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**THE LEBANESE UNION FOR CHILD WELFARE**

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"THE NATIONAL REPORT OF LEBANESE ASSOCIATIONS AND NGOs"

NARRATIVE REPORT (Supplement)

Presented To

THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD GENEVA

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November 23rd, 1995  
Beirut-Lebanon

## **I- BACKGROUND:**

To date, six years that the war is over. But, unfortunately we are still suffering its resultant effects- at the level of the individual, and at the level of the governmental and non-governmental sectors.

During the war period when the governmental sector retreated from assuming its responsibilities because of the geographic and operational divisions, the non-governmental sector was motivated and mobilized with its modest resources and facilities to respond to the continuously emerging needs of the society. NGOs were the milestones that supported and prevented the demolition of different communities. The non-governmental sector grew up enormously during the war period and its role varied in different periods and with changing needs.

Now, that the war is over and the governmental sector is recovering its detrimental effects, two big forces are building up- the governmental and the non-governmental sectors. However, many factors are shaping their relationship:

- 1- Absence of a national social plan that will guide the development process in Lebanon;
- 2- Absence of clear presentation of the responsibilities and the areas of intervention for each of these sectors;
- 3- Overlap among the functions of different ministries, the overlap among the ministry of social affairs and the ministry of health is an example;
- 4- The governmental sector is engaged in its restoration, reconstruction and institutional development processes without any consideration to human development;
- 5- The government is treating the gap in its function through increasing the load on the non-governmental sector.

As a result, the relationship is being a competitive and bureaucratic rather than a complementary one where both forces are in constant challenge.

Lebanon signed the Convention On The Rights of The Child in 1990. Ratification of the convention means commitment to the principle of "First Call For Children". Children basic needs must be given a priority at the level of the government, institution and individual. Recognizing the need to invest in the human being whose physical, mental and psychological health and socio-economic status were deeply affected during the war and are still suffering in the time of reconstruction, NGOs will keep on exerting pressure on the government:

- 1- To meet their needs;
- 2- To enhance the national development programs;
- 3- To consider human development, protection of the environment, soothing the effects of poverty on the family and on the child along with economic development;
- 4- To accept the non-governmental sector as a partner to provide support and share responsibilities.

Out of this belief. NGOs concerned with child welfare present the "National Report of Lebanese Associations and NGOS" to the Committee On The Rights Of The Child, first to give a profile of children status in Lebanon, and second to express its independency in performing its role and fighting for its rights.

We will be concentrating on the most disadvantaged groups:

- Displaced children
- Stateless and undocumented children
- Delinquent children
- Disabled children
- Street and working children
- Children slavery
- Children, victims of war
- Abused children

We will be submitting, analyzing and publishing all related documents to follow the progress in the implementation of the convention.

**For the Displaced:**

The returning program does not consider the health, social, educational and economic needs of the returning population but only material reconstruction.

**For the Stateless and Undocumented:**

They don't benefit from the offers provided by the government- education, hospitalization, ownership, civil rights, etc ...

They don't have the right for defense because of their illegal status. Thus, enhancement of legal aid services and documentation on their rights are required.

**For The Delinquent:**

50 years ago, the union for protection of the delinquent was established to protect and rehabilitate the delinquent. However, its dependence on the government as the only funder, and the scarcity of governmental resources moved the union to financial insufficiency which was reflected negatively on its operational sustainability. The main problems were absence of reformatories and facilities to develop rehabilitation programs for the delinquents. For this, delinquents under 15 years of age were sent to a rented center which maximum capacity is 25 children, and those 15 to 18 years were sent to the jail in Roumieh. If the child entered a delinquent, he will be discharged a professional criminal. The two present reformatories are occupied, one by the Internal Security Force and the other by the Ministry of Defense.

An interview with Mrs. Nayla Moawad, president of the Parliament Commission on the Rights of the Child, to the "Nidaa Al Watan" newspaper pointed out to the following:

" ... the committee, in coordination with the ministry of health passed the law of compulsory medical examination before marriage. However, its cost mounts up to double the minimum salary. The actually performed tests are questionable in terms of reliability and validity because a large number of the Lebanese population cannot afford it.

... Lebanon is a suitable medium for delinquency because of the absence of legislations that control drug distribution, child abuse and child slavery. The ministry of interior prohibited begging one year ago. However, in the absence of needed expertise and facilities to accommodate these children, the ministry was not able to execute its plan. ... We are waiting for the evacuation of the occupied reformatories to plan and implement rehabilitation programs ... unfortunately, we are expecting a spoiled, illiterate and may be delinquent generation who is deprived of its right to receive the minimum of primary education in public schools because of the difficult economic conditions.

... The needs of the disabled are many and the issues that I triggered are minimal, like rehabilitation of the sidewalks as part of the national reconstruction plan which, actually, does not need allocation of financial resources as much as it requires awareness of this problem. I raised this issue three years ago and I am still raising. All what I am getting from the Council of

Development and Reconstruction are promises."

### **For the Delinquent Girls (Prostitution):**

Deterioration of socioeconomic conditions, poverty, ignorance, rape, absence of sexual education at schools, absence of awareness and fear are the leading causes to prostitution. The law protects the one who kills his daughter or his sister if she loses her virginity and it is called "Crime of Honor". In Lebanon, we only have one institution that provides awareness, vocational training and rehabilitation for delinquent girls, prostitutes. However, the social worker at the institution reveals that the number of these girls is decreasing because they are being trapped by gangs of children slavery who is pushing them to prostitution. The government does not admit the presence of this problem and did not take any corrective action neither socially, nor at the level of the legislations, nor security.

### **For the Abused Child:**

7 children died this year because they were excessively beaten from their employer or parents. Lebanon shows the highest rate where children are hit. Terre des hommes work with those children and they reveal that they are abused by being pushed by their parents to work at an early age and from their employer who is paying them far below the minimum salary.

### **For the Abandoned Children:**

Abandoned children are left at the door of orphanages without any official documents that prove their parenthood. They are given an identity card mentioning their status as "illegitimate Child". Despite the follow up of the NGOs with the government to cancel this expression, local authorities are still holding to it which is creating embarrassment for them.

### **Children Slavery:**

Investigations pointed out to the presence of children slavery but it did not prove it. The last survey, to study this phenomenon, was conducted on July 24th, 1995. The directors of the St. Vincent institution declared that nowadays the number of applications to adopt children from the institution is higher than before but the number of children to be adopted decreased. In the late 80s, we started to hear about children slavery. Based on the adoption program with the ministry of exterior in France, documents revealed that France received 21 children for adoption from Lebanon, only one is from St. Vincent institution, knowing that St. Vincent is the only legal reference for adoption from Lebanon which explains the presence of children slavery (for the blond child, it is \$25,000 and for the brune one \$10,000).

### **Adoption and Sponsorship:**

If we go back to the religious muslim and Christian regulations, we differentiate between adoption and sponsorship as:

For the Christian, adoption is allowed for a child with known and unknown parents. Whereas for the muslims, it is only allowed if the child is abandoned with unknown parents; then, the child will be his legal son with all the rights of the biological son. If the father is known, the care taker will have to sponsor this child but will not register him under his name.

### **Orphanages and Social Welfare Institutions:**

Orphanages became social welfare institutions when the department of social welfare in the government started to send delinquents and border line cases to these institutions in the absence of specialized ones. The deterioration of the socioeconomic level increased the load on many of the Lebanese families which became unable to meet all their children's needs. The ministry of social affairs assisted these families by taking their children away to social welfare institutions, and this was the criteria for assistance. Despite the ministry of social affairs is

working on the implementation of the Convention on The Rights of the Child, the director general is holding to this condition which NGOs consider a crime and they are trying to exert some pressure to modify this condition to become congruent with the convention which emphasizes the role of the family (article 9).

### **Child Labor:**

Lebanese labor law does not consider children below 20 years of age. Thus, they are not protected by the law and they are subject to abuse by their employer in terms of working hours, salary payment, working conditions, etc ... Moreover, medical supervision and routine medical check ups are not controlled by the labor law. The lebanese labor law allows the employment of children at the age of e. For this reason, the national association for the rights of the child, supported by NGOs, presented a request to the minister of justice and the minister of labor to elevate the legal age of work to 15 in congruence with the convention on the rights of the child and the other international conventions (convention # 58, 1977 and convention # 58, 1982).

The conditions that allow the child for vocational training and education are not present in the lebanese labor law. Most of children work in factories, mechanics, car repairing and some work in cemeteries till late among them a child, 6 years old, died. In addition, there is no link between the minimum age for employment and the age for accomplishing compulsory education levels.

### **Street Children:**

The latest study, july 1995 revealed that street children belong to the following groups: 49.3% gypsies, 32.9% syrians, 17.8% lebanese. They live in destroyed buildings and the majority live in the suburbs. They are organized groups that share profits and responsibilities. Street children are beggers, bubble gum sellers or car glass cleaners. An adult supervises their work and delegates their responsibilities. Begging is a profession that the whole tribe follow. The lebanese law punishes begging by jail, however, the lebanese government does not consider this problem among its priorities.

### **Report Preparation: Situation Analysis**

The Lebanese Union For Child Welfare as the sole representative of the NGOs concerned with child welfare in Lebanon, was delegated to prepare and present "The National Report of Lebanese Associations and NGOS" for the Committee on The Rights Of The Child, in Geneva.

This decision was communicated at a time where the government had already prepared its report and sent it to the committee in Geneva, neglecting the right of the NGOs to be exposed to this report and add to it by preparing their own report (article 45 of the Convention). This created some resistance at the level of the government and reluctance at the level of the institutions to participate in the preparation of the report.

All institutions concerned with child welfare were invited to a general assembly to discuss the importance of the report in evaluating children status in Lebanon and its importance to guide future interventions. 60 institutions attended the general assembly which representatives were divided into 5 groups: Participation, protection, education, mental and physical health, identity and family. Meetings were held periodically, every two weeks, then every one week to be finally concentrated on a daily basis during the preparation of the final report.

After lobbying for the idea, more institutions provided their input, however, some were reluctant about mentioning their name, others refused to provide information related to their actual experience and many were conservative in order that this commitment will not affect their relationship with the ministry of social affairs.

At the end of the report, all participants formulated an vision about the condition of children in Lebanon from an NGO perspective and were motivated to continue what they started, working as a group, which proved to be a powerful force to induce change. The report was considered a

baseline upon which institutions can build for the future, and a reference for the NGOs which most problematic area in developing programs is scarcity of information. Since the needs were assessed, areas of interventions became more easy to identify and develop programs accordingly. At the same time, it allowed the participants through discussion of possible solutions for certain problems, to identify available resources ( material, financial and human).

Moreover, participants were able to develop some action plans, as to:

- Modification of current legislations, activation of unimplemented ones, and working on new laws
- Start support groups for institutions which are vital to respond to urgent needs but whose resources are insufficient
- Formulate a data base among institutions with common objectives
- Coordination and cooperation between institutions in terms of referral, exchange of knowledge, etc ...

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