

Title: Intervention during the ICRC meeting in Geneva, concerning the Lebanese report on the prevention of violence against children.

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Questions raised and keywords:

1. The Lebanese initiative in addressing VAC and CAN: Child observatory, child ombudsman, LibanCAN/Higher Council for childhood, NPA, Child protection Act, Curricula, Municipalities, child injuries, safety
2. Child injuries

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Despite ongoing efforts by many organizations in Lebanon, CAN remains a serious threat to child rights implementation. Children from different communities still suffer maltreatment, abuses and neglect of all sorts.

Lebanon, as other regional signatories of the CRC, has shown growing intentions and visualized fair compliance with the basic guiding principles, as shown in the periodic reports. However, monitoring and evaluation still have significant limitations. In order to present a realistic picture of the problem faced by children and the Lebanese efforts to implement measures, the higher council for childhood called for independent and competent professionals, familiar with the state of children, to build a national program (NPA) for child protection².

The mission of such professionals – at academic or informal levels -aims indeed at the prevention of maltreatment as well as the identification and management of abused and neglected children. In Lebanon, the task force for accomplishing this mission is a multidisciplinary team formed of law enforcement personnel, child welfare and mental health specialists in addition to research resources and medical professionals.

In this regard, it is noticeable that there are few available statistics on the extent of CAN in Lebanon. In fact, *child abuse and neglect* is still not a mandatory reportable or regularly disclosed entity, with some professional exceptions. Children subject to CAN are however frequently encountered in clinical practice and professional exercise, and may require urgent medical attention.

Since there is a growing and concerted initiative in Lebanon for the recognition and banning of CAN, the relevant lack of findings did call for an independent, competent and participatory structure to analyze relevant child related information, to build with stakeholders, professionals in child related sectors, child and youth associations and dedicated NGOs, child protection initiatives and programs based on relevant accurate information.

¹ Coordinator of the Lebanese Intersectoral Board of Associations Network for the prevention of child abuse and neglect, the Higher Council for Childhood in Lebanon [2004-]

President of the Lebanese Institute for Child Rights [2005-] www.childoflebanon.org

President of the Lebanese Union for Child Protection [2005-2008]

² LibanCAN [The taskforce mandated from the Higher Council for Childhood to come forward with a National strategy for the prevention of CAN.

This is the vision of a Child observatory. Such a structure, while gathering data, would enhance the capacity to act, as the knowledge base is an ongoing process, growing through a participatory social network and an evaluative intersectoral teamwork, all being keen to develop within the CRC framework with culturally sensitive local tools. The child observatory project is developing since 2 years, has an independent academic and research setting, and is exploring the adequate articulation with a Hotline and the LibanCAN.

Proposed LibanCAN mission:

To design a “Child protection system” and contribute in developing official and social action strategies: Cooperate with policy makers for the implementation of a single and CRC compliant Lebanese child protection system, while encouraging child participation in the NPA.³

Proposed objectives of LibanCAN

- ☀ To identify valuable resources and key persons working with children
- ☀ To develop and improve models for detection and management
- ☀ To increase public awareness in the definition, recognition and prevention of CAN.
- ☀ To design and facilitate educational and training materials, and provide a sustainable educational support for professionals and NGOs working in the area of CAN.
- ☀ To support municipal and governmental cooperation, and encourage the Arab region (MENA) and global efforts in child protection.
- ☀ To help launch specialized centers for research and others for the management of maltreated children
- ☀ To ensure adequate and independent surveillance and monitoring of extent and pattern of child maltreatment

An important aspect of LibanCAN’s mission includes comprehensive reporting on CAN and involves the Lebanese efforts to improve child protection. In this vision, the major objectives of LibanCAN are as follows:

Provide professional expertise and technical support to gather information from resources and professionals

Establish a core group of trained and committed - dependent and independent - multidisciplinary professionals who will be able to report on cases involving CAN, and monitor the municipal and governmental actions to comply with CRC provisions.

³ Within that vision, LibanCAN relies on professionals, institutional and human resources in contact with children³, based on an interdisciplinary team approach, in order to develop skills and knowledge, encourage collaboration within local and governmental institutions, call on academic and research organizations, stimulate funding from private sectors, interact with families and informal sector and – last but not least – create opportunities for youth participation

Increase the quality of practice in terms of intersectoral and intra professional work, in the areas of health, law – civil and spiritual –education and welfare services.

In the UNSV perspective, LibanCAN – as a steering committee - was divided into subcommittees or working groups, dealing with the legal framework⁴, the training needs⁵, the research resources⁶, in all types of CAN. As those working groups are intervention defined, others are problem-related: Two are dedicated to child sexual abuse and exploitation⁷, and to physical abuse and neglect⁸. In fact, the structure of LibanCAN involves the civil society in addressing violence against children, with the help of Media⁹, as well as children and youth, as actors in addressing violence. LibanCAN also tackles policies and programs to address violence against children: data collection and research, analysis and evaluation, awareness and advocacy curricula and training. LibanCAN expects to integrate a legal structure, while this national committee is required to set up a proactive national child protection system in Lebanon.

In fact, despite the professionals pressing demands and the consequent governmental efforts exerted from the levels of policies and legislations to those of implementation and practice, violence against children is still a challenge for several reasons, which can be summarized as follows:

Culture: Corporal punishment, Household intimacy, Legal provisions for civil rights

Education: Awareness about child rights among families, educators and child caregivers.

Structure: Lack of monitoring systems relating to violence: The project on a Child observatory is going forward. This vital project is developing within a Lebanese national child protection strategy and still needs funding. Such an institution should be independent, updated and transparent. It is also an

⁴ Mission: Extract the legal provisions about CAN within the legislative framework in Lebanon. Provide the legal modifications of Law towards stopping corporal punishment. Prepare, with the Institute for Human Rights and the Lebanese Institute for Child Rights, the Child Ombudsman project. Advocate for Child protection Laws.

⁵ Mission: Define the training needs for professionals in CAN. Provide the relevant training tools for professionals working with children. Set guidelines for intervention and algorithms for professionals. Prepare prevention-oriented material.

⁶ Mission: Prepare an overview, in collaboration with the UNICEF desk research and the emerging child observatory, on the status of CAN in Lebanon. Provide a frame for case analysis and the need for qualitative studies. Set, on a priority level, the urgent needs in knowledge base.

⁷ Mission: Provide socially accepted definitions for the different aspects of CSA, with compliance to the CRC. Advocate for child protective strategies within the family and in the Society as a whole. Improve the quality of interventions and upgrade the capacities of professionals working with children at risk or affected by CSA.

⁸ Mission: Define the different aspects of maltreatment and neglect. Raise the awareness of the Lebanese society concerning the individual and social effects of M&N. Provide effective tools for complaints, interventions and follow-up.

⁹ Mission: prepare for a workshop on the role of Media in addressing violence against children that would include: Providing the media and journalists with relevant information on CAN. Involving the public in the process of awareness rising and the preventive strategies. Set a child friendly environment and an ethical code of exercise.

appreciated tool to direct the Higher Council for Childhood toward priorities in child protection, and the Child Ombudsman to come towards rapid, adapted, legalized and socially acceptable interventions. Also, the Hotline / Childline project, present since many years, is warming up since the 2005 regional UNSV conference, to coordinate with the relevant Lebanese institutions, mainly the Ministry of Justice and the Union for Child Protection in Lebanon.

Legislation: Weak enforcement of legal provisions, discrepancies within the national legislations: Child friendly law enforcement and Juvenile Justice (compensation, reintegration and restoring justice)

Training and capacity building: Weakness of human capacities and institutional frames: Curricula for professionals and clear algorithms are required.

In the recent MENA regional UNSV consultation context, inclusion of the informal sectors in the State prerogatives remains a challenge. The emerging child protection movement is presently in a continuously growing, expanding, and hopefully inclusive and participative design, as a mixture of cultures, values, beliefs and challenges.

Our taskforce [LibanCAN] in the Higher Council for Childhood ensures that the Lebanese national child protection system is more inclusive, and shared with dedicated members of the social network. In such a project, the state and even local authorities will be players in the game, to help the accountability procedure. In this regard, evaluation is vital because those authorities set policies, formulate legislations and provide needed resources.

This ongoing task is child rights-approached, to ensure the right of the child at risk and the child victim. As this perspective necessarily requires that children themselves, who are subjected to violence, become involved in the development of the relevant policies and their evaluation, a child and youth subcommittee has been integrated in the general assembly of the taskforce, with a representative within the steering committee. Another subcommittee for children with special needs has also been integrated, to ensure the participation of representatives for vulnerable categories of population.

There is also a growing interest in CAN from informal networks in alliance with local authorities, some of which created a child and youth commission within Municipal councils.

In addition, mass media and opinion leaders are stimulated to share the advocacy effort in this new vision. More and more, private sector and NGOs are invited to participate to this inclusive national Lebanese brain storming to set a child protection system, as funders and providers.

It is finally vital, in a child oriented system to invite professionals in direct contact with children and youth to this process. In this regard, there is a belief that front liners can contribute to the development of a better understanding of

universal child rights, as well as focused, adapted, socially accepted, functional and optimized actions.

Child Injuries

Injuries remain the leading cause of mortality for children older than 1 year of age in Lebanon. More than 50% of fatal injuries are due to road crashes and concern young people. In Lebanon, the traffic-related death rate is as high as 20 per 100,000. It is estimated that 13% of injured children are injured on public roads, and that 17% of children have been exposed to a road crashes.

Activities regarding injury prevention and safety promotion included: lobby for safety, child friendly infrastructures, network, and raise awareness, mainly with regard to population and groups specific needs. In this regard, the government and some local authorities developed, with research institutions, community-based programs and established a collaborative atmosphere with many private and non-governmental organizations and based on a network of resource people, education-based activities, victims' organizations and youth.

Actions included educational activities, multisectoral workshops, production of brochures, training, community activities, and participation in media programs. These targeted children, students, parents, politicians, and potential collaborators and funders.

The outcomes showed:

1. A clear reduction in small children fatalities, at home and on the road
2. The need for a child safety program for schools and nurseries
3. An increase in fatalities among teen-agers and young people

Financial and human resources to support injury prevention programs should be identified. However, collecting statistical data on injuries, and increasing the momentum are vital, while placing injury on the local and national agenda remains a main challenge. The ultimate goal is to pass legislation at national and municipal levels to reduce injuries and protect the life the most vulnerable, especially children and adolescents, through a child protection act, a safety chapter and a child observatory.

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