



HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

17 - 23 JULY, 2023



Human Rights are inherent to all human beings, regardless of the nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language or any other status without discrimination. These rights are all universal, inalienable, interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

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LEBANON

Monday
17 July 2023

Sea migration attempts on the rise this summer: UNHCR

UNHCR has recorded a new increase this summer in informal sea journeys from Lebanon to Europe, mainly Italy, UNHCR Lebanon spokesperson said. She stresses the continuous economic crisis and the reliance of 90% of Syrian refugee families on humanitarian assistance as reasons for this new increase. Despite a low number of departures detected at the beginning of the year, “they have since picked up as the warmer season started.” In 2022, UNHCR received reports of 51 boats departing Lebanon, carrying 4,334 individuals; 66% were Syrians, 24% Lebanese, and 10% Palestinians. In July 2023 only, the Lebanese security apparatus prevented at least 4 departures and reported having arrested smugglers. Sea migration attempts are expected to increase in the next months, as they have at the same period last year. In 2022, departures more than doubled compared to 2021. Most of the boats that are not intercepted by Lebanese authorities succeed to reach Europe. In a joint statement, UNHCR and IOM stressed that the current “approach” to migration in the Mediterranean Sea is “unworkable”.

Salameh's last attempts to avoid judicial probe and end of term

Riad Salameh, under judicial probe both in Lebanon and abroad, makes his last moves to attempt to keep his position as the head of the Central Bank after the end of his term on July 31. In the first half of July only, Salameh increased public debt by \$690 million, after having previously recorded most banking losses as debts owed by the State to BDL. Salameh also purchased \$91 million from the market in the same period, contributing to the recent instability of the Lira, and increasing fears for the post-Salameh phase. This purchase of dollars led to an increase of 21% of the Lira in circulation only in the first week of July. All these moves would be attempts of Salameh to increase the financial instability in Lebanon, in order to create a tense monetary environment that justifies the extension of his term at the end of the month. Such an extension remains unlikely, as Salameh is subject to international and national judicial probe. A Lebanese judge ordered the seizure of Salameh's properties, including “luxury real estate and apartments [...] in addition to a number of cars”. Another \$135 million were confiscated in France, Germany, and Luxembourg in March 2022.

Five-nation group on Lebanon calls to penalize those obstructing presidential election

Representatives of 5 States - Egypt, France, KSA, Qatar and the US - met in Doha to discuss the Lebanese presidential file. They once again called for a President to be elected quickly and added that they “discussed several options including taking measures against those who obstruct progress in this area”. Last week, the European Parliament adopted a resolution blaming Hezbollah, Amal, and their allies for resorting to “unconstitutional tactics to prevent the conclusion of the parliamentary vote” and deepening the political deadlock. It also called “to apply targeted sanctions [...] against all of those who are infringing the democratic and electoral process in the Lebanese institutions”. On July 20, the Council of the EU renewed for one year its framework for imposing targeting sanctions for persons and entities undermining democracy and the rule of law in Lebanon. Earlier this year, Washington had also warned that it was considering to impose sanctions on Lebanese officials for their obstruction of the election of a President. The French envoy Jean Yves Le Drian is expected to return to Lebanon at the end of July.

Tuesday
18 July 2023

HRW highlights mobility restrictions for women in Lebanon

In a new report, Human Rights Watch details mobility restrictions for women in the MENA region, including Lebanon. The main obstacles to free mobility for women in Lebanon are the personal status laws for the different recognized religious communities. For example, all personal status laws state that a woman can be found legally recalcitrant if she leaves the marital home and refuses to cohabit with her husband without a reason that the religious courts consider legitimate. This restricts access to divorce and may force her to go back to her husband, therefore exposing her to domestic abuse. HRW documented cases in which judges ordered women to return to their marital home “even if their husbands were abusive, had prevented their wives from maintaining custody of their children, were not paying child custody, or had tried to undermine their wives’ financial rights”. Despite women having the right to travel without their husbands’ authorization since 1974, some religious personal status may consider this as disobedience, causing the wife to lose her right to spousal maintenance from her husband or establishing a ground for divorce.

Wednesday
19 July 2023

The unknown fate of Syrian detainees in Lebanese prisons and detention centers

Amid governmental public statements calling for coordination with the Syrian regime to return Syrian refugees from Lebanon, the fate of at least 1,800 Syrian detainees remains unknown. 80% of them are imprisoned despite being unconvicted. Syrians represent only 28% of all detainees, despite media rumors overestimating this figure. The news of the Lebanese government’s intention to deport them sparked a wave of anger, apprehension, and fear among them. As they would be at risk of torture and mistreatment, Lebanon would violate the Convention against Torture, which proscribes the deportation of any person who may be subjected to torture in the country of arrival. The majority of Syrian prisoners released after their sentences were immediately detained by the General Security under the pretext of “settling their legal papers”, but their families were unable to communicate with them. Fears are growing that they will be deported to Syria, especially as the General Security indicated that this policy made its detention centers overcrowded.

Thursday
20 July 2023

[Bou Habib addresses a letter to Borrell denouncing European Parliament's resolution](#)

Caretaker Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, Abdallah Bou Habib, addressed a letter to the Commission for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union, Josep Borrell. Bou Habib denounced the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on the 12th July 2023, calling for a "constructive and comprehensive dialogue between Lebanon and the EU". Bou Habib stressed on "the Syrian displacement dossier, which has begun to pose a threat not only to the Lebanese social structure and economic stability but also to the continued existence of Lebanon as an entity". The caretaker Minister called on the EU "to accelerate early recovery, including securing basic infrastructure and social services in Syria, in order to facilitate the return of the displaced". The European Parliament's resolution has been largely criticized in Lebanon, as it calls to refrain to return Syrians to "conflict-prone areas in Syria".

[Lebanon central bank vice governors propose move to floating FX rate by September](#)

The vice governors of the Central Bank, which are set to remain in power after Salameh's end of term on July 31, proposed their plan for a new monetary policy in a meeting with Lebanese MPs. They suggested moving the exchange rates to a "floating" system by the end of September 2023 to reflect the real value of the Lira. The current Sayrafa system, criticized for its lack of transparency, the high variations it imposes on the black market exchange rate, and for not complying with the latter, would also be replaced by a new electronic platform for foreign exchanges, handled by an internationally recognized actor. The proposal also includes a new legislation that would allow the government to borrow up to \$200 million per month to the central bank over a six-month period and the central bank to produce banknotes bigger than 100,000 Lira. The vice governors also called on the Parliament to adopt the 2023 budget by August and 2024's by November. According to them, the State's budget should be increased, to fit with the World Bank's recommendation to have a budget of at least 15% of the GDP. Other legislative measures that should be adopted include a capital control law, the repartition of the country's losses (\$70 billion according to the IMF), and the bank's capital restructuring. MPs are expected to review the proposal over the next few days.

[ABL reimposes restrictive measures, in reaction to new wave of depositor hold-ups](#)

The Association of Banks in Lebanon (ABL) announced the return to strict precautionary and regulatory measures, further explaining that banks will have the possibility of closing some branches temporarily if necessary. It also criticized "the inaction of the States and its institutions in dealing with these systematic attacks for days". Earlier this week, the ABL denounced the "wave of attacks" by depositors to withdraw their funds, and threatened to revert to measures taken beforehand, should the attacks not stop. It further added that "the attacks continued as if to push the [banks] to close." Over the past days, several depositors held-up banks and succeeded in recovering substantial parts of their savings, despite illegal bank restrictions severely hindering the free access of depositors to their money since 2019. Such events had already happened in the past, and the banks responded by implementing harsh security restrictions, including temporarily closing banks, therefore increasing the difficulties in accessing deposits.

Friday
21 July 2023

Protests in Lebanon after Qur'an burned in Sweden

Hundreds of protesters gathered in front of Beirut mosques to protest against the burning of a Qur'an in Sweden. Similar incidents took place across the region, including a massive mobilization in Baghdad where the Swedish embassy was stormed. The protesters called for the expulsion of Swedish diplomats from Lebanon. The Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed "the 'Lebanese people's disapproval [...] and their condemnation of once again allowing offense to the Holy Qur'an in Stockholm, which constitutes a continuous violation of the feelings and dignity of Muslims". It also called on "the Swedish authorities to take appropriate measures" to end such events. The Swedish ambassador to Lebanon, Ann Dismore, had reportedly left Beirut, but embassy sources claimed that her departure was planned before the escalation.

French Judge's positive decision for Lebanese depositors

The Judiciary Court of Paris issued a decision June 29 following a request made by Lebanese depositors against a bank in Lebanon for the hindered access to their funds. This decision marks a shift in the conditions necessary for a judicial decision. Until then, European judges restricted the access to rulings to persons residing in their country. However, for the first time, the judge accepted the request even though the depositors do not live in France, based on the fact that they have French nationality. The decision is still subject to appeal by the bank, but it is a hope for Lebanese residents holding French nationality. Karim Daher, president of the commission for the defense of the depositors' rights at Beirut Bar, considered that it could also have an effect on Lebanese courts, stating that "Lebanese judges could follow this orientation, as the Lebanese case law is often inspired by the French one".

Saturday and Sunday
22 and 23 July 2023

At international migration summit in Italy, Miqati reiterates call for return of Syrians

Italy's far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni gathered representatives from Middle Eastern, North-African, and Sub-Saharan countries for an international conference on migration aimed at strengthening international cooperation to prevent so-called "illegal migration" to Europe. Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati used this forum to call once again for the return of Syrian refugees to Syria and denounce the European Parliament's recent condemnation of forced returns in "conflict-prone areas in Syria". He also warned European leaders that refugees in Lebanon might "aspire to reach Europe". The Prime Minister called for the reallocation of aid to Syrian refugees from Lebanon to returnees in Syria, hoping that it would incite them to return. Miqati urged the international community to "allocate sufficient resources to fortify border control measures", considering such support as a counterbalance to Lebanese "remarkable and unparalleled generosity in absorbing refugees". Meloni previously stated that the newly signed agreement with Tunisia, mainly based on fundings to border enforcement, "must be a model for building new relations" with neighbors, despite repeated human rights violations and increasing violence against foreigners in Tunisia. The Italian Prime Minister called for the establishment of a trust fund to provide assistance to countries from which individuals emigrate. A similar fund (EU Trust Fund for Africa) was established in 2015 and contributed to divert development aid to serve border enforcement and anti-migration objectives, based on EU interests rather than local interests.



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