

Lebanese Republic
Ministry of Social Affairs
General Director
[?] 654

To Human Rights Watch

Subject: Information on the Efforts of the Ministry of Social Affairs to Strengthen and Protect the Rights of Children with Special Needs in Lebanon

Dear Sirs,

The Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon has distinguished itself in terms of its work. The basis of the Ministry's work is people, and it has also distinguished itself in its partnership with the non-governmental sector, as well as the comprehensiveness of joint projects with international, regional and local organizations.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, in accordance with the laws and regulations in effect, in particular Law number 220/2000 related to the rights of the disabled, through all of its services and specialized units, addresses all issues of the disabled, whether educational, occupational or social.

The most significant duty of the Ministry is its attention to the affairs of disabled people, in coordination with the relevant authorities in the public sector, civil society organizations, and nongovernmental bodies. It also contributes by laying out programs and implementation plans in coordination with the relevant public institutions and offices.

In pursuit of this goal, the Ministry has dedicated itself to contracting with specialized non-governmental organizations and associations to secure the rights of the disabled, both in terms of social welfare and rehabilitation.

The most significant programs and services offered by the Ministry to disabled people are, in summary:

1. Welfare and Rehabilitation within Specialized Organizations and Associations:

The Ministry follows a policy of partnership with the non-governmental sector via yearly contracts with a number of specialized organizations and associations distributed across Lebanese territory. The number of organizations contracted with in 2017 is around 103, which provide foster and daytime care for beneficiaries with various disabilities. Notably, this number changes yearly as per contracts.

Possession of a disabled personal identity card is a basic requirement for the entry of beneficiaries into specialized organizations or associations to obtain services, after a special care request has been issued.

The care request is issued by the disabled personal ID card submission center, and then the request is transferred to one of the contracted organizations for their preliminary approval, and then referred back to the Disabled Affairs Office for their review.

Upon approval, and after authorization of the information included with the request, it is recorded with Disabled Affairs and signed by the Director of Disabled Affairs, the Director of Social Services, and the

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General Director of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The request is given a decision number and submitted to the [disabled person's] guardian, and referred once more to the organization for final approval. Then it is sent back to Disabled Affairs and it goes into effect. Notably, the organization is chosen by the family, after they receive a list of the contracted organizations or at the guidance of Disabled Affairs.

As for foster care services, the Ministry determines this in the light of different factors, the most important of which are:

- No contracted organizations near the beneficiary's house
- Refusal or non-acceptance of the beneficiary in public schools
- Family violence
- The child is threatened, exploited, neglected or mistreated
- Extreme poverty
- Parents' failure of their responsibilities
- Behavioral problems, and family inability to protect [the individual]
- Death of the parents

As for removing a child from the custody of his parents and placing him in an institution, this is subject to a decision by relevant judicial authorities.

To ensure beneficiaries receive the necessary services, and to ensure the proper conduct of activities in organizations contracted with the Ministry's Disabled Affairs Office, the Department of Specialized Organizations (in the Disabled Affairs Office) is responsible for overseeing the implementation of contracts and giving the necessary administrative and technical guidance to develop these activities and improve their conditions, suggesting the issuance of any necessary warnings for organizations as per the rules and regulations of specialized welfare set by the Ministry.

Oversight and supervision of the conditions in contracted organizations are carried out by a team of social specialists in all Lebanese provinces, which helps facilitate the oversight of contracted organizations.

The elements covered by the oversight process, and upon which an institution is evaluated, can be summarized as follows:

- Health conditions in the institution: structure, hygiene, public safety, and food
- Necessary equipment for all types of disability
- Appropriate academic, occupational, and rehabilitation programs in the contracted institution
- Specialized educational, occupational, and rehabilitation work team in the institution

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- Quality of services provided to beneficiaries in the contracted institution
- Files or documentation for the disabled recording developments in their condition
- Presence of beneficiaries paid for by the Ministry
- Non-collection by the institution of additional fees from the guardians of the disabled
- Institution commitment to all terms of the contract signed with the Ministry

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Social assistants visit contracted institutions monthly to prepare periodic reports, in addition to a yearly report about each institution. These visits provide the means of reviewing the periodic and yearly evaluations submitted by social specialists, to identify any violations and take the appropriate measures.

Separately, oversight is carried out and reports sent on the social and familial circumstances of beneficiaries. Families of beneficiaries, or a special field team at the organization or a designated social assistant for supervision are also contacted directly, especially if we are looking into any danger or threat faced by a child, or in case of any problem such as aggressive behavior or failure to comply with the program.

The relevant departments at the Disabled Affairs Office receives daily complaints and queries and provides appropriate suggestions and procedures.

2. Certificates for Specialized institutions: By decision number 1/257 for 11/30/2000, the Disabled Affairs Office sends certificates to service institutions and associations for the disabled to benefit from several provisions of law. These certificates range from exemptions from municipal fees, exemptions from vehicle registration fees, exemptions from property fees, exemptions from customs fees, and a certificate directed to the National Social Security Fund.

3. Program to Secure Disabled Rights

The Ministry of Social Affairs' Program to Secure Disabled Rights, as per Law number 220/2000 for 5/29/2000, related to the rights of disabled people, aims to:

- Secure all rights of the disabled
- Facilitate access to the benefits of these rights, and other privileges
- Transform the relationship between the public and private sectors (institutions or individuals) from a relationship built on family, political, and sectarian affiliation to a relationship built on rights.

Among the most significant elements of this program are:

- **Issuing disabled personal ID cards:** The Ministry of Social Affairs issues disabled personal ID cards supervised by a specialized medical team under the Program to Secure Disabled Rights, in its seven centers distributed across all of the provinces.

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- **Issuing and covering accessory service requests:** includes various types of wheelchairs; crutches and canes; medical aids; medical footwear; special beds, furnishings and mattresses to prevent bedsores; in addition to devices for incontinence, such as diapers, urostomy or colostomy bags; and hearing aids.
- **Issuing Computerized Care Requests:** Centers for the Project to Secure Disabled Rights have continued to issue care requests in accordance with the computerized and decentralized approach adopted by the Disabled Affairs Office. It also continues to receive the families of individuals benefitting from care in Program centers twice per year, to let them verify that their children in institutions and ensure that they will want to continue during the next term.
- **Issuing certificates of Exemptions - Certificates to Disabled People**

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The Centers continued with giving certificates to disabled people, as per Law 220/2000 and Ministerial decision number 1/257 for 11/30/2000, stating the possibility of being exempt from municipal fees, property taxes, customs, vehicle and car registration fees.

4- Model Center for the Disabled

The Model Center for the Disabled, under the Ministry of Social Affairs, diagnoses cases of learning disabilities and academic regression (intelligence testing) to determine the causes and identify the appropriate intervention to address them. This Center is the sole official body authorized to study these issues.

The Model Center for the Disabled receives individuals with learning disabilities, and a psychologist **conducts a psychological examination as the basis for a diagnosis.** Notably, the psychological examination uses psychological and IQ tests to evaluate the subject and determine his mental and intellectual capacity. The tests applied will vary depending on age and type of disability.

The Model Center for the Disabled has continued since 2003 to provide speech therapy services to children diagnosed with speech impediments and learning disabilities (stuttering, halted reading or speech, dyslexia). The speech pathologist evaluates each subject before starting therapy. The significance of this treatment is that it prevents the accumulation of learning disabilities and academic regression. This service is provided to age groups ranging from two to twelve years old--IQ tests help determine the needs for speech therapy--usually administered twice per week.

The conditions for acceptance of a request [to treat] learning disabilities are summarized as follows: that a psychological examination has shown the need for educational follow-up in a specialized center and rehabilitative services; that IQ tests are valid for new requests for two years only; and that the beneficiary is between five and fourteen years of age.

5- Training: The yearly contract made with institutions clearly stipulates that there be an exchange of training provided by the Center for Social Training, the Social Training Office or any other office.

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In order to improve the quality of services to achieve the optimal interest of the child, all contracting institutions have been trained through the Ministry's Disabled Affairs Office, on "the institutionalization of the protection and supervision of children in various procedures, steps, and standards that ensure the protection of children receiving care from the institutions."

These trainings have covered most of the welfare institutions, associations and special needs organizations, and these organizations have demonstrated their willingness to adopt a policy of protecting children. This exchange marked the beginning of the effort to train the staff of these organizations.

To strengthen and develop the oversight and supervision process of institutions and non-governmental associations contracted with the Ministry, two workshops were held with social specialists working with the Ministry of Social Affairs to develop a working mechanism that facilitates the execution of the oversight process, and to unify approaches in dealing with the institutions, as well as to provide support to these institutions and coordinate the development of their internal activities in terms of building the capacities of their staff, and helping them apply the terms of a policy for protecting children.

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6- Challenges:

The subject of disability presents some of the most difficult challenges. Disabled people in Lebanon suffered from marginalization for years, until the Lebanese government, with the help of civil society and non-governmental institutions, managed to pass Law 220/2000, which the government considered a major achievement and which codified the rights of disabled people and enshrined their access to them.

Despite passage of this law and its implementation nearly seventeen years ago, the issues of the disabled in Lebanon remain in need of increased interest and care from all institutions of the state, especially the education, health, transportation, labor, sports and other sectors under ministries and authorities relevant to the disabled.

As such, we would highlight the following challenges:

Legal Issues: Lebanon has not ratified the international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is considered an unprecedented step for disability issues, and which centers around the approach of social integration and human rights. Also, it is important to work on amending and developing Law 220/2000 and laying out an implementation plan for that.

Family Issues: There are no governmental programs to support families of the disabled, for example financial support programs, family awareness-raising programs, social intervention programs, psychological-social support programs, and programs to provide care and support for the disabled within their families.

Health Issues: Disabled people need access to health services, including:

- Government-supported nurseries for disabled children

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- Comprehensive medical and health coverage for the disabled
- Specialized medical centers for disabled children
- Necessary tools and equipment for disabled people

Educational Issues: There are no public schools or occupational institutes equipped to receive disabled children, and educational supplies are not provided free of charge. It is important to prepare sports programs for disabled people in schools, institutes and universities, and that they would be able to actively participate in all activities.

Accessible Environment:

Among the most important issues that must be addressed are:

- Renovating public institution buildings to make them accessible to the disabled
- Renovating municipal council [buildings] to make them accessible to the disabled
- Creating an inclusive environment
- Passing special standards for all public facilities, traffic signage, public phones, and tourist locations to make them accessible to the disabled
- Creating safe spaces for children, and public parks accessible to disabled children

The importance of encouraging political participation by the disabled should also be noted.

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We hope that we have provided all the necessary information.

7 July 2017

General Director of Social Affairs

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