly also said there are still old editions with pictures and symbols of the defunct regime and so on. I confirm that last year's editions, 2025 and 2026, the last two editions since the liberation, have all pictures and symbols removed. But there are old editions, of course.

[01:02:34] Activities, which I've mentioned, matter a lot to us: values and behaviour. In the coming phase the Ministry of Education is moving to focus on upbringing as well as teaching, on values and behaviour. So activity halls were created, aimed at health awareness, emergencies, environmental and legal [awareness] in this area.

[01:03:11] What will we work on in curricula? One of the members of the People's Assembly also asked about the platform. I stated six months ago or more that we have a platform with interactive books, recorded lessons and educational games. To be honest with you, the platform has been ready, as far as I'm concerned, for six months. The whole curriculum is interactive and ready. So what's the obstacle,

[01:03:36] what are the difficulties in launching this platform? Frankly, infrastructure. Infrastructure, and the lack of servers, because the number of people who will access the system will be in the thousands, hundreds of thousands if not millions. We are still working to develop the infrastructure, and we requested a dedicated server for the Ministry of Education. We still don't have a dedicated server, so we requested one

[01:04:03] to host the platform and to publish results. You saw the problem with publishing the baccalaureate results. The number of people who logged on to check results was three times Syria's population. Not just the student: the aunt, the other aunt, the cousin, and those abroad. This caused a crash; the specialists said the infrastructure

[01:04:28] couldn't handle it. So for us the platform is ready; once we have the infrastructure available we'll launch it. And I want to stress there is presidential interest and follow-up, frankly, on the platform, digital transformation and launching this platform. Now the school pillar. We'll distinguish between the school building and the school, for

[01:04:59] statistical purposes. Periodically we publish on our website and through news reports and update the buildings that have been restored. At the Ministry of Education we have 18,312 buildings, buildings only. But the number of schools is above that figure. Why? Because sometimes a building houses two shifts, and a school in the legal sense is the students, the principal and the system, not the building.

[01:05:33] Currently we have 15,568 schools in service, of which 9,056 are intact. We have 2,873 partially damaged schools and 3,639 in need of urgent maintenance. On the other hand, 15% of schools are out of service, numbering 2,744,

[01:06:02] of which 822 are totally destroyed, 278 are still occupied as shelters, 1,321 have partial damage and 213 are under assessment. I'll be frank and clear with you. You sometimes see pictures of a school with no desks posted to you, or a school with no staff, as was mentioned. We open schools daily. These schools, to give you an example: in Aleppo, 10 days ago, 134 schools were opened; in Idlib, 50

[01:06:39] schools; in Hama next week we have 37 schools. These schools need equipping and new staff. Demand for schools exceeds the ministry's current capacity. But let me ask you clearly: how many schools have no desks? You've seen this in the media, say five or ten, against how many? We're talking about thousands. And in some schools, village residents, frankly, are taking the initiative

[01:07:14] on restoration, and the neighbourhood or village committees, with thanks. One of the colleagues asked me about neighbourhood committees; I'll answer. With neighbourhood committees, first of all, the relationship between us is certainly one of shared interest: we both want what's best for our children, safe and good education. Many neighbourhood committees helped with restoration. But in Damascus there was a problem, and we tried to resolve it: neighbourhood committees in some

[01:07:46] neighbourhoods, not all, interfering in staffing and staff evaluation. A neighbourhood committee installs a water tank and then submits a request to me to remove the principal and deputy. We are trying to deal with this in an institutional, constructive way with the neighbourhood committees and their relationship with local administration. We have something called the parents' council, and frankly we are working on activating it: the parents'

[01:08:18] council, which is a direct link between the school and the neighbourhood residents. Currently we have 2,609 schools with two shifts, meaning 17% of existing schools operate on a two-shift system. This affects the quality of education and exhausts children, since it's not proper learning time; it's the afternoon shift.

[01:08:48] We are working to reduce this number as much as we can complete schools. Private education: the proportion of students in private education is around 10%. The number of private schools is 1,253. One of the honourable members spoke about emergency relocation. Last year we issued

[01:09:22] a decision to stop emergency relocation. What is emergency relocation? For example, a school from Aleppo went and opened in Hama, or a school from Hasakah opened in Damascus. Last year we announced there is no longer such a thing as emergency relocation; everyone returns to their own governorate. Of course, sometimes [the owner] rents, or has a building that was destroyed. Who can determine

[01:09:48] whether a school can be opened in a given area? The governorate sends me a report that such-and-such an area is destroyed and a school cannot be built there, if there's no

infrastructure, no road, no services, the residents haven't returned. In that case we grant relocation within the governorate: he can open wherever he wants, but within the governorate. I was asked about camp students and camp schools. We are working in very close coordination [01:10:22] with the Syria Without Camps committee. Decree 59 sets the priorities for return: schools, clinics and infrastructure. We share data with them, and a large part of the funds allocated under the decree went to rebuilding schools in the areas whose residents are in the camps. What has been achieved with schools: 3,857 schools restored. So the number of restored schools is

[01:11:01] 3,857; currently 704 are being restored. This year 212 new schools were added to the education system. There's something I must clarify, it's important: even the existing schools are insufficient. For example, a few days ago I went to Jisrin in Ghouta. Whatever Jisrin's population was, now

[01:11:33] with the return it has doubled. So even the existing schools don't meet the needs of the number returning to the area. We are also coordinating this with local administration, adding new schools within the new master plans. A visual identity has also been added for schools. You know that in the days of the defunct regime, schools, with their bars and colours, felt like a prison, a reformatory, if we want to soften it a bit,

[01:12:02] a reformatory. In the new schools, if you've seen them, colours, adding a playground: every school we build, we include a playground and an activity hall. As for the old schools we're restoring, we try to add a playground where possible. So the visual identity was also necessary for children, since school should be an attractive environment in its colours, its form

[01:12:28] and its content for students. OK, what we will work on in the schools file: continuing restoration. You asked me what my restoration plan is. Frankly, we restore within available means, whether through the government, the local community or international organisations. Wherever we get the chance

[01:12:59] to restore, we restore. OK, the legislation pillar. This is the most important pillar, and also the last. The reality: we suffer from outdated legislation that doesn't match current needs on the ground or the ministry's aspirations. There are many steps, frankly, we haven't been able to take because we have

[01:13:29] issues that need legislation: fragmentation and institutional duplication. Even the ministry's current structure: we had independent centres with financial autonomy and so on; we merged them and made a lean structure so we can work faster. We also suffer from a weak digital system, meaning data. We are still trying to build

[01:13:59] a database. One of the members asked me about substitute appointments: that you asked for paper [lists], then went back. Frankly, since last year we instructed directorates that substitute appointments for the coming year, meaning this year, would be exclusively through the application. Why? First, to fight corruption in substitute appointments. I have a database with 156 [thousand?]

[01:14:29] applications, including doctorates, master's degrees, teaching diplomas, institute degrees and baccalaureates. So assignment is now by qualification. Previously the complexes assigned manually: this one is an acquaintance, this one was there before. It wasn't an institutional process, frankly. We know we were a week late; never mind, we're pushing. As of last night, 33,000 substitutes were assigned, 33,000. But we are very transparent: we tell

[01:15:07] each person, you applied to these schools, look at the qualifications. If someone with a lower qualification than yours was appointed as a substitute, you can appeal. So on transparency, the application had difficulties and affected the start of the school year. Last week was the first administrative week. God willing, from Sunday most of them will be at work.

[01:15:32] What has been achieved in digital transformation: for the first time in Syria's history, last year all certificate students, numbering 834,000, applied electronically. Previously there was crowding around exam applications and corruption. Now all registration for national exams is electronic. From home, he uploads his ID, his ninth-grade certificate, the application; he gets a card and goes to sit the exam.

[01:16:03] The Syrian certificate is also now protected, and we've reduced correspondence for students, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education. Any Syrian baccalaureate or ninth-grade certificate now has a QR code. Anywhere in the world, as soon as the QR is scanned, it goes to the database and tells you whether the certificate is genuine or forged. This has saved us a lot of correspondence; we used to receive frightening numbers of requests to verify

[01:16:32] certificates. Registration for internal competitions is also entirely electronic. Certificate equivalency: last year around 37,000 certificates were made equivalent. These are people who studied the baccalaureate outside Syria and want to study at university in Syria; there were around 37,000, and their certificates were made equivalent

[01:16:57] electronically and the equivalency database transferred to the Ministry of Higher Education. Also achieved: the President's decree on private international schools was issued. In Syria we have public international schools and private ones. Public international schools belong to embassies, like the French school and the Pakistani school. And we have opened the field for private international schools

[01:17:25] that award the IB, the International Baccalaureate. God willing, next week we'll open the first school in this category. [snoring sounds] We have now completed draft laws that will be referred to your honourable Assembly soon, most importantly the Teachers' Affairs Law, the draft law on the cumulative average in certificate exams, and draft laws abolishing the five centres that

[01:17:55] had financial autonomy and were affiliated with the Ministry of Education, to achieve a lean structure. What is being worked on in legislation is indeed the private institutions law. One of the members spoke about the private [education] law, Law 55; God willing, we will work on amending it. The vocational education law also needs amending.

[01:18:24] The Teachers' Pension Fund law also needs amending. The quality and accreditation system: in the new structure we added a Directorate of Quality and Accreditation. How are schools classified now? God willing, after we adopt the quality [system] next year, every school in Syria will have a classification, even public schools, and will get a mark out of 100: this one got 80, this one got

[01:18:53] 90. It will be based on scientific, practical evaluation of teachers, exams, infrastructure and staff. In the end each school gets a mark. The mark indicates if there's a flaw in the school and how we need to intervene. This is called the quality and accreditation system, and it will cover private schools too. Finally, to summarise the main challenges facing

[01:19:27] the ministry: rapid student growth, weak and insufficient infrastructure, the human resources gap, learning loss and dropout, and outdated legislation. My one proposal to the honourable Assembly is legislative support. As Minister of Education, frankly,

[01:19:59] I hope education laws will have priority among the laws on the Assembly's agenda, especially the Teachers' Affairs Law, the cumulative average, and fees. This would really help us achieve more. We also need your support when the state budget is discussed, for you to support the education sector. You've seen the challenges; I tried

[01:20:31] always to explain with figures so you'd know the scale of the challenges facing the ministry. Of course, to address these challenges we need will and determination, we need laws and we need financial support. Thank you for listening. **[Chair]** Thank you, Minister of Education. Of course, the questions were many and the briefing may not have covered all the questions, so I find it

[01:21:03] our duty to leave room for members to register for interventions, to complete what wasn't answered or wasn't raised. Colleagues who have an intervention and feel it wasn't answered: we registered 20 interventions, as we agreed yesterday.

[01:21:40] **[Chair]** Register... sorry, please, quiet. Speak... Numairi (?) ... the Speaker asked that registration be...

[01:21:55] Exactly.

[01:22:01] **[Chair]** They opened [registration] after we finished; as soon as I asked, they opened it continuously... OK. Right now we've taken 20 interventions; let's hear them. If someone didn't get a turn... and I hope there won't be repetition. We can take other interventions, no problem, but I hope there's no repetition, meaning any question the minister has answered, or if your colleague asked the question, please don't repeat it. We'll start with... I hope

[01:22:38] we're on the same page. We'll start with colleague Adnan al-Khatib.

[01:22:45] **[MP Adnan al-Khatib]** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Your Excellency, for this good briefing. Briefly, I want to draw attention to the issue of secondary languages such as English, and requiring students to take French, when many of our students are far from this orientation. What is the ministry's plan on this? Thank you.

[01:23:04] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague. Minister, the answer standing... Let's agree on something. Will the minister answer now, meaning we pose a group of questions and he answers, or one question at a time? It's up to you.

[01:23:28] **[Minister]** Question [by question].

[01:23:29] **[Chair]** OK.

[01:23:30] **[Minister]** The problem is, when we ask questions and everyone answers at once, we end up not hearing anything. OK.

[01:23:37] **[Chair]** OK.

[01:23:38] **[Minister]** Five, five, Doctor. Five questions and I answer.

[01:23:40] **[Chair]** Let's make it three questions, three questions, a compromise.

[01:23:42] **[Minister]** Fine.

[01:23:43] **[Chair]** OK, the second question, with colleague Nour al-Jundi.

[01:23:48] **[MP Nour al-Jundi]** Your Excellency, we talked about integrating people with special needs, but neither the plan nor the figures were clear. How many people with special needs require integration? Is there a clear plan regarding curricula, exam questions, a plan with a goal of directing people with special needs to a clear vocational track in the future to secure their future? You did not talk about citizenship curricula that match those of other countries and

[01:24:18] the needs of Syrian students regarding understanding rights and duties, responsibility and belonging to Syria. Also, the ministry's clear plan to raise teachers' salaries. You did not speak clearly at all about inspection and oversight; this pillar was also absent. Last question: contracts of young people who passed a competition and were contracted for five years from 2011–13 and dismissed because of the revolution, what is their fate? Thank you.

[01:24:52] **[Chair]** Well, colleague Nour took five questions, so we'll limit it to colleague Nour and the colleague before her. Minister, please answer.

[01:25:00] **[Minister]** First, regarding languages: English has been adopted as a compulsory foreign language. As for French, if you noticed, this year it didn't count towards passing or towards the average. Why? The number of French language teachers doesn't cover 30% of students. So it was preferential: if someone scores higher in French than in English, it's recorded

[01:25:32] for them, but they must pass English. So first, English is compulsory, they must pass it. The preferential element concerns the second foreign language. Regarding integrating people with disabilities...

[01:25:46] **[MP]** The other languages?

[01:25:47] **[Minister]** The other languages, exactly. Currently we...

[01:25:50] **[Minister]** Regarding languages, the two core languages are English and Arabic. French, as I said, will be preferential. As for adding any other language, that is a sovereign matter; it is not subject to the Ministry of Education's discretion but is one of the sovereign issues that fall under the state's sovereignty, and the Supreme Council for Education may take it up. On Kurdish, Decree No. 13 was issued

[01:26:19] and schools were opened under the executive instructions of that decree. Regarding integrating people with disabilities, there are two types of disability. For severe disabilities, education falls under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. For mild disabilities, we have inclusive schools, meaning schools that receive two types of students: regular students and students with special needs whose disability is mild. The number

[01:26:54] of inclusive schools we currently have is roughly 300 and a bit, 354 is the exact figure, but around 300. It is not enough, frankly. We need more staff and more equipment for disability, and we are working on this, God willing. The 2011 contracts: making them permanent, as I said, is subject to a law.

[01:27:22] The Ministry of Administrative Development, with thanks, is addressing these files together with the other ministries. We do everything we can to keep the teacher: we give them a place and a salary so they keep working. But correcting their legal status requires a law. As far as I know, the Civil Service Law is also ready; it includes making contracts permanent and will be presented to you soon, God willing. It will set out

[01:27:50] how many years of contract service a person needs and what conditions they must meet to be made permanent under it. There was another question: citizenship. I mentioned briefly that we have completed the national standards for the new curricula. Within these standards there is citizenship and national values. We will have a subject, God willing, instead of "National Education" [qawmiyya]. We haven't yet agreed on the name, whether it's "Citizenship" or

[01:28:21] another name, but it covers this topic, values, and will run, God willing, from first grade to twelfth grade.

[01:28:29] **[Chair]** Thank you, Your Excellency. Colleague Azzam Fadel Khanji.

[01:28:34] **[MP Azzam Khanji]** In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Minister of Education, honourable colleagues, there is no doubt that education is a national security issue par excellence, and we always aspire for the Ministry of Education to be a sovereign ministry like the other important ministries. That is why we always advocate for the Ministry of Education to be allocated sufficient budgets so it can bring about a real revolution in education. Syria will not rise except

[01:29:08] through a real educational renaissance. I want to focus on several points. First, we have not really heard clearly about the strategy and philosophy of education the Ministry of Education wants today in order to bring about this real renaissance in Syrian education. There is no doubt Syrian education is in a lamentable state, the result of decades of accumulation. We don't hold the current ministry responsible for the state we've reached, but in circumstances

[01:29:41] like these, having emerged from a catastrophic situation, we need flexibility, we need boldness, we need firmness. For the teachers dismissed because of the revolution, we need revolutionary legitimacy: the revolutionary legitimacy that swept away the defunct laws. We need revolutionary legitimacy to return these dismissed teachers to their posts, especially since, Mr. Speaker, in a large number of places the teaching is done by people who only have a

[01:30:13] baccalaureate. We are in dire need of these teachers who have higher qualifications. There must be a firm, revolutionary measure to return these teachers. There is also an important issue: the teacher's central role. We also want to hear from the Ministry of Education what its plan is to make the teacher a leader in their community. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Syrian teacher

[01:30:45] was a community leader. We want him to return to what he was. Not just in terms of salaries, but a set of privileges given to this teacher so that society as a whole sees this man as more important than many other professions. The teacher is the one who makes the president of the republic, the army commander, the defence minister. He made us, he taught us all; we all owe this teacher, and we must restore his worth and dignity, which were trampled into the ground over

[01:31:20] many years. There must be a good salary, privileges, social esteem. These matters, down to the finest details, I hope the Ministry of Education will take note of these small, simple things, even a media plan, to restore the teacher to the status we aspire to. In vocational education, the ministry issued a decision that ninth-grade students whose total is below a certain threshold will go to vocational education. The number

[01:31:54] of vocational schools in Syria today is not enough for these students, who are perhaps in large numbers, so they will end up without a school. The ministry must pay attention to this. Most vocational schools today have no equipment. The issue of funding, spending and the budget: we haven't heard enough. What is the Ministry of Education's budget, how much has it spent, what projects does it want to spend on, and what are its spending priorities?

[01:32:28] What are the ministry's spending priorities to achieve this qualitative impact? We want more discussion of this, with the ministry's priorities specified. I don't mean restoring schools or things like that, but things relating to the quality of education: how do we revive education? We want specifics and clear answers, because frankly there are sometimes contradictions in the figures. It would be good to pin these

[01:32:58] down. For example, in the ministry's report in April, the number of schools restored and completed was 448. Now the figure is close to 4,000. Which of the two figures was wrong? It would also be good, for transparency, to publish the names of these 4,000 schools on the ministry's website, [showing] that we completed these schools, so people are informed. On languages, I believe Turkish

[01:33:30] also has...

[01:33:32] **[Chair]** We've covered languages, if you have something else.

[01:33:34] **[MP Khanji]** Turkish wasn't discussed. Turkish, similarly... It was a very nice thing that Kurdish was given the right for students to learn in their mother tongue. Likewise for Turkish, I think it's important there be something similar. And it is a sovereign matter; if it's a sovereign matter, then the legislative authority holds sovereignty on this issue, so let the Ministry of Education submit something on this... **[Chair]** Mr...

[01:34:04] Sorry, he specified that he's transferring the competence from himself to the Council of Higher Education, the Council, exactly; it's a group of ministries that decides.

[01:34:15] **[MP Khanji]** Just the last point: psychological counselling. The last point, psychological counselling. About 1,100 specialists, university professors and academics in psychological counselling, submitted a memorandum, because the Ministry of Education turned the psychological counsellor into an activities officer, an activities supervisor. This memorandum is very important; it would be good to listen to the specialists. It has very good detail, and I sent it to the Higher Education Committee. I hope

[01:34:44] it will be in the minister's hands so he can review it and hear the specialists' opinions. Thank you.

[01:34:51] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Azzam. This leads us to the issue of colleague Azzam's long intervention. It leads us to limit interventions to no more than two minutes. And I think we can't take a second intervention; the intervention and questions posed by our colleague Azzam exceed maybe six or seven questions. So please, Your Excellency.

[01:35:18] **[Minister]** No, it's not working now, the microphone.

[01:35:21] **[Chair]** OK.

[01:35:21] **[Minister]** Regarding the Ministry of Education's strategy, I said we have the Supreme Council. We have finished our strategy, Higher Education has also finished its strategy, and Awqaf has also submitted a strategy. We will come out with a comprehensive education strategy for all sectors in Syria, and it is currently being worked on in the Supreme Council. Regarding the dismissed, I don't

[01:35:45] know, you're raising it for the third time. Maybe there's a dismissed teacher who hasn't returned and isn't working? That's a question. OK, if a dismissed teacher hasn't come back to work, we issued a decision that they go to the nearest school and start. But the problem is the dismissed want to come back as permanent staff. I'm with them, but it's not within my authority to make them permanent; that's with you. So help us on this when the law on the dismissed is presented to you.

[01:36:11] Regarding the teacher: of course we want the teacher to be a role model in the school, in society, in the state. When is someone a role model? When they're strong academically, strong in values, influential, effective, right? We held a workshop with the Ministry of Higher Education on teacher training. In the near-term plan we will abolish all teacher-training institutes. We took [a cohort] only this year; we're not bound for next year and will stop, because we're going for teacher quality and teacher

[01:36:45] calibre: the teacher should be a university graduate. As for those we have with a baccalaureate or institute diploma, we'll give them opportunities to complete their studies and promote them according to the qualification they obtain. OK, regarding the budget, I'll be transparent with you. Last year there was no budget; it was on a one-twelfth [monthly] basis. And this year the budget didn't come in until roughly the first [month]; practically, we've had the budget for two months. We've been working for two months. Our priorities,

[01:37:16] certainly, we have the planning directorate in the ministry, which plans how we'll distribute it, within the strategic plan and the emergency plan. It has been distributed between basic needs and developing education. On Turkish, the Speaker answered, and I've spoken on it. On counselling, sometimes, I'd like to say, especially to the professor who spoke, I think he may have been a member of the executive bureau for education in Aleppo, I'd have hoped that, given the sanctity of the dome we sit under,

[01:37:47] what's said would be as accurate as possible. Sometimes things reach you, but let's be accurate before we raise them. To say we abolished counselling: we did not abolish counselling. On the contrary, counselling exists, but we added a new task. The counsellor in the school had no tools. How was he supposed to handle values

[01:38:14] and behaviour? He was solving problems and registering students. We created an activity hall, and he's been assigned to the hall, the activity hall for values and behaviour, in addition to his duties. Counselling here is collective, not individual; it's not solving an individual student's problem but values and behaviour. We're seeing a lot, frankly; we have a problem with values and behaviour in this generation. It's an issue

[01:38:40] that needs intervention. We intervened quickly with the activity halls and assigned the counsellor to take on collective counselling, and we'll give him a bonus if he takes it on. The counsellor's salary is, I believe, around 32 [thousand?]; if he takes it on, his salary will increase, since he's taking on a new task. Otherwise he continues as a counsellor. And if a school has more than one counsellor, one takes the activities and the other continues individual counselling. Thank you.

[01:39:10] **[Chair]** Thank you, Your Excellency. Colleague Badr Jamous. I hope you'll respect the time.

[01:39:17] **[Chair]** We'll apply it to you as soon as we start, sorry... **[MP Badr Jamous]** Mr. Speaker, honourable Minister, welcome to the Assembly. First, I really want to thank you for your efforts. Dr. Azzam and I worked on the education file from the start of the revolution; we had the

National Commission and worked on curricula and baccalaureate exams, so we know the scale of the burden on the Ministry of Education and whoever holds this house. Truly, thank you.

[01:39:42] I want to focus on... I don't want to repeat, I'll endorse all the points my colleagues mentioned. But on certificate equivalency, I hope the ministry takes this into account. When our children were displaced and went to Turkey and Lebanon, those countries accepted them, gave them a placement test and put them in the right grade. They didn't ask them to authenticate certificates. Nor did they ask them, in Saudi Arabia, for recognition of the baccalaureate, like having tenth and eleventh grade. They gave

[01:40:06] them a placement test, they sat the exam and obtained [the certificate]. Today there are many complications with certificate equivalency for returnees. They want papers. People who were in Sudan don't have tenth and eleventh grade papers. Fine, he has a baccalaureate: accept the baccalaureate, without tormenting them: go to the Sudanese foreign ministry, the Syrian foreign ministry, the embassy. I truly saw this as a personal experience, and there is a lot of suffering. Also university degrees: someone comes back

[01:40:29] from Germany with a doctorate in medicine, and they tell him to go back to the Ministry of Education for his baccalaureate equivalency. I think today we need to get past these points. Reduce bureaucracy. There's truly a bureaucratic situation that's wasting... Today the most important thing for a person is their time. We're in a situation where there's a lot of pressure on time, and bureaucracy is being used to waste people's time.

[01:40:52] Three: we as the People's Assembly are an ally and partner of the executive authority, especially in this phase, before we are oversight. We need to change laws. We expect you to amend laws quickly and send them to the People's Assembly, and we won't hold them up much here, because accountability, or questioning, comes when there are proper laws. We have a problem with all the laws of the defunct regime; they need review. The faster you work on the laws

[01:41:18] and they reach the People's Assembly, God willing, we'll amend them as quickly as possible and vote on them, and then we can start questioning. The last point: putting your work on the ministry's website, meaning what the plan is and what's been implemented, every three months. Because truly, you're being treated unfairly in the eyes of the public, since people have no information about the work the ministries are doing, including the Ministry of Education. Thank you.

[01:41:41] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Badr. Colleague Mai Khallouf.

[01:41:47] **[MP Mai Khallouf]** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your Excellency, thank you for your presentation and for the efforts you are making. Two points. First, you didn't talk about the contracts terminated since February 2025, that is, after the liberation. These terminated contract holders, in Tartus Governorate and across Syria, haven't been paid since then, while when the employee goes to get a "not employed" certificate, it turns out he's [listed as] employed. This is a major contradiction. At the same time, these contract holders are

[01:42:27] needed as specialisations, like Arabic language and other specialisations. Colleagues raised psychological counselling. Given my position as a former psychological counsellor, I hope you'll look at the terminated contracts in that specialisation, because this task is being done by non-specialists from the activities specialisations, so-called drawing or sports and so on. This is unacceptable when there are huge numbers of psychological counselling graduates available. I ask:

[01:43:03] why aren't competitions held to appoint teachers in all specialisations to meet needs across all of Syria, since, as you said, there is a severe shortage? Second point: I hope Your Excellency will reconsider what you said about the cumulative average, which will be presented as a bill to the People's Assembly, because favouritism may play into it, as may personal, environmental and local matters in each school. Thank you.

[01:43:43] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Mai. Your Excellency, before you answer the two interventions: you raised a very important issue and put the ball in the People's Assembly's court, and it's our duty to return it to you. Regarding the laws on the dismissed: to make them permanent they need a law. We ask: where is this law? The dismissed because of the revolution, it has been two and a half years since the event. Now the law comes, and today we'd pass it as an Assembly,

[01:44:08] but nothing has reached us, neither from the Ministry of Education nor as proposals or draft laws. Thank you. Add this question to the questions of colleague Badr and colleague Mai. Thank you.

[01:44:22] **[Minister]** OK, regarding certificate equivalency, Mr. Badr asked. For returnees, as I said, we don't ask for any certificate, except that someone sitting the baccalaureate must have ninth grade. I can't give him a baccalaureate certificate. The Ministry of Education cannot grant a baccalaureate certificate unless the student has obtained the Syrian ninth-grade certificate or its equivalent. Even for returnees we had

[01:44:54] conditional registration: he registers for the baccalaureate and passes the baccalaureate, but we don't give him the baccalaureate certificate until he brings the ninth-grade certificate.

[01:45:00] **[MP Badr Jamous]** My son was denied, my son was denied the baccalaureate. I spent three months in Turkey going from ministry to ministry and province to province, and my son was denied because there was no registration... My children in primary school, yes, there was conditional registration and I benefited from it. But my son in the baccalaureate was denied this year. And I didn't intend to speak.

[01:45:20] **[Minister]** No, no, you're right. We...

[01:45:22] **[MP Jamous]** But if there's room, with permission to speak.

[01:45:24] **[Minister]** Yes, fine, no problem at all. The number who registered conditionally for the baccalaureate was large.

[01:45:31] **[Minister]** Now, if he couldn't register technically or there was a problem, I have no information. But a large number registered conditionally, and we didn't give them the baccalaureate until they brought us the ninth grade, or the Turkish eighth grade. For the Turkish eighth grade, a decision was issued to consider it equivalent to the Syrian ninth, to make things easier, since there the certificate is at eighth grade. That was also issued on this matter. As for authenticating certificates, there is difficulty...

[01:46:01] **[Minister]** Yes, we're talking about this; I'll tell you about higher education. There is indeed difficulty with some countries, and sometimes there is obstruction. Sometimes authentication involves political calculations between countries; they delay students and make it hard for them. And we have countries, which I won't name. We agreed with the foreign ministry that for students who come and can't authenticate there, we authenticate for them: we send them to the foreign ministry in lists and the foreign ministry corresponds [with those countries]. We currently have four

[01:46:26] countries, frankly, that are tormenting students over authenticating certificates. It was agreed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to send lists of students with certificates so the foreign ministry authenticates through official correspondence. As for someone who obtained a university degree or a medical degree abroad and returns to Syria and is asked for baccalaureate equivalency and equivalency: we also process this as fast as possible and try to help. But these are procedures; we're obliged.

[01:46:54] If someone wants to be a doctor, how did he get the degree if he has no baccalaureate? As a state, frankly, we verify: anyone who brings me a certificate saying "I studied medicine in such-and-such a country", fine, but the baccalaureate certificate is

mandatory. There is a sequence. In no country in the world does anyone get a university degree without finishing secondary school. So it's our right to check these [01:47:15] matters.

[01:47:16] **[Minister]** Regarding contracts, God willing, we'll launch a competition within a few days, in agreement with the Ministry of Development. It will be specific to Aleppo, Daraa and Rural Damascus. Frankly, we gave these three governorates priority because we have the biggest shortage there in terms of vacancies. Fine. The law on the dismissed, Mr. Speaker, [01:47:48] the Speaker of the People's Assembly asked. We finished the draft and sent it to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, and I think all the ministries have finished, because it doesn't concern only the Ministry of Education. The dismissed because of the revolution isn't specific to the Ministry of Education.

[01:48:02] **[Chair]** Of course. Generally, I think it's with the drafting committee at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, God willing.

[01:48:08] **[Chair]** Right, God give you strength. Colleague Aws Fayez Othman. **[MP Aws Othman]** But I want to talk about an issue that perhaps wasn't discussed properly, so I hope to take one minute more than the two minutes.

[01:48:28] **[Chair]** Fine.

[01:48:28] **[MP Aws Othman]** Honourable Minister of Education, we have an ongoing problem. You said the President returned the contract holders to the governorates of Latakia and Tartus or other governorates, or the contracts of those who sat specialised competitions in governorates that lacked certain qualified staff or vacancies. Anyway, the

[01:48:56] President, after the liberation, when he returned these staff, returned them within the director[ates] and returned them because of circumstances, which shows understanding and humanity on his part. So when we say the director of the financial [control] authority didn't sign, that's a problem, that's a problem. I'm talking about something else, Minister. These contract holders sat an official competition with the state; five years were served, and after five years they were returned to their governorates

[01:49:32] where they started, bearing in mind the contract ends after five years on condition that their situation is reviewed and they are returned to their governorates. At least the education contracts for administrators: more than 1,200 administrators who sat the same competition were dismissed, and today we're replacing them with teachers, and we say we have a shortage of teachers and need substitutes.

[01:50:04] On the other hand, many governorates ask what the Ministry of Education's role is with other education directorates. When we say the Idlib education directorate, or Latakia, or Rural Damascus, did not approve a certain number of teaching staff who sat a competition and were requested through the ministry to join their governorates under the legal competition,

[01:50:38] we don't know what the ministry's role is in this. I return to the competition: it was regular, the specialisations were complete, the teachers did their duty. Did we ask at the Ministry of Education, Minister, whether this teacher, who will again leave her family and go to another governorate, has been given housing? Given an adequate salary? Did we consider her family, which is in another governorate, in

[01:51:09] Latakia for example, or Tartus? You want to send her back to Rural Damascus after five years. Did we ask whether the salary is enough, whether the residence is enough, whether ending her contract and sending her back, or her resigning, leads to better family circumstances? Given that you're the Ministry of Education: we have a clear shortage of teaching staff, and we're relying on substitutes, and we're pushing away the people

[01:51:38] who succeeded in a competition, whom we should seek to make permanent in these posts if possible. OK, I want to talk about something else: replacing administrators who passed

a competition with teachers. This is strange. Why replace administrators who sat a competition? Truly, Minister, there is no surplus in Latakia Governorate. You have a problem that [01:52:04] in Latakia Governorate... **[Chair]** I know your pain.

[01:52:07] **[MP Othman]** Just a minute, a moment. I asked for one extra minute only, because this issue hasn't been addressed.

[01:52:12] **[Chair]** You've had the minute.

[01:52:14] **[MP Othman]** No, we just lost that minute. I'd have finished.

[01:52:16] **[Chair]** It's the same issue; you're talking about the same issue, but you went into the case. **[MP Othman]** Mr. Speaker, sorry, I just want to say it in this minute.

[01:52:24] **[Chair]** Go ahead, but don't take long, please, because we have many interventions.

[01:52:28] **[MP Othman]** I've now got to the... I see you gave everyone open time, so you should have left me enough for my intervention.

[01:52:36] **[Chair]** Go ahead, go ahead.

[01:52:38] **[MP Othman]** Mr. Speaker, we want to talk about an issue that relates... Also, has the staffing cadre [malak] been expanded since 2020, Minister? It hasn't been expanded. If the cadre were expanded, there would be no surplus in any governorate; there is a shortage in all governorates. If you say you'll announce a competition in Rural Damascus and so on, why don't you look with compassion, affection and paternal care at these female teachers... Why is the pressure always on the weakest segment,

[01:53:09] the poorest segment, the segment we need most? Spreading the problem across Syria is not a solution, Minister. If the Latakia education director doesn't put you in the picture, or you don't get a snapshot: today there's a shortage in Latakia schools, a shortage of staff, and we send them to other governorates because of the competition, while we have a shortage. The problem has been spread, and we've gained nothing. Anyway, in my name

[01:53:37] and on behalf of the people of Latakia Governorate, and on behalf of our people and the members of the People's Assembly in Latakia, Tartus, Hama, anywhere this case applies, I ask you to look with the compassion with which the President of the Republic looked. A thousand thanks to you.

[01:53:59] **[Chair]** You completed your intervention; I gave you the time... The issue, brother, is when one person goes on long... we're not targeting him. I hope this is understood. Just, sorry, Your Excellency, because the issue has dragged on a bit, please keep the answer short.

[01:54:18] **[Minister]** Or we answer it... so we keep it short, since it's one question.

[01:54:22] **[Minister]** OK. We agreed to speak transparently; the new Syria is a transparent Syria. In Latakia Governorate I have 9,500, 9,500 surplus teachers sitting at home and receiving their salaries. These are permanent staff, not contracts. As for the contracts, they moved from Damascus and Rural Damascus and went back because of the circumstances after the liberation. It was a de facto situation; they were transferred en masse. Now, after

[01:54:53] the situation stabilised, what did we tell them? Everyone returns to their place of contract, according to need. I can't continue now with 10,000, frankly, in Latakia, in addition to 10,000 permanent staff counted on the education cadre and paid from the education payroll, while in Rural Damascus, Daraa and rural Aleppo I have a shortage of thousands. That's why I said the competition within 10 days will be specific to Rural Damascus, sorry, Rural Damascus, Aleppo and Daraa, because we have a severe shortage there.

[01:55:21] As for "with compassion", frankly, this is an issue that needs discussion at government level: living stability and social conditions. We at the Ministry of Education have a numerical

cadre, a budget and a number of students, so we work institutionally. As for looking at them with compassion, I'm with you in finding them a solution, whether through the Ministry of Development, the Ministry of Social Affairs

[01:55:48] and Labour, or you find a solution. You, members of the People's Assembly, help us find a solution. Frankly, this issue goes beyond the Ministry of Education's remit. I'm speaking to you with complete transparency.

[01:56:01] **[Chair]** Your Excellency, just one thing. Colleague Aws's remark caught my attention: that the Latakia education directorate has a shortage, that's what they say. Let's agree on one point: the Latakia education director isn't keeping you in the picture, while you say we have a surplus.

[01:56:16] **[Minister]** First of all, we sent...

[01:56:17] **[Chair]** Just to clarify the point.

[01:56:19] **[Minister]** We sent several ministry committees; the Ministry of Development went, fine, several statistics and so on. We have the number of students, the number of classes, the number of teachers. I'm telling you transparently: 9,500 permanent teachers in surplus, not counting contracts.

[01:56:34] **[MP]** They're sitting at home without...

[01:56:36] **[Minister]** There are no schools. The empty schools may be in the villages, and teachers don't go. Now that's the education directorate's responsibility, its responsibility within the governorate, I mean the teachers.

[01:56:46] **[MP]** I hope the issue of empty schools will be addressed with the Latakia education directorate. Jabal al-Turkman and Jabal al-Akrad have shortages; some areas have shortages, I'm being frank.

[01:56:55] **[Minister]** But in Latakia, in the places where they are, yes, we have a surplus.

[01:57:00] **[MP]** Fine, those with a shortage, no one goes; send these to those.

[01:57:04] **[Minister]** If they go, we have no problem. The permanent staff I have... Rural Damascus and those vacant areas, send them there.

[01:57:11] **[Minister]** We told them to go back to Rural Damascus. Now whoever went back...

[01:57:13] **[Chair]** Please, please, quiet. Please, quiet.

[01:57:15] **[Minister]** We told them the contract...

[01:57:17] **[Chair]** Please...

[01:57:18] **[MP]** OK.

[01:57:20] **[MP]** Right.

[01:57:20] **[Chair]** The minister is answering, sorry.

[01:57:22] **[MP]** Right, right.

[01:57:24] **[Minister]** Right. We will redirect the surplus towards... Last week 14 schools opened in Jabal al-Akrad and Turkman, last week, if you followed it. The problem we have, frankly, is poor distribution. We have areas with a surplus and areas without. Sometimes we assign, for example, a teacher whose contract was with Rural Damascus: go back, you'll get your salary and continue, because your contract is originally in Rural Damascus. I can't continue his contract, extend his

[01:57:45] contract in rural Latakia when I have a surplus there and his contract is originally in Damascus. That's the problem.

[01:57:51] **[Chair]** Thank you. Colleague Mahmoud al-Madi, and we return to the matter of brevity.

[01:57:57] **[MP Mahmoud al-Madi]** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All respect to the minister. The issue of the dismissed has been discussed by many colleagues. There's another issue: there are teachers with mandatory [education] qualifications, such as education degrees, and also some teachers who sat competitions and passed them under the defunct regime, but were not appointed; the decision was shelved with the phrase "pending", and to this day they remain "pending".

[01:58:38] The other issue is integration. We have a particular situation in Hasakah Governorate with integration. In truth, large numbers with low qualifications, ninth grade and baccalaureate, were integrated into education, while a large number with university and institute degrees were excluded. I don't know; they are now outside the integration in Hasakah Governorate.

[01:59:12] Another issue concerns some schools. In Markada, Hasakah Governorate, about four or five schools were destroyed and levelled to the ground. There's currently no possibility of building, and the school year has begun, so the hope is to find a solution, for example prefabricated rooms or caravans. Lastly, I'll end with this: today a colleague called me from Turkey. They were coming from Turkey and have children in primary, first, second, third grade I think.

[01:59:51] They had their report cards authenticated. Not a certificate, a report card, authenticated by the...

[01:59:58] **[Chair]** I think colleague Badr raised this issue, so you don't... **[MP al-Madi]** Primary, excuse me, Mr. Speaker, primary report cards authenticated by the education director in Urfa and also by the school, and here they were asked to have them authenticated by the consulate and the Turkish foreign ministry. Thank you.

[02:00:17] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Mahmoud. Colleague Abdullah al-Abdullah.

[02:00:23] **[Chair]** Peace be upon you. Please keep it brief and please don't repeat. The issue of repetition is very important, so that we allow room for new perspectives and new questions and make the best use of the session.

[02:00:36] **[MP Abdullah al-Abdullah]** May God honour you. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, and prayers and peace be upon the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers. Your Excellency, may God reward you for every word you said. I have two questions. The first: what is the fate of those integrated now in the eastern regions in general and Ras al-Ain in particular? That's the first question. The second: what is the Ministry of Education's vision for teachers' salaries in the coming days? We know that all of us

[02:01:03] here under the dome of parliament only reached this place by the grace of God and then the teacher who raised us in our early years. And you, Your Excellency, only reached this place thanks to the teacher. We ask you, as the Ministry of Education, to make the teacher's salary the best salary in the state. Now we look at the teacher as though, God help us, he is humiliated by his salary. God bless you. That's my word.

[02:01:32] **[Chair]** And certainly [we all] hope teachers' salaries will be at the highest level. But you know, and we know, that the issue needs other ministries, other resources and other matters; the minister isn't the one responsible for this issue.

[02:01:45] **[MP al-Abdullah]** But he can raise it from his side.

[02:01:46] **[Chair]** On the second part, of course he raises it.

[02:01:49] **[MP al-Abdullah]** I'm done. God bless.

[02:01:50] **[Chair]** Colleague Nawar Najmeh, so there are three, if you please. And again we stress the matter of time.

[02:01:57] **[MP Nawar Najmeh]** Mr. Speaker of the People's Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, Your Excellency the Minister of Education, nations rise when education rises. Education is a right for every citizen in every state, and this right should be free; this is adopted in most countries of the world. We certainly appreciate what you said about the huge student intake, especially with the increase in students coming to schools. But the point I want to raise,

[02:02:24] truly, is that the private sector perhaps plays a role in helping to absorb students. But unfortunately most private educational institutions have turned education from a mission into a trade and adopted school fees that match neither wage levels in Syria nor income levels, and this sector has become profit-driven, even though most countries of the world, especially developed ones, adopt the model of non-profit educational institutions.

[02:02:54] To what extent can this be regulated, and laws enacted specifying that educational institutions be non-profit, and if they are for-profit, that it be within acceptable and reasonable limits, and that we not adopt the theory of supply and demand in the education sector? This theory can apply in other sectors, but education is not the right place to apply supply and demand. Thank you very much.

[02:03:15] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Nawar Najmeh. I leave the floor to the minister. Your Excellency, please answer. OK.

[02:03:33] **[Chair]** Just give the floor, give permission to the minister. OK, go ahead.

[02:03:37] **[Someone]** Technicians...

[02:03:41] OK.

[02:03:42] **[Minister]** Regarding integration teachers: the integration file isn't finished. To be precise, the 42,000 who were previously with the Autonomous Administration: their files were transferred to the Ministry of Development, and we are currently verifying the certificates. They are in four governorates: Hasakah, Deir ez-Zor, Raqqah and rural Aleppo. We are very transparent on integration. With the northern teachers, when integration happened, frankly, anyone

[02:04:13] without a certificate, or with a forged certificate, wasn't included in integration; they were left out. And even now I'm told there are large numbers of returns [of files] in the integration file too; we are verifying certificates and their authenticity. Anyone who doesn't hold a qualification that makes them eligible to be a teacher has not been integrated into the Ministry of Education. I'm clear: they could go to another ministry, but within the teaching staff they must

[02:04:41] have a teaching qualification. Regarding Markada, correct. We started in the newly liberated eastern regions in June, and we have a large number of schools. Mr. Speaker of the People's Assembly, we requested urgent assistance from the General Secretariat of the Presidency, since nothing had been allocated for them in the budget: Hasakah and part of Deir ez-Zor, Raqqah and rural Aleppo. Last week approval was given to

[02:05:12] allocate an emergency sum for the eastern region. In our last meeting with the Minister of Emergencies, we requested caravans for the areas where we haven't yet managed to build, especially small villages. We requested caravans, of course as a temporary alternative until we can build a school in every village. They talked about salaries: I'm with you. If you help me make the teacher's salary like

[02:05:47] the salary of a member of the People's Assembly, I'm ready. I'm ready. As Minister of Education I call for the teacher's salary to be as much as an Assembly member's salary. We'll work with you. OK.

[02:06:04] **[Chair]** Now, regarding the teacher's salary, truly it requires combining many efforts: your efforts, ours and the Ministry of Finance's.

[02:06:14] **[Chair]** And we are working for the teacher's salary to be higher than ours.

[02:06:16] **[Minister]** Right. Let me give you some information: at the Ministry of Education, 95% received the qualitative raise and 5% received the 50% raise for administrators. So it wasn't only teachers who got the qualitative raise; every educational-administrative position was included in the qualitative raise: the school principal, the supervisor, the activities officer, the counsellor, the secretary. Anyone whose basis was being a teacher and then became an administrator was covered. And the salary scale, we are transparent, was published in the media, showing how

[02:06:49] the grading worked. Of course I thank the Ministry of Finance, frankly, for its great efforts in this area and for securing this qualitative raise.

[02:07:00] **[Chair]** Thank you, Your Excellency. Colleague Ahmad Mahmoud Khalaf al-Shalash.

[02:07:06] **[MP Ahmad Khalaf al-Shalash]** Your Excellency, welcome under the dome of parliament. Today the minister has come to turn the tables on the People's Assembly. One: regarding the dismissed, I wish all the ministers would send it to the People's Assembly. I believe the competent committees would adopt it for this segment in particular, and it would take priority; they'd adopt it yesterday, not tomorrow, the reinstatement of the dismissed.

[02:07:33] So I hope it will be referred. Second, regarding salaries, teachers' salaries and all sectors, this goes through the executive authority and only afterwards comes to the People's Assembly. Three, regarding transparency, I hope the Ministry of Education and all ministries appear on a scheduled basis on the national channels and present their programmes, strategies and plans, and are

[02:08:00] close to the street, and likewise on their official accounts. I'll move to the regional situation, the specificity of Raqqa, because there's no colour of de facto authority that hasn't passed through the governorate. We have, under the dismissed, an item colleagues didn't mention: those dismissed by the SDF, dismissed by the SDF for objecting to the change of curricula and to the internal

[02:08:36] **[military]** camps, as well as those dismissed in the Peace Spring area and those who resigned in the Peace Spring area. And regarding training and qualification, not a single name from Raqqa Governorate was included in the foreign scholarships. Foreign scholarships... The budget for Raqqa Governorate: Raqqa was not included in the budget, and Raqqa Governorate's budget to

[02:09:03] this day is the budget of an educational complex, the Maadan educational complex, even though it was liberated at the start of the year. School buildings in Raqqa, according to the education directorate's statistics, number 1,436, of which 137 are out of service, ranging from totally destroyed to partially destroyed to needing restoration. This has left students... a classroom holds 80 students, some sitting on the floor, with no desk,

[02:09:37] no desk. Raqqa Governorate needs nearly 4 million books; less than 10% has been provided, 350,000 books. We have the Tal Abyad area, with a population of about 236, 260,000 people, which has no secondary scientific or literary class section. 260,000, according to the education directorate and according to our people

[02:10:13] in Tal Abyad. Regarding digital transformation, Your Excellency, I hope a margin remains for manual processing, because you yourself complained about the communications infrastructure. Today when you launch a link for substitutes and bar substitutes from applying manually... in any country, digital transformation is supported by manual [processing]. So please keep the manual process working for those unable to apply.

[02:10:48] Furniture: likewise in Raqqa there are no desks, no desks. Residents launched community initiatives, and we have shortages there, apart from teaching aids, lab equipment and halls. God... I wish, only the time...

[02:11:05] **[Chair]** Time's up. God give you strength, Doctor. **[MP al-Shalash]** Just a general point, a general point we've passed over more than once: we call them "people with needs"; I hope we call them "people of determination". Welcome, Your Excellency.

[02:11:22] **[Chair]** OK, go ahead, Your Excellency.

[02:11:25] **[Minister]** I'll start from the last point. The international term is "people with disabilities". "People of determination" is an emotional, non-legal term. We're with you in using "people of determination" as a term in the Assembly. Regarding Raqqa, there is indeed a very great need, and I was realistic with you: Raqqa had no budget, and as I said a moment ago we requested an emergency budget for the eastern region and it was approved. Book distribution isn't finished yet; God willing, within a week or

[02:11:54] 10 days we'll complete distribution. Establishing complexes, establishing secondary schools with scientific or literary streams: we only need a request from the education directorate. I'll contact him if... just remind me of the area. What's the area that doesn't... Tal Abyad?

[02:12:10] **[Minister]** Tal Abyad. No request has reached us saying they want to open a secondary school or open a scientific or literary stream. Just yesterday I issued instructions: there are areas where they haven't opened a literary stream, only a scientific one. I said, whatever the number of students, however many, open a literary section in those areas too. I share your view: the situation in Raqqa needs great effort.

[02:12:32] **[Chair]** Who, Ahmad Mohammad al-Shalash? ...

[02:12:34] **[Minister]** Mr. Speaker, the Speaker of the People's Assembly will ask me about the dismissed. I've said it more than once: the law on the dismissed...

[02:12:40] **[Minister]** ...is at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. We've finished it and most ministers have finished it. It's an issue that doesn't concern... **[Chair]** No one interject, please, don't interject.

[02:12:48] **[Minister]** It doesn't concern only the Ministry of Education; it concerns all ministries. OK.

[02:12:54] **[Chair]** Whoever wants to intervene, register.

[02:12:57] **[Chair]** The problem is that all the issues have been raised; the problem is most questions are being repeated. Colleague Ahmad al-Shalash.

[02:13:06] **[MP Dr. Ahmad al-Shalash]** Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. Your Excellency, I am Dr. Ahmad al-Shalash, on the Ministry of Education's cadre and a son of education. God willing, we raise with you problems that must be taken seriously. First, exams and the [cheating] network. The exam and the network, [cheating] succeeded. People, to my knowledge and before my very eyes, pulled earpieces out of their ears, and they got very high marks. If this happens again next year,

[02:13:43] we will not accept, in any way whatsoever, whatever the cost, that there be a network, and exams that were, of course, not clean. That's on exams; this must be looked into. Second, the retirement age for women should be lower, because after 55 their output decreases. And maternity:

[02:14:11] female teachers should have a fourth maternity [leave]; raise this issue, because it's not reasonable, she won't perform in the classroom when she has a child left at home, a whole family. [snoring sounds] OK. The second matter: school health is not activated at all, especially in Deir ez-Zor. There is no school health, and school health has a very large and wonderful role;

[02:14:42] almost a quarter of society is served by it. It's a preventive function and at the same time curative and educational, as you know. As for us, desert [Badia] schools: we need

prefabricated rooms, of course; Deir ez-Zor needs them, the governorate needs them. We also have

[02:15:20] many teachers who were seconded or assigned to certain institutions, especially military and security ones and so on. We must not look favourably on their case, because they were surplus and had connections [wasta] and got out to those places. Their return: from a revolutionary standpoint I reject their return to their schools. Regarding investment in private [education]: public education could lease school buildings to

[02:15:54] private education, to ease the burden for those who want to register in private [schools], leasing school buildings. This idea could be raised, at other times, for schools that could be used in the afternoon. Also, the competition for service staff in Deir ez-Zor doesn't exist yet, sorry, hasn't launched yet. There's a competition for service staff; there's a big shortage of service staff at the education directorate there.

[02:16:25] Operating costs: they have an imbalance in this and suffer greatly from it. Of course we always sit with the education director and discuss matters. OK. May God reward you, and thank you for listening.

[02:16:41] **[Chair]** Colleague Mohammad Basel Hailam (?). And please be brief, brothers; many issues have been repeated. I'm mindful of the minister's time and yours.

[02:16:51] **[MP]** There are many issues.

[02:16:53] **[Chair]** Yes, go ahead...

[02:16:56] **[MP Mohammad Basel Hailam]** Mr. Speaker, Your Excellency the Minister, we are all concerned with lifting injustice and raising justice in all ministries and all relevant bodies in beloved Syria. I'll speak on the student pillar. Sons of the revolution were wronged twice: in the countries of asylum and when they returned to Syria. Your Excellency, there are Syrian students who returned with their families from countries

[02:17:29] of asylum to contribute to building Syria. But when their certificates were made equivalent, they were treated according to a mechanism that counts the years of study from ninth grade to the baccalaureate and then divides the total marks over four years, even though their educational circumstances in the countries of asylum were harsh: language difficulties, bullying, many things, especially ninth grade, which was exceptional because of language and different

[02:17:59] curricula. Aren't we thereby wronging these students twice, once because of the conditions of asylum and once on their return to their homeland? What solution do you propose to do justice to these students without violating the principle of fairness among all students? I propose re-examining the mechanism, an exceptional mechanism for students returning from countries of asylum, and adopting a

[02:18:29] fairer criterion that takes into account the actual years of study and level of attainment, with a specialised educational committee formed to examine affected cases one by one, and offering a unified test or placement exam for those who wish, so that the result reflects their actual level, not the conditions of asylum. Second, there is also injustice in the baccalaureate exam questions. We

[02:19:00] saw the psychological shock many students suffered. Your Excellency, this year we witnessed great shock among a number of baccalaureate students after exams that students and parents described as, in some subjects, not matching the level of preparation and the curricula students studied. Some hard-working students even felt a whole year's effort did them no justice. Will the ministry review

[02:19:29] the level of the questions and their consistency with the curriculum and educational measurement standards? And how will you ensure the exam does not turn from a means of measuring student attainment into a source of injustice and distress? The proposed solution: form an independent evaluation committee to review the questions, the answer key and the results and ensure they match the curricula and graded levels of thinking,

[02:20:04] address any proven flaw in the marking scheme or mark distribution, and set clear criteria for the future that ensure a balance between measuring understanding and distinction and not harming hard-working students. Thank you. We want fairness, truly. Justice is hard now in the first years of the return of refugees, the children of the revolution, but it's our duty, all of us, to cooperate and do justice to these students. May God reward you.

[02:20:33] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Mohammad Basel Hailam. Your Excellency, please answer the questions.

[02:20:41] **[Minister]** Regarding Deir ez-Zor, right, we have a difficult situation in Deir ez-Zor, frankly. Our legacy is heavy, frankly, in education: destroyed schools, worn-out vehicles, infrastructure unsuited to launching the educational process. We are working on two tracks, as I said: the emergency track, securing the child's right to education, and at the same time the strategic track,

[02:21:11] development. OK, have we reached every child in Syria? Not yet. There are areas, especially the eastern regions, the recently liberated eastern regions, with great difficulty, and we are trying. As I said a moment ago, we've been given an emergency budget for the eastern region. Regarding baccalaureate equivalency: there are two systems in the world, the cumulative system

[02:21:38] and the single-year system. We follow the country. A country with a [single-year] certificate system, for example Germany, gives the baccalaureate: he got 80%, we adopt that figure. Some countries use the cumulative system, so we adopt the cumulative system. The Ministry of Education can't decide to use cumulative for this country and not for that one according to its own whims. Rather, the system of the country where the student obtained

[02:22:04] the secondary certificate dictates the equivalency. Regarding equivalent certificates, I said the figure was 37,000, and in agreement with Higher Education there's very close coordination on this, so we don't wrong those who obtained certificates from one country. Some countries' baccalaureate marks are high, so they were ranked against each other. For example, someone got the certificate from Saudi Arabia; the number of students [from] Saudi Arabia was

[02:22:32] nine, they get three seats, so they're ranked against each other for relative fairness. He isn't ranked against someone with a certificate from Turkey or Kuwait, because from some countries, frankly, the marks all come to us as 99.99. So in coordination with the Ministry of Higher Education we reached a rule that achieves somewhat logical fairness: ranking within [each country's] group.

[02:22:55] **[Chair]** Colleague al-Aish al-Zarqa (?), go ahead, and I hope you'll respect the time. As for Deir ez-Zor's problems, part of them was raised by Dr. Fat...

[02:23:02] **[MP]** Sit down, then? That's it?

[02:23:03] **[Chair]** No, no, God give you strength.

[02:23:06] **[Chair]** I just... some of Deir ez-Zor's problems were raised by the Doctor, and the matter of time, because honestly I have a lot of repetition.

[02:23:13] **[MP al-Zarqa (?)]** In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings.

[02:23:16] **[MP]** We welcome the minister under the dome of parliament.

[02:23:19] **[MP al-Zarqa (?)]** You spoke about the difficulties the ministry faces in opening schools, but what is the criterion adopted for opening schools? Why didn't your ministry coordinate with the people of the villages and towns who restored [schools] themselves, and redirect the money spent on restoration towards equipping the restored schools? For example, in the town of al-Quriyah in Deir ez-Zor Governorate, residents restored 13 of 24 schools at their own expense.

[02:23:48] The question: had your ministry coordinated, they could have restored nine and equipped the rest with the cost of the restoration. Have new mechanisms of monitoring and accountability been activated to avoid mistakes during the certificate exams, as happened last year? Of course, the Doctor spoke about this. What is the reason for the disparity in teachers' wages despite similar specialisations? You said, Minister, that making [teachers] permanent

[02:24:16] goes through the People's Assembly in this file, and the Speaker spoke about this. Why was preparing the law and presenting it to the Assembly delayed? Because whoever hears this would say the Assembly is what's holding up this law. What is the ministry's plan to activate literacy programmes, facilitate study for young people who dropped out, and find solutions to this phenomenon? Why haven't guards been employed for educational facilities?

[02:24:45] We now see some schools being robbed, and this costs the ministry and the state additional expenses. Does the ministry have a plan to hold competitions for specialist teachers in Deir ez-Zor Governorate, given the governorate's acute shortage of teachers? You mentioned there will be competitions in some governorates; we hope Deir ez-Zor will be included like the other governorates. There are teachers and substitutes, sons of

[02:25:15] the revolution, who left teaching because they joined the revolution. Now they're being asked for 1,000 working days to enter the competition and be made permanent. What we want is for them to be treated like their counterparts in the Autonomous Administration. School principals: most of them were active members of the Baath Party, even though there are alternatives from the sons of the revolution. Why haven't they been replaced? Since we're from Deir ez-Zor, we propose classifying the governorate as a remote area and granting

[02:25:43] teachers a transport allowance on top of the basic salary. Adding a subject to the curriculum, a proposal: [a subject] on the constitution, to teach citizens their rights and duties, raising their awareness. Male and female teachers in Jinderes don't have self [employee] numbers, even though they're permanent. Does the Ministry of Education know of, and have a plan for, setting private school fees? What we see is

[02:26:13] a great exaggeration in school fees; some are similar to university fees. Thank you.

[02:26:20] **[Chair]** Colleague, some issues really are being repeated. For example, our colleague's last question was repeated from Nawar Najmeh... repeated three times, the issue of fees. Azzam Munir Jahjah (?), there's no answer on...

[02:26:37] **[Chair]** Azzam Munir al-Jahjah.

[02:26:40] **[MP Azzam al-Jahjah]** In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your Excellency, on the contracts issue, we won't go back over it; I endorse what Dr. Aws and our colleague Mai said, and we will certainly follow up this issue with Your Excellency and with the Ministry of Administrative Development, because it's not reasonable that thousands of families end up on the street with no source of income. The second issue, the surplus:

[02:27:06] calculating the surplus, Your Excellency, if we wait until the Civil Service Law comes out, then on that basis a large part of these may... you'd have 20 or 30% vacancies in this matter. And a third and final issue: teachers of Russian, the Russian language subject. You dismissed them and then asked them to make contracts outside the cadre.

[02:27:33] If we could resolve this matter. Thank you.

[02:27:41] **[Minister]** There's a question we really haven't answered, about the difficulty of the questions. Once I was on an exam tour, and a parent saw me and told me the questions were very hard.

[02:27:53] **[Minister]** On evaluation: the questions were hard, easy... OK, on the difficulty of the questions and the pass rate, let me ask you: what was the baccalaureate pass rate this year?

[02:28:08] [Minister] In the literary stream 69, in the literary 65 [sic]. That's within high standards, not low ones. So if the questions had been hard, it would have been [lower]. But what we see on social media, we say "God help us, mathematics was a disaster", yet more than 600 students got full marks in mathematics. Frankly, it's the populist atmosphere

[02:28:33] that's affecting the public mood and driving us. I assure you the pass rate was very good. Were there violations in the exams? Yes, OK, there were violations; there was cheating, there was cheating. But what was its rate, how many [cheating] reports? We announced the number of reports: we had 3,700 cases of cheating by mobile phone, thousands. We're not a society of angels, certainly. Whether

[02:29:00] students or teachers, some cheat in exams, and it always exists in all exams. There are students who don't study and try to get through, try to cheat. We are working on this issue. This year we will decide to reinstate the qualifying exam for the baccalaureate. Frankly, a lot of people sit the baccalaureate just to try their luck, whether they pass or not, whether they get through or not. So the qualifying exam this year, God

[02:29:28] willing, will return, to filter the students who can sit the baccalaureate exam. Regarding the law on the dismissed, as I said, it's with the drafting committee at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers; it has to be referred to you. This issue is with the Speaker of the People's Assembly, and we'll speed it up too; we'll send drafts, drafts... **[Chair]** Just to clarify something:

[02:29:51] [Chair] What's with me is when the law is at the committee.

[02:29:55] [Chair] As for the draft law, it's still with the executive authority. For me, the executive authority is one body; you and the executive authority are one body. A law that's "with me" is one that's with one of my committees, the People's Assembly's 26 committees, or the Education Committee; I'll speed it up. As long as it's with the executive authority, it's with the executive authority and not with me.

[02:30:15] [Minister] It may take a long time because, as I said, it doesn't concern only the Ministry of Education but all ministries.

[02:30:21] [Minister] Regarding private schools, their prices are high and crazy, in some areas of course, because there are few of them and demand is high, so it drives prices up. Last Thursday we licensed 135 private schools. We are trying as much as possible to facilitate licensing to ease the pressure. As for what Dr. Ahmad raised, leasing a public school to the private [sector]: frankly, this is out of the question at the Ministry of Education, because

[02:30:52] education is free. We're trying to restore our schools; even if we're a little late, we'll stay on this track.

[02:30:59] [Chair] The cost of private education: can't the Ministry of Education set a maximum fee, for example, and thereby curb this excessive greed? **[Minister]** It needs an accreditation system, as I said: classifying the school, its number of students and so on. It needs school classification and accreditation, and then setting the fee amount.

[02:31:19] [Chair] OK, classify the schools, accredit them and set us the ceiling.

[02:31:22] [Minister] We're working on it, God willing. Even Law 55, the private education law, all needs changing. OK.

[02:31:28] [Chair] That all needs work.

[02:31:29] [MP] Russian language teachers, if you please.

[02:31:31] [Chair] Kindergartens, same thing, private kindergartens. **[Minister]** Regarding Russian, we said languages are discussed in the Supreme Council; it's a sovereign matter.

[02:31:39] [Minister] Our line on languages is clear: the primary language, the national language, is Arabic; the second, foreign language is English. We're working along this line.

[02:31:51] **[Chair]** Huda al-Atassi.

[02:31:53] **[MP Huda al-Atassi]** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[02:31:55] **[Chair]** Try not to repeat.

[02:31:56] **[MP al-Atassi]** God willing. I want to thank the minister for the briefing, and truly he answered most of the questions, including in the questions and answers with colleagues on education, curricula and child dropouts. But my question: do you have a clear map (sorry, yes), do you have a clear map of schools that need restoration or rebuilding, and what are the priorities and timeframe?

[02:32:25] My question: what three specific goals does the ministry commit to achieving during the coming school year, so that the People's Assembly can come back to you after a year and ask whether they were achieved or not? Also, there's the National Centre for the Distinguished in Homs. This centre belongs to the Ministry of Higher Education, but the Ministry of Education is involved with it; staff and teachers are requested from them, but with a research methodology. Previously this centre was, let's say,

[02:32:59] **[reserved]** for a certain party or a certain colour, but this year, thank God, 250 students from across Syria applied, of whom 75 will be taken. It's the most important centre for graduating distinguished students across Syria. We in Homs see it as neglected; it needs more attention from you. So I ask Your Excellency to send a ministry delegation to assess this centre and set an appropriate plan to develop these distinguished students across Syria.

[02:33:34] Thank you.

[02:33:35] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Huda. Colleague Miqdad al-Ash al-Jasham (?). And we repeat the matter of repetition and the matter of time.

[02:33:54] **[Chair]** The technical team, just for colleague Miqdad...

[02:34:09] **[MP Miqdad]** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't take long; I'll be very brief and won't repeat, God willing. Come on, we're almost done, God willing. In the name of God, praise be to God, and prayers and peace [upon the Prophet]. First, we thank the minister for the fine presentation of the Ministry of Education's future plans. This hasn't been implemented yet; in the future, we ask God that the fruits be better than that, and that the general goals in the ministry's plan and policy

[02:34:36] be ones we can achieve. That's the first thing. But we're now discussing matters that exist now and problems that exist, just some details. We want now a principle, a fundamental principle in education: taking account of individual differences between students. This is well known in education, and I'm a son of the educational institution myself. The areas that saw many takeovers and de facto authorities, and I mean the eastern region,

[02:35:05] Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Hasakah, these governorates, and I'm a son of this region, require that we take account of these students in university admissions and secondary school admission, because education was truly destroyed in those areas. That's one matter. Another important matter: the minister, with thanks, mentioned opening [snoring sounds] competitions to

[02:35:37] make teachers permanent by specialisation, whether primary teachers or specialists, in Aleppo Governorate, Daraa Governorate and Rural Damascus. The eastern region is in dire need of opening this, the matter of competitions for permanent posts. Another matter, because of the region's complexity, and I stress this, it's not repetition: we have a problem now. The minister indicated that the integration file, a complex file with its own particularities and ramifications, was referred to

[02:36:14] was initially referred to the Ministry of Administrative Development. I recall, for example, more than 9,000 names were submitted in the integration file overall from Raqqa, for example, since I'm in Raqqa Governorate. OK, what I mean, and this question concerns

procedures: why aren't there committees under the Ministry of Education to verify the authenticity of certificates, verify names and so on? The minister indicated

[02:36:39] that for those who claimed to have been dismissed because of the revolution, through Administrative Development and so on, we verified whether, for example, someone claiming to be a teacher is or isn't a teacher. This is an extremely easy matter. We also have a problem: those dismissed by the SDF. They were teachers working during the SDF period, and it dismissed them for refusing the existing curricula, which don't accord with our society's intellectual and moral system, and for other reasons, for refusing to enter

[02:37:09] special courses that follow the policies of certain parties. These were dismissed. Truly, we ask the minister, you promised, that this be one of the very important issues: treating them like those dismissed because of the revolution. Another matter: previously there was something called an obligation, colleagues, for graduates of the Faculty of Education, class teachers: the state was obliged to what? To employ them directly as teachers without competitions. So why don't we continue this? Because

[02:37:38] there's also a group of young people who refused to work with the regime and were dismissed. This is an injustice we must also redress. And another matter, a truly extremely important one... **[Chair]** Come on, now another matter after another. You promised us brevity, you promised brevity.

[02:37:58] **[MP Miqdad]** Two minutes. I haven't exceeded two minutes.

[02:38:00] **[Chair]** You've exceeded them. **[MP Miqdad]** The last matter: the budget of the Raqqa education directorate is very small; it matches only the capacity of a complex. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[02:38:10] **[Chair]** Three things were repeated on Raqqa, but on the SDF and SDF integration, the minister didn't clarify. I hope you'll answer the questions raised by colleague Huda and colleague Miqdad. **[Minister]** On integration, I said integration isn't finished. We have 42,000 integration files; certificates are currently being verified, and we will announce the results. We're transparent on this

[02:38:39] issue. Regarding our priorities for rebuilding schools: of course, Decree 59, residents currently in the camps; second, the areas people are returning to where there are no schools, so we're forced into two shifts, a school with two shifts, so we can accommodate the largest possible number of students. We have shortages in areas we haven't reached; we requested caravans, [we're] working for remote rural areas.

[02:39:12] The need is very great. I gave you a figure at the start of the session: on average it's increasing by a million students each year. A million students: how many schools do we need, how many desks, how many teachers? That's the core challenge facing our ministry, and we're working on it. OK, educational differences and differences between regions will certainly be part of education policy. University admission in remote

[02:39:42] and semi-remote areas is certainly subject to the Higher Education authority. God willing, soon there'll also be a meeting to designate remote and semi-remote areas. So far, the salary-increase decree included 10% [sighs] for semi-remote areas and 15% for remote areas, but they haven't been designated. A meeting will be held between the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Higher Education,

[02:40:11] the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Local Administration to designate these areas, and also the Minister of Health, so we designate the areas, and on that basis a compensatory amount will be added for remote and semi-remote areas. I don't know, is there a question I didn't answer? The colleague, the colleague...

[02:40:32] **[MP]** The National Centre, the National Centre for the...

[02:40:36] **[Minister]** OK.

[02:40:37] **[MP]** Because we registered for a turn; we registered 20 as agreed yesterday.

[02:40:42] **[Chair]** Leave it to the end, sorry, hold on. **[Minister]** We said our legacy is heavy with destruction and corruption. The Distinction and Creativity Authority and the schools for the distinguished, as you said: correct, there was a very high rate of corruption in the admission mechanism and in the mechanism for [sending students] to study abroad. We're trying to regulate it with Higher Education, since this file is shared between us and Higher Education. We set controls

[02:41:12] this year, and we've achieved to some extent a very large part [of curbing] entry by undeserving people, God willing, and we're working on this file.

[02:41:23] **[Chair]** Thank you. Colleague Madonna. Just be patient, brother; let's [finish] the interventions and I'll give you the request, I swear I'll give it to you. Colleague Madonna.

[02:41:30] **[Chair]** If you want, just a minute... The Latakia problem, the two colleagues raised it.

[02:41:35] **[Chair]** So if you want to repeat it: the two colleagues raised it, especially Dr. Aws, who covered it fully. So we don't want to raise the problem a third time. Only if it's something else, speak.

[02:41:45] **[MP Madonna]** I'll raise a different issue... [inaudible]

[02:41:50] **[MP Madonna]** No, of course, now, exactly. My colleagues from the coast fully covered the importance of the matter; it's now in the minister's care. Your Excellency, you raised the quality of education, and in my opinion it's very important for measuring the ministry's success; it's the core output. My question: how will the ministry measure the success of the educational process? Is it only by the number of students who pass, as you mentioned a moment ago, or will there be a real system for measuring

[02:42:18] the quality of education, its outcomes and students' skills? Here I come to another question: could the ministry adopt a proposal used in many countries, namely that education not be seen only as a mark and certificate the student obtains, but also encourage students to serve their community and acquire life, leadership and teamwork skills, with this participation documented in the student's file so they can use it when applying for any job,

[02:42:48] applying to university or applying for any vocational work? This participation in volunteer work could include tree planting, environmental protection, supporting the elderly, educational activities, cultural initiatives and, as Your Excellency mentioned a moment ago, participating in emergencies, but within controls appropriate to their ages. The student would receive a certificate for their number of volunteer hours and move

[02:43:11] from the concept of merely receiving knowledge, the rote learning we were talking about earlier, to a student who feels a partner in their society and learns responsibility, leadership and initiative from an early age. This will help us build the coming generations. Finally, you said we want to honour the teacher. I want to point out that last year there was no Teachers' Day, by the way, no holiday, nothing, and this very much affected male and female teachers psychologically,

[02:43:40] because my family are teachers, and they truly felt reproachful about this. Thank you.

[02:43:46] **[Chair]** Colleague Tareq Sello (?). Most likely colleague Tareq will repeat, so...

[02:43:52] **[MP Tareq Sello (?)]** In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. The honourable Presidency of the People's Assembly, His Excellency the respected Minister of Education, honourable deputies, peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. God Almighty says in His glorious Book: "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and colours. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge." Proceeding from the Constitutional Declaration, especially Article 7, paragraph 3, which states that the state guarantees

[02:44:22] the cultural diversity of Syrian society in all its components and the cultural and linguistic rights of all Syrians, and recognising the importance of language as a fundamental part of identity and belonging, and in order to protect national and cultural languages, the Committee on Culture, Heritage and Cultural Diversity, acting within its competence and responsibility, proposes that the languages spoken by indigenous components of Syrian society,

[02:44:50] including Turkish and Syriac, be included among the languages that may be taught as optional second languages in schools, according to controls and criteria set by the Ministry of Education. We in the Committee on Culture, Heritage and Cultural Diversity do not see this as abolishing the unity of the curricula; rather, we see it as a means of entrenching national unity by respecting and protecting cultural and linguistic diversity. We therefore ask the minister:

[02:45:21] does the ministry have a clear plan or vision for protecting and teaching the national and cultural languages present in Syrian society, in line with the provisions of the Constitutional Declaration, guaranteeing the rights of all components to preserve their languages and cultures? Many thanks to you.

[02:45:41] **[Chair]** Thank you, colleague Tareq. I now have three interventions left. I hope you'll answer colleague Madonna's and colleague Tareq's interventions so we can move on to the three interventions.

[02:45:52] **[Minister]** Indeed, the question is important. When does the Ministry of Education succeed? I consider the Ministry of Education successful when we reach every child in Syria and secure their education. And if you ask me what my core goal in this phase is: to secure for every Syrian child a seat, a book and a good teacher. Quality of education: I said a moment ago we created a directorate dedicated to quality

[02:46:19] and accreditation. It will be institutional work: every school, public or private, will get a mark, and on that basis it will receive a school classification. On languages, I share your view, but this matter is sovereign. Languages in the education system are a sovereign matter, and I will convey your voice to the Supreme Council for Education on this, God willing.

[02:46:48] **[Chair]** Colleague Lina Aizouqi (?)... **[MP]** Community [service], development...

[02:46:53] **[Minister]** Yes, right, there's a point. We did, as I said a bit, the activities. We'll launch their curriculum, yes, we'll launch the curriculum soon. It includes classroom and extracurricular activities and will be a complete system, which you'll see; we'll launch it in the media. It encourages care for the environment, health, how to behave, respect for others. It's about values and behaviour, not academic; it's upbringing. So as an emergency solution we intervened

[02:47:22] in the school, because we have a clear problem with values and behaviour. Since last year we took the decision; the curricula have been completed, and the school counsellor has been assigned to run these activities, and normal work, God willing. **[Chair]** Colleague Lina Aizouqi (?), she has a mark [raised hand].

[02:47:42] **[MP Lina Aizouqi (?)]** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, you mentioned you caught a large number of cheating cases. So the question: what measures is the ministry taking to ensure the integrity of public exams, especially the basic and secondary certificates, and to prevent the question leaks or cheating seen in previous sessions? Another question: on what basis are admission averages lowered for some schools for the outstanding but not others,

[02:48:09] and what criteria are used to determine which schools this reduction covers, especially since the measure isn't applied to all schools for the outstanding in Syria? Minister, we carry a great trust and the voice of teachers in Tartus Governorate regarding contracts that haven't been mentioned before the Assembly so far: the direct contracts made with the governorates. They've been in service since 2016, some since

[02:48:35] 2012, filling actual vacancies in schools, with accumulated experience, training courses, insurance and acquired employment rights. What is the ministry's policy towards this

group whose contracts weren't renewed, given that similar contracts, or contracts of the same form, were renewed in the other governorates? In the interest of fairness in contract renewal, we ask that the contracts be renewed or this matter be looked into. On the issue of

[02:49:06] the competition criterion versus acquired experience: if the competition is a condition for appointment, how will the ministry deal with teachers who were never given the chance to apply for competitions because they're on direct contracts and, by the nature of the contracts, lacking an insurance number, were unable or not allowed to apply for competitions? The mass transfer: please, Minister, or designating the workplace outside the governorate...

[02:49:37] be reconsidered, because it's not possible for [them], I think, very much.

[02:49:42] [MP Aizouqi (?)] Right. So I just ask that this issue be [resolved]. And as soon as a solution... in the area of education quality: currently classes are crowded with nearly 60 students in some. Right. So we could offer a solution: returning to the two-shift system is a solution; we don't dismiss teachers and we raise education quality. Primary students, 40 per class, and this situation exists in all Syrian schools: 40 primary students, or 55,

[02:50:16] 60 secondary or middle-school students in a class. There's no quality of education. We're all parents and families and know what the alternatives to [school] education are, private lessons and so on, and how much they burden families with expenses. Finally, Minister, the Syrian coast is an educational and cultural pillar and a human and knowledge reservoir for all of Syria. Please pay attention to it. Education isn't an option; it's a social culture there. Thank you.

[02:50:44] [Chair] Thank you, colleague Lina. Truly, some issues are being repeated; I hope they won't be. We have two interventions left: Mohammad Ibrahim al-Zoubi, our colleague Mohammad Ibrahim al-Zoubi.

[02:50:55] [MP Mohammad Ibrahim al-Zoubi] Peace be upon you. Praise be to God, and sufficient is He, and prayers and peace upon His chosen prophets. Minister, we know the size of the bad legacy the defunct regime left in education, and we know the challenges, but we ask in order to know, and we learn in order to cooperate and produce. The first point, frankly: the presentation the minister gave is a strategic vision, but given the current reality we'd hoped to see quick solutions. Many questions

[02:51:19] weren't answered, the urgent, emergency matters. So the presentation was an emergency-strategic presentation. The second point: we've noticed, with the growth in schools, the feminisation of education. Most of our schools are female: the principal, the supervisor and so on. Frankly, it doesn't give strength to the student's personality, even though there are people, I know, I'm not diminishing women's rights, but you go to a middle school, even a secondary

[02:51:45] or primary school, and it's all women, women, women. The feminisation of education: there's no more authority [hayba], frankly. A student grows up with a strong personality from a man. So I hope, focus with me, brothers: there are many retirees and people with very strong experience, over 60, who aren't returning to teaching. What's the retirement age? High experience we need, since we currently don't have enough staff. That's this matter. The second point, God bless you: does the ministry have a plan to check for

[02:52:13] forged certificates? I know, and I have names and so on, a very large number of forged university and secondary certificates, and even more than that. So does the ministry have a plan? What is the ministry's plan for evaluating teachers? Frankly, there are teachers who shouldn't be teachers; they got in with a forged certificate and are graduating generations. It's strange, bizarre. So frankly, does the ministry have a plan to re-evaluate teaching staff?

[02:52:42] Dr. Abdulhamid [the Speaker], I'll end my intervention with something; I don't know if the minister will answer it now or I'll leave it to you. A document has spread on the deputies' group page concerning Dr. Mohammad Tarkou and Dr. Osama al-Jabban, from when he was deputy president of Damascus University. I hope the ministry, all the brothers, will address this

so we know the truth: that he was among the people who filed a personal claim against a member of the teaching staff at Damascus University,

[02:53:11] and she was sentenced to three years, a fine and deprivation of all civil rights, and this doctor remained in prison until the liberation. So, Doctor, either we answer or leave it for another session. This document is posted in our group, so we ask that we verify its authenticity. God bless you.

[02:53:26] **[Chair]** I think the document's authenticity should be verified before we raise it publicly. I think that's best. We as an Assembly should verify its authenticity, then raise it publicly. As for raising it publicly before we verify, I think... that's the matter for us. So the issue: just the last question. You verify the document, and then raise it in an official session like this

[02:53:49] session. Colleague Haitham al-Masasis (?), and I'll end with him.

[02:53:54] **[MP]** Peace be upon you. I've taken Dr. Haitham's place. In the name of God, and prayers and peace upon the Messenger of God. O God, open with good and end with good. Your Excellency, it's not two questions but two requests. The formerly liberated areas: a request from students in the formerly liberated areas, meaning Idlib and rural Aleppo. We ask that baccalaureate and ninth-grade students who failed this year be allowed to repeat next year according to the former Idlib curriculum, as

[02:54:19] an external [private] candidate, one time only, for the following reasons. First, great harm, because the difference between the two curricula is more than 80%. Second, it costs the ministry nothing overall, since as external candidates they won't require opening new class sections in schools. The second matter, also briefly: in general the border areas that were in revolt against the defunct regime went 15 years without new schools. Our schools are shelled and destroyed; not

[02:54:50] a single new school was built there at all. May God reward you. Go ahead.

[02:54:57] **[Chair]** Your Excellency, I hope you'll answer these interventions. As for the colleagues who asked [to speak], I think yesterday we organised the session, but it seems... Just go ahead, Your Excellency, answer the questions, and then we'll deal with the other issue.

[02:55:12] **[Minister]** Now, regarding cheating cases, we mentioned there was a large number. They were caught and legal measures taken. For those who weren't students, they were referred to the judiciary. As for students, they were expelled and barred for a number of sessions depending on the cheating method. Regarding renewing contracts in Tartus, I've said [what I have] on this. The competition for the eastern region will certainly be the second phase, after the integration file

[02:55:41] is finished. We'll see how many teachers are suitable to remain teachers and see the shortfall, and we'll hold a competition for the eastern region to fill the need. Private lessons: correct, truly they're creating great pressure because of the disparity in educational level between schools. We are working on improving teachers through training courses, and the e-platform, God willing, as soon as the infrastructure is ready we'll launch it. It will be

[02:56:10] free, of course, God willing. We're working with the Ministry of Communications so the platform is free, meaning students can access it at no cost. It has recorded lessons, interactive books and interactive tests.

[02:56:26] **[Minister]** God willing. Regarding unifying the curricula, the idea of unifying curricula, which no one mentioned... wait a few seconds.

[02:56:38] **[Chair]** Colleagues, let the minister speak. Please, sir. Right. Please, I beg you.

[02:56:43] **[Minister]** Unifying the curricula: we gave two years as a transition period for all curricula. This year is the last year for the eastern region, for the former Autonomous Administration students. We're trying to get to a unified curriculum, so they've had their due: whoever studied eleventh grade on the Idlib curriculum will sit the baccalaureate, [as] last year

[they] sat on the Idlib curriculum. Why did we give two years? The baccalaureate student and the eleventh-grade

[02:57:08] student, the ninth-grade student and the eighth-grade student. If I give three years, I'll go back another year. So the issue is two years, which in my opinion is enough to move to the unified curriculum. Regarding schools, there's a big shortage in the border areas, as we said, and destroyed schools, and I gave you the statistics. So we need the honourable Assembly's support when you discuss the budget, so that a large part of the budget is allocated to rebuilding [02:57:34] schools. Thank you. **[Chair]** Waddah, the chair of the Education Committee, please go ahead, with thanks.

[02:57:53] **[Chair]** Please, colleague, we're in the middle of an official session, and we agreed beforehand. Please, I beg you.

[02:58:04] **[MP]** They all spoke in the revolutionary narrative...

[02:58:06] **[Chair]** No, no one spoke...

[02:58:11] **[Chair]** Just be patient with us, let us speak. Colleague, this chaos, I don't know... We've held 20 sessions. A colleague wants to speak, so, colleagues, I hope... You want a few seconds, the other wants a minute, and we agreed beforehand. How...? Please don't speak, please, I beg you. Go ahead, Doctor, Doctor.

[02:59:01] **[MP Waddah, Chair of the Education Committee]** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Your Excellency. Some brother deputies messaged us during the session that some answers were missing from the minister's answers. We could compile these and send them to the ministry to study and answer. I have just one simple point. Minister, in the briefing you said "never mind, we were a week late." That is not a trivial matter;

[02:59:32] it is a serious matter, not a small one, for schools to be empty of teachers for a week. And today we're in the third week, and there are many schools, and I have many examples, that no teacher has entered. This is a serious problem, not a simple one. On extracurricular activities, we ask the minister, on the psychological counsellor

[02:59:57] and the duplication of work, we ask him... that is, we will send you a study on this matter, on the duplication of work between the psychological counsellor and classroom activities. Thank you very much for this briefing and these answers.

[03:00:14] **[Chair]** Your Excellency... Look, yesterday we agreed on a particular organisational format, all of us agreed and voted on it. Nevertheless, we'll take a 15-minute break, and then the vote comes in on one minute and one question, not someone coming and reeling off 10 questions. One question or request. There were many questions, questions were repeated... We'll rest half an hour and return. But for us, we agreed on a format and broke it. God give you strength.

[03:00:48] **[MP]** God give you strength, Your Excellency.

[03:00:49] **[Anchor]** Welcome back, dear viewers. We continue with you in this live coverage of the third sitting of the first extraordinary session of the first legislative term, which included the hearing of the Minister of Education, Mohammad Abdulrahman Tarkou. In this session several questions were raised, and the session went past three hours; a long session. In any case, we continue with you in this coverage. I thank

[03:01:22] Dr. Maher al-Tamran, jurist and researcher at the Jusoor Center for Studies, who was with us before this session began and had to leave for personal reasons and commitments, and I welcome here with me in the studio engineer Mazhar Sharbaji, a governance expert. Welcome, Mr. Mazhar.

[03:01:45] **[Mazhar Sharbaji]** Welcome to you.

[03:01:46] **[Anchor]** Welcome. First, what's your view of this session? Before going into the details, are we today looking at a healthy, lively situation, especially since we're talking about a hearing, I believe the first since the success of the Syrian revolution and since the People's Assembly convened?

[03:02:04] **[Sharbaji]** Yes, thank you. First, certainly a healthy situation. We've long been eager to hear People's Assembly sessions. But it was a long session, three hours.

[03:02:14] **[Sharbaji]** Even though long, it was useful. The positive thing is that we hear people. The current legislative council is a council whose remit is to listen, not to hold [ministers] to account. I'd have hoped it would be broader in the Constitutional Declaration, but it's very clear. This is a healthy session par excellence, and we hear people questioning the ministers on other matters. Today there's a very important aspect, the education file.

[03:02:42] As the minister said, every year we get an extra million students coming from neighbouring countries, and last year it was a million, 5 million, about 1.1 million increase. And this...

[03:02:57] **[Sharbaji]** And the number is expected to rise; about 600,000–700,000 are expected to come from neighbouring countries, because most families in neighbouring and European countries are waiting for their children to finish school. So there'll be a flow, not a small number; it'll be in universities and schools.

[03:03:14] **[Anchor]** So the need really is great. But from listening to the questions and discussions...

[03:03:21] **[Anchor]** What caught your attention?

[03:03:22] **[Sharbaji]** What caught my attention first was the many demands. But these are rightful demands.

[03:03:27] **[Anchor]** I see.

[03:03:27] **[Sharbaji]** Rightful. And the state and government, it's been 16, 17 months, should be studying these tasks and responsibilities after the destruction of a large part of our schools. The regime targeted schools, mosques and health centres. But education is a fundamental part, as one of the Assembly members, Mr. Azzam Khanji, mentioned; he raised many very important points in his intervention, that education makes

[03:03:55] the president, makes the ruler, makes the minister, the lawyer and the engineer. So indeed, this...

[03:04:00] **[Anchor]** But didn't the minister seem to have a convincing answer to every question, in your view?

[03:04:06] **[Sharbaji]** Certainly convincing, but he also mentioned the challenges and difficulties Syria is going through. We are without... He didn't focus much on financial support, and financial support is fundamental to building schools. I want to draw attention to the fact that schools are destroyed and being restored. When the state is built, it's built on three bases: the state and government on one side, which isn't enough alone, and local and international community organisations. In some wars we've seen, in all

[03:04:34] countries of the world, the international community supports this issue. There are some...

[03:04:38] **[Anchor]** Is there a shortfall in this respect with Syria? **[Sharbaji]** I think yes, a little. There is some free [support], but Syria's need is also great: health, education, psychological, governance, and building infrastructure. Thousands, but more is needed, yes, especially in education, building schools. But there was a certain flaw, and I think it needs reconsidering: competent teaching staff and expertise. Their dismissal needs to be studied, and then

[03:05:06] their reinstatement. It greatly affected education. It's about identifying staff and working out how we can train and qualify them, and it's not just a matter of training courses. We have a large generation of teachers who need a review of their own curricula.

[03:05:22] **[Anchor]** So it's not a matter of a training course of perhaps a month or two, but a cumulative process, not at all.

[03:05:30] **[Sharbaji]** Cumulative, and it needs to be continuous. We distinguish between a lecturer, a teacher, a trainer and a facilitator. And even one of the members, I believe, raised psychological counselling...

[03:05:43] **[Sharbaji]** Exactly, and there are specialists. If we look at the Syrian situation in education, every school needs a psychotherapist. Even those who were besieged in Syria and those who were outside Syria have psychological conditions. I'd expect 80% of the Syrian people have some psychological condition.

[03:06:00] **[Anchor]** We didn't say 100%: those who stayed and those who left the country. OK, members of the legislature focused on several points, especially perhaps contracts and permanent staff, and on reinstating the dismissed. To what extent might this create a sense of grievance among contract holders?

[03:06:33] **[Sharbaji]** Let's put ourselves in [their] position. I expect the ministry and staff are looking into the issue, but they can't distinguish between the shabbiha [regime loyalist] case and the genuine case, the correct and incorrect, and it's a cycle...

[03:06:46] **[Sharbaji]** ...that wrongs us. When a number of teachers were dismissed and then reinstated, in my view it was not an accurate or correct step in the... Now the need is great, they were reinstated. But when we announce we have a competition for teachers, and how many Syrians have the competences, there should be publicity, there should be transparency and clarity of vision, and other staff should take part in decision-making. There may be a shortfall from decisions being taken by one side,

[03:07:17] the centre.

[03:07:17] **[Anchor]** Before continuing: do you mean there may have been haste in dismissing some people from their jobs?

[03:07:27] **[Sharbaji]** Certainly, certainly, yes. Even in cases of transfer.

[03:07:31] **[Sharbaji]** The transfer case was mentioned, also in handling... it was mentioned regarding Latakia: I have 9,500 teachers who haven't reported. There should be a procedure: that they report, or be given a chance, or be deemed to have resigned. As they said, correct, Minister, we have a cadre; every government department has a cadre. For me to hire people, someone must leave, resign or retire for me to serve. This must be sped up. But he mentioned several topics; most of the questions revolved

[03:08:00] around the plan.

[03:08:01] **[Sharbaji]** The curriculum plan, the education plan, such-and-such a plan. I hope the legislative council, and a committee has been formed called the Higher Education Committee, will take into account all the questions. The minister alone can't solve [it]; it's not...

[03:08:14] **[Anchor]** So that it's not just a hearing and, as they say, "God spared the believers the fight" [nothing follows].

[03:08:19] **[Sharbaji]** The committee formed among the 26, the education committee, must cooperate from today, from the first session. And I hope all ministries have similar sessions, so we put our hands [together]: the participation of the local community, community initiatives, civil society. And we have committees in every administrative unit called the local development

committee. This committee comes from Local Administration Law 107; it supports the health and education sectors and can

[03:08:44] stand with these ministries in supporting educational institutions. And let's not forget the role of civil society, which restored [schools], and the report mentioned that it helped restore many schools. We take our hats off to everyone who contributed to restoration. I know the scale of destruction is huge, and the scale of teaching staff...

[03:09:01] **[Anchor]** But we shouldn't rely on it entirely.

[03:09:04] **[Sharbaji]** The ministry must set plans. The most important thing in the ministry, and I hope from your platform here, is that it announces even the positives and negatives: if we erred, to say we erred on this front. And we want... the minister said "I need your help, People's Assembly."

[03:09:18] **[Anchor]** And one of the members also asked the minister for media follow-up, appearing on national media, and putting citizens in the picture of the situation [snoring sounds] with full transparency.

[03:09:35] **[Sharbaji]** That's what's needed. I see.

[03:09:36] **[Sharbaji]** To ease the burden on him: why stay silent? "We put out a tender for a school, and it didn't happen, no contractors came to us." Why leave the issue to social media opinion, especially today's negative social media, which always comes with problems? I have local media, national media, Syrian media. Any news in any ministry should be announced: a shortage of staff, we need staff, tenders; announce it, and quickly. Between the two terms, four **[03:10:04]** months went by.

[03:10:05] **[Sharbaji]** I see. The ministry also bears responsibility for the delay. The minister gave figures on students and teachers; there should also be figures on vacancies, the number of vacancies, prepared within three months, and we can bring in whomever we see fit. Even if there are contracts we're making: the state is relying on contracts, and many members of the Assembly objected to the contracts and how their mechanisms work.

[03:10:27] **[Sharbaji]** And the two different salaries were mentioned; in my view this should be explained to people.

[03:10:31] **[Anchor]** The salaries issue is really talked about a lot; it's thorny.

[03:10:36] **[Anchor]** What's your view on this issue? What's the solution?

[03:10:38] **[Sharbaji]** I'd justify it, but the justification must be clear: I can't hire employees on the Syrian financial [state] salary, so I'm forced to use contracts and give them [that] salary to encourage them to fill this educational gap and teaching-staff gap. Explain it. But if I have staff, that means the hiring problem needs solving, and the hiring problem, as they said, needs a budget, and the budget is prepared by the People's Assembly. And the People's Assembly, **[03:11:04]** today we're attending the first sessions. So all Assembly sessions must hurry to think about these important gaps. Today we talked about education, tomorrow health, after...

[03:11:15] **[Anchor]** On Thursday, I believe, the Minister of Energy will be in...

[03:11:18] **[Sharbaji]** The issue that has preoccupied people. There's a big uproar on the street today. The minister, or some body, must come out and justify why it happened. People don't know about Bab al-Mandab or the Strait of Hormuz; [they need to know] why, for example. Explain it to people.

[03:11:33] **[Anchor]** Indeed, Mr. Mazhar, there were several things the minister mentioned that people perhaps learned about for the first time, for instance, I believe, the summer Arabic

course for those arriving from abroad, and several other measures the ministry takes that many people aren't aware of because they aren't announced clearly enough. This too may be considered a gap.

[03:12:06] Also, regarding today's session, it was the first fruit, let's say, of the Education Committee, which was tasked with, and requested, hearing the minister. Do you see it as successful now, in this session? Do you think we succeeded in hearing the minister, and were the minister's clarifications positive and clear? Is this enough, or what's needed today?

[03:12:35] **[Sharbaji]** It's not enough, but it's a very important round. Even members of the Assembly learned figures they didn't know before.

[03:12:44] **[Anchor]** With all respect, of course, to the minister and all the information presented, is there a particular mechanism for perhaps verifying this information?

[03:12:54] **[Sharbaji]** Certainly. No, after this session he should put these documents and information before them in clear reports, so people can see them. I don't want to hear 9,400 or, say, 47. OK, one of the members cast doubt, and the minister has figures, surely taken through important means. Perhaps as a citizen I only know my own area or my neighbourhood, but I don't

[03:13:18] know [the rest].

[03:13:20] **[Sharbaji]** But I focus here on one thing about education, and it's also my specialisation, urban planning: in every administrative unit, meaning a municipality, city or town, there are designated plots, sites ready for schools. We must think about how we can build new schools. On building, demand for expropriated land: [the state] has obtained land for a school, a secondary school or a health centre. For education, a committee should be formed from now to take inventory, as the Minister of Awqaf did to inventory all

[03:13:54] endowment properties. We should also send a letter to all administrative units about expropriated land suitable for schools, and set a plan for 2028 or 2029, no problem, let's start; the important thing is to start. As we've sat [here]: these are useful and positive sessions; at least they could reach people. But it mustn't stop here; if it stops here, that's the problem. These sessions must continue, with media dialogue sessions on television, as happened [with] some of the Assembly,

[03:14:22] reaching out to specialists and experts. The country has many experts. Participatory education is the most important principle of governance. The minister can't [handle] the situation alone, nor can the staff.

[03:14:34] **[Anchor]** OK, from listening to the minister's answers, do you see the ministry as operating day to day, or is there a strategic plan?

[03:14:48] **[Sharbaji]** No, I expect it's a plan. A strategic plan is built at the level of all of Syria, 14 governorates. We have 14 education directorates. We must take into account every governorate; as he mentioned, [they] fell under four different political, administrative and educational authorities. The plan is very nice, giving two years to unify curricula. But we need to hear from every education director about problems and outputs so we reach a plan. And where should the plan be set? In

[03:15:16] the competent committee, in coordination with the minister. And I want to say we must rely on previous educational expertise. If we rely on our young generation, that's good, but the older expertise, a teacher who has problems, knows how to solve them, and bring in the young generation with their expertise coming from Turkey, from Germany; we benefit from them too in education. But we mustn't stay in one centre [thinking] the solution is in our hands. No,

[03:15:42] the solution is in everyone's hands: participation.

[03:15:44] **[Anchor]** Is a strategic plan usually set by each ministry itself, or is it a whole-of-government plan?

[03:15:52] **[Sharbaji]** Each ministry sets its plan and announces it to the People's Assembly. The People's Assembly, or legislative council, is what decides on the overall plan. This Assembly today heard about education; tomorrow it'll hear about local administration, tomorrow... But the competent ministry is what sets its plan, in coordination with its affiliated institutions. Education, as I mentioned, look at the private sector:

[03:16:13] **[Sharbaji]** very important, with great success in governance of private schools. Let's bring in the private schools and involve them with us.

[03:16:19] **[Anchor]** Hmm.

[03:16:19] **[Sharbaji]** We involve you: what are you working on? We cooperate between us, if we can coordinate...

[03:16:24] **[Anchor]** But this needs money, doesn't it?

[03:16:26] **[Sharbaji]** It needs support, and perhaps today we don't have support, but the local community, community initiatives: if I feel you've involved me in decisions, you'll tell me that if this idea is clear, I'll support you. But if I don't know what you're working on, how can I support you?

[03:16:41] **[Anchor]** I see.

[03:16:41] **[Sharbaji]** So we need knowledge; transparency and participation are the most important thing, followed by accountability. One of the young women, Ms. Nour al-Jundi, mentioned oversight.

[03:16:53] **[Sharbaji]** It can't be that I work with... I have oversight, oversight to ensure the educational process runs properly, not oversight in order to hold so-and-so to account, to ensure it runs. **[Anchor]** Where is oversight now?

[03:17:03] **[Sharbaji]** Now, I expect it doesn't exist. But I expect the People's Assembly is currently the oversight body. But there's a need... we have the Central Authority for Financial Control, a central authority, but there's an educational need, internal oversight.

[03:17:15] **[Anchor]** Mr. Mazhar, does everything mentioned in this session fall within the scope of recommendations, or is there something binding, especially with the promises made, "we will do, we will do, we will do"? Is there anything binding?

[03:17:32] **[Sharbaji]** First, a timetable must be set for this plan, a strategic plan for what's required. Several cases were mentioned by people, even the legislative council, for citizens. I want to come and say transparently that I can [do it] in the year 2000-something, gradually: a first phase, a second phase, a broader phase, so I don't mislead people.

[03:17:52] **[Anchor]** Dividing the plan into time phases.

[03:17:54] **[Sharbaji]** Time phases, and how I'll implement it, and what challenges I face against it, so it's clear to people and realistic.

[03:18:00] **[Sharbaji]** Realistic. Otherwise I promise people "within four months, a year", I don't know, and if I don't get money or financial support I won't be able to do it, so I'll have made people a false promise. The plan needs implementation follow-up, and these 26 committees, I hope, carry a great burden: it should be a shuttle process, daily, not a weekly or periodic meeting. The People's Assembly, for 18 months, has a big role in supporting all the economic, financial, educational

[03:18:28] and health files and so on.

[03:18:29] **[Anchor]** I see. Also, the Ministry of Education's plan: what determines its priorities? Is it perhaps clear data, or is it built on administrative estimates? Is it data or estimates?

[03:18:45] **[Sharbaji]** No, data, estimates and reality.

[03:18:47] **[Anchor]** Hmm.

[03:18:48] **[Sharbaji]** Facilities, teaching staff and logistics determine it. If we take each governorate: in every executive bureau of a governorate council there's an executive bureau member for education affairs; we have an education directorate; we have schools. All of these form the team that should take part in setting the plan. This plan, with its figures, is placed in the governorate's hands, and the governorate places it in the state's hands, and then I have a complete national plan for education.

[03:19:16] **[Sharbaji]** Not all of it is implemented, but parts are implemented, and I inform people: in my budget this year I have 50, 600,000 dollars, a million dollars, for education; it will be allocated in phases. The revolutionary [aspect] mentioned is taken into account; the most destroyed sites are taken into account, and I explain it to people. All the circumstances, perhaps, are put on paper. And take the point I want to make, a very important one: the budget should be based on

[03:19:44] people's real population numbers. By the civil registry? I say no, by residence. For example, in Qudsaya Suburb or any town in Rural Damascus, or [any] country, the registered population may be 40,000 while those actually present are 200,000.

[03:19:59] **[Anchor]** I see.

[03:19:59] **[Sharbaji]** So the plan isn't set on the...

[03:20:01] **[Anchor]** 1980, for example, [figures] taken.

[03:20:03] **[Sharbaji]** Jdeidet Artouz: it has 7,000 [registered] residents and 1.5 million (?) people in it. For their children alone it needs 20 schools. But based on 7,000 it needs two schools, as before, in Damascus.

[03:20:16] **[Anchor]** It needs a census, perhaps a census.

[03:20:18] **[Sharbaji]** A full census of the stable residents in the area, and on that basis strategic plans come out. I can't set [plans] based on "you're from such-and-such area". The people of Deir ez-Zor, most of Deir ez-Zor is destroyed. I don't make a plan for Deir ez-Zor [based on those registered] who aren't there; people from Deir ez-Zor are now in Damascus, Homs and Aleppo, so they need schools for their children [there]. A real and accurate census. **[Anchor]** Yes. At the close of this coverage, many thanks to engineer

[03:20:47] Mazhar Sharbaji, governance expert, and thanks also to you, dear viewers. As a reminder, this was our coverage of the third sitting of the first extraordinary session of the first legislative term, which included the hearing of the Minister of Education, Mohammad Abdulrahman Tarkou. Goodbye, dear viewers. **[Sharbaji]** Thank you. **[Anchor]** Thank you. **[music]**