DAY OF GENERAL DISCUSSION

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My name is Mia Farah, I come from Lebanon, I am a council member of Inclusion

International. I represent the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Today, I would like to talk about the impact of insecurity in life, but especially about the education of people with intellectual disabilities.

When I went to school with my 2 brothers, I was supposed to learn Arabic and French and later on, English. But the Arabic teacher kicked me out of the classroom because I have intellectual disability. So I studied French and English only.

**BUT THE WORST THING IS THAT THERE WERE NO LAWS TO PROTECT ME**

Maybe you are asking why did this happen?

At that time, state, community and family thought that special schools were the best place for people with intellectual disabilities, and the law of the country was supporting this, with no hope for change. On top of that,

**WE WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF A CIVIL WAR.**

As years passed and the security situation improved, some Lebanese organizations, International NGO’s and UN bodies started to be involved in inclusive education.

And most importantly, the World Bank supported 3 DPO’s to start inclusive education. At that time, I was a member of one of these organizations. We were very excited and started to work at different levels.

First, the Ministry of Education:

Since we wanted participation and equality, it was very clear for us, that, if we wanted inclusive education, participation and equality, we had to work with the Ministry of Education.

It was very important to have one ministry responsible for the education of all the students and one educational system too.

Second, the teachers:

We wanted people to accomodate to our needs so we could learn better.

We also wanted to have teachers that can reach and teach all the students in an inclusive setting.

Third, the schools:

We wanted to be included at any level

Many trainings were made for the principals of schools, as well as for all the staff and students.

You know, inclusive education means change at all levels and for everyone.

Fourth, Parents:

When we say parents, we are talking about all parents who have kids at the school.

They have to know that inclusive education means quality education for all.

Family is our best support. We want them to be part of our life.

Fifth, Community:

To reach the community, we used the media.

Several movies were produced and shown on TV.

The results:

Ministry of Education started training their teachers.

More public schools opened their doors for persons with intellectual disabilities.

Official exams were modified to reach the needs of all students.

And the best part is:

When we changed the way of teaching, all students benefitted from good education.

Persons with intellectual disability started to be visible, to live with their peers and to talk about their future.

But this was a dream…A very beautiful one, but a very short one.

**Again insecurity in my country,**

Persons with intellectual disabilities were among the first affected.

Ministries, International NGO’s, and UN bodies told us that they don’t have money for inclusive education because the country is in an emergency situation and help needs to go somewhere else…

When no one really really believes in inclusive education, it means:

No more training,

No access to schools,

No participation,

No equality,

No respect,

No rights…

And for persons with intellectual disabilities:

NO LIFE

I have very important questions to all of you who are here to discuss education, and

the rights of persons with disabilities:

Is our right for education linked to peace?

Why are we the first group to be affected during crisis?

Is education a luxury or a right?

Lately, I often hear this:

« We need to do several changes in the educational system in Lebanon in order to educate the refugees because **they are the lost generation.** »

What about refugees with disabilities?

Are they going to change the educational system for refugees with disabilities?

Is it worth changing the system to accommodate for all of them?

How many generations of persons with disabilities have we already lost?

Thank you.