

Write up

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The Human Rights Center for the Assistance of Prisoners (HRCAP) Egypt

The Human Rights Center for the Assistance of Prisoners is the first Arab center specialized in studying and monitoring prisons. It was founded in 1997 by Mohammed Zarei. The idea came about after Zarei, a student at Cairo University, was arrested, tortured and detained for two months because of his political views and activities.

The Center, a non-political, non-profit civil association, struggles to improve the living conditions of prisoners (social, medical, emotional, etc.). It provides legal aid to prisoners and attempts to raise awareness on the rights of prisoners, among lawyers, personnel of penal institutions and citizens. Moreover, it advocates (for) prison reform and strives to improve the Egyptian penal system, by ensuring its conformity with and its implementation of International Human Rights Instruments dealing with the administration of justice.

Through its program for the amelioration of prison conditions, the Center monitors, gathers, documents and analyzes information regarding Egyptian prisons for a number of purposes. First, to recommend to the Egyptian Government the actions required to improve the conditions of prison inmates. Second, to urge donor countries to allocate part of their aid to help the Egyptian Government for developing the prisons' infrastructure. Third, to call for the amendment of laws regulating prisons and to encourage researchers and scholars to conduct analytical and applied studies on prisons; in doing so the Center provides the necessary information to establish a database on prisons and prisoners in Egypt. Fourth, to attempt to mold prisons into places of true correction and rehabilitation that assist prisoners to reintegrate into society after having served their sentence.

To achieve these objectives, the Center conducts fact finding missions to prisons, and provides prisoners with legal aid and advice. Moreover it monitors violations of prisoners' rights and cases of torture, and provides legal aid, where necessary. Besides, it conducts workshops, intellectual forums and discussion sessions on the conditions of prisons and prisoners. The Center also issues regular reports on prisons and handles the production and distribution of information booklets on prisoners' rights. In its work, the Center collaborates with international organizations concerned with prisons and prisoners, notably the United Nations and its specialized committees. The most recent plan of the Center is to establish a legal library to help researchers working on prisons, specifically on the cases of prisoners of conscience.

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Addameer Palestine

Established in 1992 by a group of human rights activists, Addameer (conscious) is a Palestinian non-governmental, civil institution that promotes human rights issues. Addameer believes in the universality of human rights and prioritizes the respect of human dignity. It calls for building a free and democratic Palestinian society based on justice, equality, rule of law and respect for human rights within the larger framework of the right to self-determination. It strives to support Palestinian prisoners, advocates the rights of political prisoners, and works to end torture through monitoring, legal measures and solidarity campaigns.

The objectives of Addameer include:

1. To oppose torture, brutality, and inhumanity in the treatment of Palestinian prisoners.
2. To abolish the death penalty.

3. To object to arbitrary arrest and to guarantee fair and just trials.
4. To support prisoners of conscience through supporting the efforts of political prisoners and providing them with psychological, legal and mass media accessibility.
5. To lobby for the issuing of laws which guarantee human rights principles and basic freedom and their actual implementation.
6. To raise awareness regarding the issues of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Addameer runs several programs devised to assist prisoners. Thus, their legal support program has enabled prisoners and their families to receive legal services and consultations free of charge. Their regular visits to prison focus on ensuring that basic living conditions are met. Besides, Addameer is engaged in lobbying and organizing solidarity campaigns to oppose torture and arbitrary detention and to support and endorse the plight of Palestinian prisoners. Finally, Addameer has a documentation program in which all information concerning the numbers of detainees, dates and places of arrest, and any violations suffered by detainees are recorded and stored.

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Dar Al-Amal Lebanon

Dar Al-Amal is a non-profit social service organization, founded in 1970 to address the needs of young girls and women at risk of delinquency and prostitution. Dar Al-Amal started off by opening a 24 hour shelter in the Zaytouni area to help women who wanted to quit prostitution. According to Huda Kara, general coordinator of the organization, "prostitutes are usually unwillingly dragged into this area (profession) at an early age. These girls and women have no choice because they are usually poor, uneducated, unemployed and often come from difficult circumstances and unsafe areas that encourage delinquency and prostitution. Therefore, taking to the streets and turning to prostitution becomes a way to earn a living."

Dar Al-Amal has three main centers: A Social Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center which com-

bats prostitution and aims to keep women off the streets; a Specialized Prevention Center that addresses itself to young girls at risk of delinquency, and; a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center that is concerned with services to women prisoners in the Baabda prison (the main prison for women in the country).

Referring to the work of the Association in prison, Kara recalls that, in 1995, Dar Al-Amal along with the Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World started working in the Baabda prison. Kara explains that living conditions in the four women prisons in Lebanon are deplorable mainly because the prison locations and premises are not adapted to serve as prisons. "The rooms are tiny and accommodate for around 25 women each. There are no beds; mattresses are used instead. Moreover, there are no chairs and tables. The rooms are damp and the electricity is very feeble. Inmates rarely see the sun or exercise. Each cell has one bathroom that often serves as a kitchen where the dishes are washed. So inmates eat, drink, sleep and spend their whole day in these tiny cells."

According to Kara, the aim of their project was to improve the living conditions of women inmates. Kara recounts: "We realized that something should be done to make these women prisoners productive. Given that they had ample spare time, they used to spend most of it arguing with each other. Moreover, they had nothing to look forward to, so they were practically living on tranquilizers. When we first started working with these women they were skeptical and doubted the continuity of our programs. However, with time we were able to gain their trust and they started enjoying the training sessions and the workshops." Kara explains that most of the training workshops were tailored according to the women's needs. Kara asserts: "We organize vocational training workshops on skills that women request, namely sewing, sequin embroidery, fashion design, hair dressing and make up. Moreover, weekly meetings are held with the participants to discuss issues. There are also awareness sessions and literacy programs. The vocational training sessions are planned and organized in coordination with the National Office for Employment, a governmental organization that is under the umbrella of the Lebanese Ministry of Labor. This coordination enables prison inmates participating in the training sessions to receive a certificate issued by the National Office for Employment, once they successfully pass the exams; it is worth mentioning also that there is no indication on the certificate that it was taken in prison."

According to Kara, working with these women is not an easy endeavor because most of them have problems. However, the workshops and training sessions have given inmates a sense of worthiness, developed

for them friendships, secured jobs and income and taught them how to manage their own environment. Kara explains: " Their work makes them forget about their problems; it creates a sense of purpose and it poses a challenge. Moreover, it provides them with economic independence because most of the merchandise they produce is sold and the prisoners are paid for it. This money enables prisoners to meet some of their basic needs and gives them a sense of independence. Also, as a result of the training, most of the women find a job very easily after their release from prison, either by obtaining employment with their trainers or by commissioned with other employers.

Dar Al-Amal has employed a full time social worker who is based at the prison. She undertakes individual follow ups of adults inmates, especially minors, as well as family follow ups. Given that many women prisoners are neglected by their parents who often deny their existence, the social worker tries to encourage families to visit their daughters and forgive them for what they did. Kara notes that these family reactions are very unfortunate, as many women turn out to be innocent several years after their incarceration.¹

Dar Al-Amal is partly funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The rest of its funding comes through donations from private organizations abroad, domestic organizations, as well as from philanthropic individuals. Despite all the financial assistance it receives, Dar Al-Amal is still in dire need of help for it is one of the very few organizations that address the issue of women prisoners in Lebanon from a rights based perspective to development.

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Endnote

1. It is worth noting that another article in this magazine had referred to the long period of pre-trial detention in Lebanon.

Mouvement Social Lebanon

The Mouvement Social was founded in 1961. Since then, it has struggled to promote human and social development for individuals, regardless of their con-

fession, affiliation and geographic location. Among its primary objectives is the mobilization of volunteers. Those play a key role in the work of the Mouvement, particularly through what is known as peer education. Young volunteers are especially trained on nonviolent communication; this was very important in view of the war that struck Lebanon for about 20 years. Activities addressed to young people include also providing vocational training opportunities; these are mostly concentrated in the underserved areas of the country. The Mouvement Social has established since its foundation in 1961 a number of Social Development Centers in poor areas of Lebanon. Those Centers provide several services to the local population residing around them.

In 1998, the Mouvement Social started working on rehabilitation of prisoners by implementing vocational training courses and social animation in the women's prison of Beirut (Barbar El-Khazen detention Center) whose conditions are deplorable. The Mouvement Social is the only organization that works in that prison. According to the Mouvement Social "the prison conditions are outrageous for the nearly sixty women; those women do not see the sun and have no outdoors or corridor to walk in." Great efforts are needed to set up reading and writing classes, or to operate the two sewing workshops that already exist in the prison. In short, the Mouvement Social tries its best to improve the daily life for the inmates. In 2002, volunteers from the Mouvement Social will be helping out at Zahle women's prison. (located outside Beirut)". The Mouvement Social is run by an Executive Committee composed of nine members. The Committee holds monthly meetings to review progress, ensure proper direction and define priorities. The Committee is elected by the General Assembly which meets once a year. In collaboration with the Executive Director, the coordination with the Executive Committee is done by a General Secretariat consisting of four members who are responsible for the programs of the Mouvement Social. Sixty permanent workers and about thirty contracted instructors implement programs. Nearly 200 volunteers take part in the various activities.

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Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World Lebanon

In 1985, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) administered and implemented a variety of income-generating workshops to teach displaced Lebanese women skills which will help them earn an income, with a special focus on the most needy areas. Through the work done with displaced women, IWSAW came to know about the distressing conditions of imprisoned women. After much investigation IWSAW felt the need to lend a helping hand to those women. According to Anita Nassar, IWSAW's program officer, "we were faced with a number of obstacles, yet, fortunately we were able to overcome them all. A study was prepared to investigate market needs and determine how to help these women inmates, taking into consideration the limitations of resources, space and time. The Institute offered the raw materials and paid for the training expenses. We started off in Baabda Prison for Women because we lacked the funds needed to implement similar programs in the three other women prisons. Moreover, we wanted to evaluate the work done to see if it is successful."

Nassar recounts: "The situation of incarcerated women was deplorable; they lacked basic living needs such as: beds, chairs, tables, proper lighting, proper ventilation, storage area for their food, etc. We tried to ameliorate their situation by providing them with some of the basic necessities they lacked. Our aim was to give those women an alternative, given that most of them were convinced that their lives had ended there and then. They had lost hope because they had nothing to look forward to, were looked down upon by society and were labeled as social outcasts. At first, they refused to cooperate. However, after some time they started to believe that they deserve another chance. We worked on strengthening their self esteem, they no longer judged themselves harshly and started admitting that it is natural to err and that everyone deserves another chance."

After much investigation, the skills requested by prisoners were mostly those that could provide them with a vocation to practice once released from prison. The Institute decided to implement training sessions in sequin embroidery, sewing as well as literacy programs, and it is in this framework that IWSAW's Basic Living Skills Project (BLSP) was incorporated. The BLSP is a non-formal, integrated educational program designed for illiterate and semi literate women. It

broaches upon eight different subjects namely health, environment, home management, sex education and family planning, nutrition, civic education, child care and legal rights in Lebanon.

According to Nassar, both the authorities and the women collaborated to make the training a success: "The authorities were very cooperative and flexible concerning the use of hazardous items used during the training sessions namely scissors, pins, needles, etc. Moreover, the women knew that implementing the program and its continuity depended on their self discipline, so they followed instructions." Nassar explains: "Several women were chosen from among the incarcerated because of their leadership skills. Besides, they appeared responsible and we felt we could depend on them to be in charge of the items that might prove dangerous and that were usually banned in prison. Yet, each one of these women was monitoring herself as well as others for the success of the program."

Nassar recounts that before the training sessions took place the candidates were screened and those who had potential were chosen as group leaders. Moreover, literate inmates were chosen to supervise their cell mates while revising the material given during literacy lessons. To support the literacy program the Institute provided a portable library containing reading materials that corresponded to their abilities and that contained books addressing various ethical themes. According to Nassar, the training sessions and the literacy program proved very beneficial for several reasons: "Inmates were able to acquire reading and writing abilities. It also provided them with financial independence. The goods produced were sold and the money earned was used to ameliorate their living conditions, and were used to provide for basic needs, pay legal fees, bail, and medication. Moreover, the training sessions created a team-work spirit, inmates started working together and helping each other. It also provided these women with a profession. Upon completing their sentence, some inmates could find a job."

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Caritas Lebanon

Caritas was established some 28 years ago. Ever since, it has been engaged in several humanitarian activities namely caring for the elderly, orphans, handicapped, widows, families, prisoners, as well as alcoholics. Moreover, it provides free health services that entail medical treatments and regular checkups. It also offers academic scholarships to needy secondary, technical and university students. Besides, it assists displaced families by providing them with housing facilities.

With respect to work at prisons, Caritas is engaged in implementing rehabilitation programs in the women prisons of Baabda, Tripoli and Zahle. Through its varied vocational training courses, literacy programs, and social animation programs, Caritas is providing women inmates with opportunities for work inside the prison and is helping them for reintegration into society. Through the social worker posted at the prison, Caritas undertakes regular follow up with prisoners and their families. She listens to these women who have no one to talk to, and tries to solve their problems. Moreover, she meets with parents who refuse to visit their incarcerated daughters and tries to encourage them to contact their daughters and forgive them.

Through its prison aid program at the Center for Migrants, Caritas carries out a number of activities to help detained migrant workers and to solve the problems they face in Lebanon. Migrants workers are often detained because they lack valid working documents, they are living in the country illegally or because their travel documents have been confiscated by their employers. A high fee is imposed on issuing replacement papers and new documents, so migrant workers spend most of their time in detention, waiting for deportation to their countries.

Even though Caritas's Migrant Center does not lodge migrant workers, however, it provides detained migrants with free medical care and legal aid. Moreover, through its mobile clinics, Caritas provides impoverished migrant workers with medications free of charge. Caritas also helps migrants return home either through the help of their embassies or by helping them pay for their ticket. Last but not least, Caritas' Center offers a number of non-formal educational activities and provides prisoner migrant workers with advice and with training for setting up of small businesses or in handicrafts.

The Jordanian Charitable Society for the Care of Inmates of Correction and Rehabilitation Centers Jordan

The Jordanian Charitable Society for the Care of Inmates of Correction and Rehabilitation Centers was established in 1996, thanks to the efforts of 25 volunteers. The Society aims to help inmates and their struggling families. Work undertaken at the Society entails fighting crime and delinquency and investigating the reasons behind them. The Society caters for the inmates' physical, psychological, social, educational, cultural, spiritual, and financial well being. It also provides them with free legal aid and assists their families financially. Moreover, the Society works on the rehabilitation of prisoners by providing them with vocational training that enables them to live decently upon their release from prison. Besides, the Society tries to find jobs for former inmates and calls upon them regularly to make sure that they are leading an honest life. Finally, the Society organizes awareness campaigns to encourage the public to accept former inmates and works on reintegrating them into society upon their release.

Health, financial, women, public relations/press, social/religious and legal committees make up the main centers of activity within the Society. These committees provide free medical and dental care, psychiatric help, educational materials, audiovisual and reading materials as well as religious books. Moreover, the committees appoint lawyers for inmates who can't afford to hire one and organize lectures and seminars on various subjects.

Among the future plans of the Society is to hold a pan-Arab conference aimed at improving the living conditions of inmates. Moreover, the president of the Society, Marwan Sultan, explains that in order to create job opportunities for the inmates, once they are released from prison, and their families, the Society is setting up carpentries, clothing factories and embroidery workshops.

According to Sultan, over 400 families and 5,000 inmates have benefited, so far, from the different services offered by the Society. He adds that special care is given to female inmates who are considered social outcasts and are rejected by their families. Sultan affirms that there are many women who refuse to leave prison after serving their sentence and he gives an example of a woman who completed her prison term ten years ago, but still refuses to leave for fear of her family.