

**Welfare Report**  
**Ascilia, Leilah and Yousef Matar**  
**U.S. Embassy Beirut**  
**October 16, 2017**

Summary:

On October 16, 2017 Consular Staff were able to conduct a welfare and whereabouts visit with the Matar children. The visit took place at the private residence of Judge Abed El Monhem Gazzawi in Tripoli. Present at the home were the attorneys for both parents, the children's father, their paternal grandfather, and Judge Gazzawi and members of his family. After pleasantries in the salon, Consular Staff were able to meet privately with Ascilia, Leilah, and Yousef Matar in another sitting room in the home. That private meeting lasted approximately 1 hour.

The Home:

When asked to describe where they live, Ascilia and Leilah said that they live in a two-story apartment with four bedrooms. Yousef shares a large bedroom with his father, while Leilah and Ascilia share another large room. They noted this was similar to their living situation in the United States. Their grandmother has the third bedroom and the fourth bedroom is for their Uncle Ahmed. The girls described him as nice and said that he had lived with them in the States as well. They said that their paternal grandfather lives in an apartment below them in the same building.

The Children:

The children were dressed in casual clothing that one might see kids wearing in the U.S. – the girls were both in jeans and athletic tops (t-shirt and sweatshirt), made of cotton. Yousef was in brown chino style pants and a green cotton shirt.

Yousef was shy and didn't speak very much but the girls spoke without hesitation to the Consular Staff. They said they are attending a private school in Tripoli, named Tarbia Wa' Islah and that the school is K-12 and has three curricula; English, Arabic, and French. They are in the English track, but plan to learn Arabic as well. Right now they said they do not speak Arabic and do not understand it very well either. The kids all said that they like school and the girls both said they want to be doctors in the future. They said that their father wants them to go to college so they can be successful and independent. Yousef is in the first grade and didn't have an answer as to what he wants to be when he grows up.

The girls described their day as school, followed by homework, and then socializing with friends or their cousins. They like to go to the LC Waikiki shops (similar to a mall), going out for ice cream, and renting videos to watch at home with friends and family. The girls mentioned that

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one of their female teachers is encouraging them to take up running with an organized group after school. Ascila is hoping to get a car when she turns 18 and showed consular staff a video about the new Range Rover convertible on her iPad. She does not expect to get a Range Rover.

The daily meals are comprised of breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but the girls stated they can eat whenever they want.

When asked if they want to speak to their mother, the girls declined and told Consular Staff that they have her number and can call or text if they want to talk to her. They said that they and Yousef last spoke to her about a month ago. Yousef said that he misses his mother but also declined the opportunity to speak to her on the phone.

After speaking with the children, Consular staff asked for a more complete translation of a statement made by the paternal grandfather at the beginning of the visit. According to the translation, the grandfather mentioned to the judge that, under Sharia law, the girls are almost of marriageable age. The father and the judge immediately and strongly voiced their opposition to that statement. The judge said that he opposes the idea of young marriage and that he would jail any man who attempted such an arrangement. The father stated he wants his daughters to go to college before marriage.

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