

## **Rights Group Helps Dwarfs Walk Tall**

**Author:** [Talar Nadir](#)

Dwarfs overcome discrimination and ridicule with support from pragmatic association.

A few years ago, friends of Taha Hussein, who is one metre tall, thought it was time for him to get married.

They found the ideal woman for him through the Dwarfs' Association, which has 3,800 members. Now he has two sons, who are of normal size, and has been married for five years.

"They persuaded the lady, talked to her family and arranged everything," said Hussein, a former secretary of the group. "They then told me, 'get prepared for married life!' The association helps us very much psychologically and socially. We visit and console one another."

Finding marriage partners for its members is just one of the ways the Dwarfs' Association, which has six branch offices in Iraqi Kurdistan, helps midgets who face discrimination and ridicule in their daily lives.

When its members get married, the association provides 150,000 dinars (102 US dollars) to 450,000 dinars to the couple. The group also lays on courses for its members in literacy, driving, administration sewing and accounting.

The association very proactive, most recently participating in a conference to discuss how to protect the rights of disabled people in the permanent constitution, which will be drafted by the newly elected National Assembly.

Dilshad Wahab, deputy secretary of the association, said many of its members have had experiences that have left emotional scars. He has never forgotten the humiliation he faced while he was studying in college, where even his friends made fun of him. When he decided he could no longer take it, he asked relatives in Britain to bring him overseas.

Omer Jabbar, secretary of the association, relates a particularly disturbing instance of society's negative attitude towards dwarfs. After he met a government minister and shook hands with him, the latter immediately went to wash his hands. "Please don't let people view us like that," he said.

But members of the association have still found ways to make ends meet and lead fulfilling and happy lives. Several of its members plan to act in a new film being made by Bahmani Qubadi, a famous Kurdish director.

They have also set up various sports teams, including football and swimming. In 2000, the association played football against dwarfs from Erbil as a way of helping to relieve the tension between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the two main political parties in Kurdistan.

Sulaimanyah is the regional capital for the PUK, which controls the eastern half of Kurdistan, while the KDP has Erbil as its capital in the west.

Sabir Ismael, deputy minister at the ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in PUK-controlled Kurdistan, said the government is paying attention to dwarfs and other disabled people.

The ministry provides the dwarfs with a stipend of about 20 dollars per month, as it does for all disabled people. Twenty members of the association have also received plots of land from the government – with provision made according to need.

But Wahab said its members need more.

“This money is not enough,” he said. “We urgently need a car and we have been asking the government for it for eight years but there has been no answer.”

Many of the dwarfs are better treated now, than in the past. They were generally neglected under the Saddam Hussein regime. Those who were not registered as members of the Ba’ath party were normally deprived of their rights, while members were given cars and land.

Because the Dwarfs’ Association does not receive much outside help, the members know it’s up to them to help each other out. Now Aras Abdullah Goran, a member of the association’s football team, is looking to get married, with the association’s help.

“They have found a girl like me in another branch of the association,” he said, smiling. “But I haven’t seen her yet.”

Talar Nadir is an IWPR trainee in Sulaimaniyah.

**Location:** [Iraqi Kurdistan](#)

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