

NGO REPORT on the situation of Women in Lebanon

**SUBMITTED TO THE 33ST SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE FOR
CONVENTION FOR THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

Submitted By:

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

An NGO in special consultative status with ECOSOC, United Nations

**Relative to the
Report of the Government of Lebanon as a State-Party to CEDAW**

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Introduction

Since 1895, sisters of the Good Shepherd have worked in Lebanon close to the marginalized in the society, in particular women victims of all forms of discrimination.

We know the multiple challenges that women meet in their families and societies because since 1895 we have offered various social, psychological and educational services to empower these women in their human rights. We also collaborate with various organizations and committees to unify our efforts and to make our work for justice more fruitful.

Reality of Women / Girls in Lebanon

We concur with the government of Lebanon in its report of 9-02-04 that describes many shortfalls to gender equality. In our social services, we meet women victims of all forms of discrimination. We wish to express particular concern for the following realities of Lebanese girls and women:

1. Minor girls, as victims of sexual abuse and early marriage, undergo all forms of **violence in their homes**. (Religious and / or social institutions take charge of some such girls.) As victims of incest, girls are obliged to keep silence by fear or by obligation. Unfortunately, to remain in her home, the girl must submit to all forms of violence, otherwise she will be killed, and sometimes by a minor who will be asked to accomplish the crime to escape legal sanction. Once an act of incest is denounced, a legal suit can be started, but there is great fear of certain political powers. To speak at all about incest or any form of family violence is constrained by fear.

Additionally, due to poverty, some minor girls are delivered to prostitution. As a result some are confined in jail, and some others must deal with the reality of having a child who is regarded as an "illegitimate child".

2. Minor girls coming from rural and farming surroundings that lack social and educational services, have a high rate of **illiteracy**. Although Lebanon instituted a system of obligatory elementary instruction until the age of 12 years, this law was not put in force. The large gap between gender and age range still exists. In certain rural areas (as Akkar, Al Hermel, Marjeyoun, Baalbek, Bint Jbeil....) boys have more access to education, whereas girls work hard in fields, with total submission to their husband or father, the « maître absolu ».
3. According to some religious sectarianism in Lebanon, wherein the religious laws dominate the legislature, raped women (and in case of abortion and prostitution) flee from their home due to fear that they will be killed by their parents, their

husband or their brother; this is permitted according to the Lebanese penal code which permits “**honor crimes**”. In addition, the man who rapes a woman and agrees to marry her will be pardoned. The victim of a rape is consigned to marry the perpetrator of the offense (report p. 30).

4. **Single mothers** are forced to take refuge in our centers or in other institutions and to abandon their children due to societal shame on the family. If they have the courage to keep their child, they cannot give him/her their name and the child remains without papers of identity and she/he is always considered as « **illegitimate child** ». Her/his name is registered in an official folder - in the government - as “illegitimate.” This creates many other problems for the child, especially in regard to school attendance and progress, since he/she never has official and proper papers.
5. Lebanese women are not allowed to give her **nationality** to her (foreign born) husband or to her children if her husband is foreign born. But the law allows a Lebanese man to transmit his nationality to his foreign wife.
6. Men and women are, in principle, equal before the **labor law** in Lebanon. However, the mother’s benefits are limited and the law does not take into consideration when she is the only provider for her children particularly in case of divorce and separation. Such laws and practices keep women economically dependent (often on those who abuse them) and leave women unable to provide for and protect her children and family.
7. **Domestic violence** against women is considered “natural behavior” within the social systems that prevail in Lebanese society. This is reinforced in more formal educational systems. These systems organize social relationships within a hierarchy that give power to the man (father-husband-brother-son) who is considered “the head of the family.” As such, he has total authority over his wife and children. The kind of violence resultant from such systems varies from being beating to being insulted and includes other symbolic violence: accusation, cursing, deprivation, persecution and submission, resulting in women losing self-confidence and feeling humiliated.

Until the present, no measures were taken to establish governmental organizations to deal with violence against women. However, concern of the non-governmental organizations is gradually increasing in this domain.

Police intervention is limited. The laws and procedures that are responsible for public life don’t allow any space for violence against women in the home since this is considered a private issue within the family and related to relationships wherein the man has total authority in the same family.

N.B. It is written in the report (p.37) that Lebanon does not have a shelter to accommodate battered women. Good Shepherd Sisters have worked to help battered women in Ain Saadé since 1975.

8. **Women foreign employees** who come to work in Lebanon are often victims of violence and sexual abuse. Their official papers can be taken by their sponsor to keep them from running away in the face of violence.

Recommendations to the Government:

With a view to support enactment of Women's rights we recommend the following to the government:

1. Minor girls:

Give financial sustenance and credible partnership to reputable NGOs and service institutions so that such agencies can fully welcome, protect, and educate minor girls who are victims of violence and discrimination.

2. Education:

According to the article 14 of the Convention:

- a) Apply (implement) the system of obligatory elementary education that Lebanon instituted, until the age of 12 years, and sustain families so that poverty is not an obstacle to adequate education to their children.
- b) Review the new educational curricula to remove gender discrimination texts from textbooks.

3. Honor crimes:

Eliminate the article 562 of the Lebanese code penal, which permits honor crimes and apply article 2 of the Convention concerning the total equality between men and women.

4. Citizenship:

Eliminate reservations for section 2 of article 9 of the Convention and amend the nationality law and recognize women's right to grant nationality to both their husband and their children as men do.

5. Prostitution:

According to article 6 of the Convention:

- a) Eliminate the law that determines conditions for opening prostitution houses and completely close all establishments for prostitution.
- b) Articulate a coherent national policy, using international instruments in favor of the dignity of women and girls, which explicitly denounces prostitution as a violation of the human rights of women and rejects its legalization.

- c) Enact laws which do not criminalize the woman victim of prostitution but penalize the perpetrator/purchaser of a woman's body.
- d) Ratify, without reservation, "the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others". Adopt and actively enforce anti-trafficking legislation using the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and the recent UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children as the framework.

6. Marriage:

According to articles 15 and 16 of the Convention:

- a) Eliminate reservations that Lebanon expressed to article 16 of the Convention.
- b) Grant to the woman, without limitation imposed by traditional cultural or sectarian practices, total liberty in the choice of her spouse.
- c) Forbid early marriages in rural areas and ensure practical support for education and employment in these areas.
- d) Eliminate the requirement for a man's agreement to allow his wife to work outside of the home. Equality at work without obstacles or constraints is required.
- e) Assure equality between men and women in the right of their child's education. Give to woman the right to keep her children in case of divorce, evaluating "the best interest of the children" as priority.
- f) Assure equality between men and women with regard to inheritance laws.
- g) Change articles 503 and 504 of the law of the Lebanese penal code which makes exception in the conjugal relation with regard to the rape.
- h) Create laws to protect women from any practical and symbolic violence.
- i) Ensure national training of all police and law enforcement personnel on gender issues.
- j) Provide women legal orientation at all educational levels.

Summary statement:

My NGO will continue to work, we hope in partnership with government, towards a goal of full implementation of political, civil and social human rights for all women and girls, so that all of Lebanese society can prosper in dignity and democracy, built on our ancient culture and relevant to the vision of the Millennium Declaration.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.