



Youth combat littering as Jordan struggles with solid waste **Nehal El-Sherif**

Amman - Shahd Almahmeed was enjoying a Friday afternoon in the park in Amman with her family, when she saw a group of people collecting the trash lying around everywhere.

Without hesitation, she took a trash bag from them and joined the team.

It was the first “Fridays for Future” event to be held in Jordan, as a group of young people sought to spread awareness on waste and climate change problems facing Jordan, by combatting litter.

“We want more initiatives like this, because in Jordan there isn’t much awareness,” said Almahmeed, who graduated from the faculty of Applied English Language last year.

The “Fridays for Future” became a global movement since Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg started a school strike on Fridays in November 2018. According to the movement, there were some 1.6 million strikers in more than 125 countries in mid-March.

However, the movement did not gain momentum in Jordan, prompting Jule Elsaesser, a German studying urban planning in Amman, to join hands with Jordanians and expats in Amman to organize this event.

Instead of striking, they felt cleaning the park on a crowded weekend would be more effective. “This is something individuals can do in their daily life,” she said.

While the group was relatively small, Elsaesser thinks every effort counts.

“You are never too small to make a difference. The world is changing due to one girl. She is a role model for young people and all of us to rise up and make a difference,” added Elsaesser.

Littering is a problem in Jordan that was exacerbated by the lack of a developed waste management infrastructure, an influx of refugees and an increase in daily waste production in the past decade.



The kingdom produces around 2.5 million tonnes of solid waste per year, 35 percent of it is plastic, figures by the Ministry of Environment in 2017 showed. Unofficial estimates expect solid waste to reach 6 million tonnes by 2039.

Minister of Municipal Affairs, Walid Al-Masri, said that solid waste costs the municipalities 90 million dinars (127 million US dollars) annually. It also presents environmental concerns, which include groundwater and air pollution.

Sanitation workers are the first to face health risks as they are responsible for moving trash from the cities to the dump sites. Afterwards, there are informal waste-pickers who make a living by going through the landfill to sell some items.

There are some 18 official disposal sites nationwide, while the unofficial number is estimated at 28. The government admitted that most sites are not safe due to the lack of a liner system to prevent liquid from leaking through soil layers; one exception to this is Al-Ghabawi landfill, the largest in the country, receiving half of the kingdom's waste.

Located 40 kilometres east of Amman, Al-Ghabawi Landfill was established in 2003 with financial assistance from the World Bank, with the aim it will start generating electricity out of the waste to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions such as methane. The mega project should be fully functional in 2027.

Recycling in Jordan remains limited and informal with around 10 percent of solid waste recycled by private businesses and NGOs.

A research paper titled "Solid Waste Management in Jordan: Impacts and Analysis" published in February, recommended that the state should take several measures to decrease effects of waste including separating and recycling waste.

A large-scale government-run recycling system and raising awareness of the local communities would help Jordan advance in this area, it added.

The government has been trying to take some steps forward, albeit it has been slow. A new draft law on the management of waste has been in the making since 2017 and yet to be passed by parliament.

"This law tackles everything related to waste, from A to Z," Minister of Environment Ibrahim Shahahdeh said recently, adding that it will regulate trash segregation at home and introduces strict penalties for littering.



“The world looks at the advantages of waste. We can also look into how to use it for development?” he added.

The ministry is increasing the number of trash bins in parks and forests, main attractions for visitors during the summer, resulting in piles of trash and random fires.

The government has also launched several campaigns to raise awareness and urge people to at least keep the touristic areas clean.

One of this year’s campaigns focused on Pella, also known as Tabqet Fahl, which is part of the famous Jordan Trail hiking route. Another was launched in Karak governorate, famous for its 12th century castle.

However, previous campaigns have been short-lived.

Amid a lack of waste management and recycling system on a state level, officials are happy to support small-scale initiatives

At the park in Amman, Deputy Amman Mayor Hazem Neimat grabbed a trash bag and joined the litter-pickers. He found it a good chance to urge park goers to help “keep their environment clean.”

“We want a clean Amman,” he said.

“This is a great initiative. We can join hands to have a joyful, strong and clean world,” added Neimat.

“This article is part of the science journalism project “Scientific Storytelling” of the Goethe-Institut, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The project is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office. More information can be found at https://www.goethe.de/transformation_arabic.”