

On Disabilities

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The Lebanese parliamentary election was a very decisive moment in the country's history. As a result of this election, a new parliamentary majority and discourse dominated the political scene. The election was also peculiar concerning the disability cause in Lebanon. For the first time in the history of Lebanon's elections, disability became an issue. In fact, the Lebanese disability movement succeeded in launching two different but complementary campaigns during the election. The first one was engineered by both the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union and the Youth Blind Association. Under the title "Haqqi" or "My Right," the campaign focused on the right of people with disability to practice one of their most important rights: the political right to vote. Such a right needs to have accessible polling stations, something that the Lebanese government did not contemplate in the process of the preparation of the election. According to the statistics around 30,000 adults suffer from different kinds of physical disability. Accordingly, 30,000 persons are denied the right to vote due to the lack of accessible polling stations. The campaign focused on highlighting this right and on pushing the government to respect and to implement the clauses in Law 220/2000 concerning the right to accessible polling booths.

The second campaign was launched by the Lebanese Council of Disabled People (LCDP). As a coalition of organizations of people with disability in Lebanon, LCDP decided to work on two objectives. The first was to get people with disability to use their vote as a political bargaining chip in the interest of the disability cause. Accordingly, people with disability were encouraged to negotiate a full commitment to the implementation of Law 220 with political candidates in exchange for supporting them in the elections. The second objec-

tive was to nominate people with disability to run for election. The idea was to negotiate the possibility of including disabled candidates in different election lists in different regions. According to LCDP, if people with disability are elected to parliament, they will have enough power to push for the implementation of the Law. Furthermore, the presence of persons with disability in parliament would drastically change societal and governmental attitudes towards disability. In pursuit of such an endeavor LCDP declared the candidacy of three persons with disability. As a result of negotiation, one person officially declared himself a candidate and ran for election in the second district of North Lebanon in one of the two competing lists there. By the end of the election, Nawaf Kabbara, the writer of this editorial and the LCDP candidate did not win but got around 64,000 votes. It was a very exciting and successful campaign. To begin with, people dealt with the presentation of a disabled candidate very normally. The wheelchair was not a negative issue for the voters. In addition, disability became a serious issue in the election. Finally, history has recorded that a candidate with disability has run and conducted a serious campaign helping in changing people's attitude towards disability.

The disability cause has changed quite positively in Lebanon, although the government is still behind in meeting the minimum aspirations and rights of people with disability. However, disabled people's organizations can use this positive societal attitude and the results of their election campaigns to push for the implementation of the Law and meeting the aspirations of Lebanese people with disability. Disabled people in the Arab world who are witnessing an increase in democratic practices in their countries can use the Lebanese experience to further enhance the conditions of Arab people with disability.