

## "Nobody Represents us better than us"

In the parliamentary elections of June 2005 the Lebanese Council of Disabled People (LCDP) took a major step towards the full participation of people with disability in the political life of the country when it declared the candidacy of three of its members. Such a step opened a new horizon for the disability movement when disability became not only an election issue, but a political power in the campaign too.

To discuss this initiative Al-Raida met Mr. Ibrahim Abdallah the President of LCDP and one of the candidates. Abdallah holds a Master's in Commercial Law from the United States, is President of the Universities League for the Blind, and was recently reelected as a member of the National Committee on Disability Affairs in Lebanon.

**Al-Raida:** What are the main reasons why LCDP participated in the Lebanese parliamentary elections through three of its members?

Ibrahim Abdallah: LCDP had three main objectives for the 2005 parliamentary elections. The first was to ensure the largest possible participation of people with disability in the elections: The more people with disability vote, the better our position to lobby for our rights. The second objective was to push for disability to become part of the political programs of different parties and candidates. The third objective was to encourage disabled people to run in the elections.

If people with disability present their candidacy, we believe that we can succeed in making disability a major societal issue and a serious subject to be dealt with by voters. In addition, if a disabled person were to be elected, it would mean that the disability movement had won a major political power that would ensure a better follow-up of and pressure for the implementation of Law 220 on disability.

**Al-Raida:** What is the importance of the presence of some disabled persons in parliament?

**IA:** Over the years, we have tried to make disability a serious issue for the government to deal with. Unfortunately we were not successful. To begin with the government is not serious in meeting its commitment to the cause – as

required under Law 220. Second, members of parliament do not seem to be interested in putting pressure on the government to meet its obligations according to the Law. The main reason behind this is that the disability movement does not give the impression of being politically strong and hence fails to win the attention of the country's political society. A disabled person as a member of parliament representing the disability movement is a sign of the movement's strength and a political passport for it inside the different Lebanese political and administrative institutions.

**Al-Raida:** We know that there are some members of parliament who are really active in the field of disability and they had their share in the efforts to pass Law 220, what do you think of them? And how do you evaluate the role of the parliament?

**IA:** Yes indeed, we have some friends in the parliament but not too many who are really concerned about disability issues; but as I said they are a minority and they can't change things around for us. The parliament did a great job when it passed Law 220 but unfortunately – and after five years – the parliament has not done what it is supposed to do, namely monitoring the implementation of this Law. So, we have found ourselves far away from the total effective implementation of Law 220 and this is what led us to take such an important initiative.

**Al-Raida:** How do you evaluate the results of your campaign?

**IA:** As you know we succeeded in getting one candidate to run in the elections in the Northern District – Dr. Nawaf Kabbara. He ran as a candidate and as a member in one of the major lists in the region. Even though he didn't win, he was able to secure a large vote of around 64,000. Such a vote is a positive step forward. It is also very encouraging for the future. Unfortunately, we were not able to succeed in getting him elected but we did succeed in putting on record the direct participation of people with disability in the political life of the country and in getting our cause highlighted. I believe that this experience will also encourage disabled people to work together and consider turning themselves into a political voting power that has a serious effect in the elections.