

Lebanese Republic

Ministry of the Interior and Municipalities

General Directorate of General Security

Number: 2737 / A 'a / S

Date: 26/11/2018

To the Director of the Human Rights Watch Beirut Office

Subject: Your inquiries about the “Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality” Conference

- Reference:**
- 1- The Lebanese Constitution
 - 2- Decision 20/11/1911 (public meetings) and amendments
 - 3- Decision No. 20/L.R., dated 22/1/1936 (Shutting down unlicensed gathering or meeting places)
 - 4- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (decree number 3855, dated 1/9/1972)
 - 5- Your letter, dated 25/10/2018

Regarding the aforementioned subject, and in response to your letter referenced above, which requested clarification of the legal basis for the intervention of the General Security in the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality Conference (AFE), held in Broumana starting 28/9/2018; and on whether the General Security considers illegal such activities related to gender or sexual orientation, or concerning members of minority groups of sexual orientation or gender; and whether the General Security deems these actions to require license, and if so, what the legal basis is for this—the General Directorate of General Security replies as follows:

First: The legal basis for General Security intervention in the conference:

AFE submitted to the General Directorate of General Security applications for entry visas for foreign participants in the conference, as the subject of the conference was “the best methods of protection and health care,” whereas in reality, the conference dealt with issues in a different framework. This was an evasion of the truth and the transparency necessary to carry out such paperwork, and it represented a kind of fraud.

Second: Clarification of whether the General Security deems these actions to require licensing, and if so, on what legal basis:

The Constitution ensures freedom of assembly within the confines of the Law (Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution). The Law on Public Meetings, issued on 20/11/1911, and its amendments states that, before a meeting, a written announcement must be prepared; indicating the meeting place, date and time, and the intent for holding the meeting, at least 48 hours prior to its being held.

In addition, Decision No. 20/ L.R. dated 22/1/1936 related to shutting down unlicensed gathering or meeting places stipulates the right of the Minister of the Interior and Municipalities to temporarily shut down places in which unlicensed gatherings are held, as well as other details related to meetings that have not obtained the appropriate legal permission. The real subject of the meeting must be indicated in a transparent manner to allow the relevant authorities to decide whether to approve or not, as appropriate. The plaintiff always has the right to appeal such administrative decisions before the courts to be overturned and to request compensation for any resulting damages.

Third: Whether the General Security considers this type of activity related to gender and sexual orientation issues or which concern members of minority groups of sexual orientation or gender to be illegal:

Article 21 of the ICCPR (Decree No. 3855 dated 1/9/1972) stipulates that:

“The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

The wording of this ICCPR article is clear in its requirement for the meeting to be consistent with the moral standards of the particular society. As the topic of the conference remains controversial in Lebanese culture, it was necessary to take measures to avoid an escalation of the situation under these circumstances, namely by suspending the conference activities. Thus, the General Directorate of General Security’s intervention can be considered no more than a preemptive measure.

This is our reply to your above-referenced letter.

Respectfully Yours,

General Director of General Security

[signature]

Major General Abbas Ibrahim

[Lebanese Republic, Ministry of the Interior and Municipalities

The General Director

General Directorate of General Security]

Circumstances of the Agreement for the AFE Conference

1) The Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE), represented by Lebanese citizen George Shakir Azzi, organized a conference in Le Crillon Hotel in Broumana from 28/9/2018 to 30/9/2018 about gay rights. The aim was to discuss how to protect the gay community, grant them freedom of expression and the right to marry and talk about their concerns, particularly in the Arab region. A number of representatives of Arab and foreign organizations participated (attached is a list of their names).

2) On 30/9/2018, a patrol unit from the Mount Lebanon National Security Department executed the orders of the General Director. The unit headed to the hotel to suspend the conference activities, after getting the signature of the hotel owner and the director of the foundation George Azzi [pledging] not to resume activities on the last day of the conference and to put down all related announcements.

3) Notably, the conference was organized with the support and under the auspices of the U.S. company Grindr, which is a digital application that provides a communications platform for this community. Around 90 people of different nationalities attended in their personal capacities, or as representatives of organizations active in supporting the rights of this company.

+ George Shakir Azzi heads the foundation, assisted by Amin Rahim, Juliette Al Zawbi, Danny Treibeh, Mohammad Yetim, Khatshik Ghosn, Mireille Abdullah, Elie Ballan, Mohammad Hajjij and Nour Nasr.

+ The conference organizers, after the General Directorate of General Security suspended the activities at Le Crillon Hotel (executing the orders of the General Director), proceeded to move and complete their activities secretly in a hall at the Printania hotel in Broumana, in the presence of representatives of several organizations, including Alwaan Foundation – Morocco, the My.Kali magazine – Jordan, Mosaic, Mawjudin, Akaliyat, etc...

- The Office of Human Rights, Organizations and Immigration asserted that the foundation submitted an application for visas for Arab volunteers from Egypt and Tunisia who were supposedly activists in health organizations. The alleged purpose was participating in a conference about the best methods of protection and health care, and a copy of the application related to the foundation's request was attached.

5) It can be concluded from the above that the AFE Foundation and its staff, deliberately and in a premeditated fashion, organized a conference for the gay community in Lebanon, and to this end, obtained entry visas for Arab and foreign conference attendees in a deceptive manner; claiming in letters submitted to the General Security that the subject was “the best methods of protection and health care.” After the conference was suspended, they invoked and exploited the fact that some participants had been granted entry visas to claim a legal basis for the conference they had organized.