



HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

03 - 09 April, 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
03 April 2023

Powerless against thieves: Infrastructure theft increases in Lebanon

Insecurity and theft are becoming increasingly problematic in Lebanon, with thieves causing millions of dollars in damage and disrupting the lives of citizens. In the latest incident, three high-voltage transmission towers in the outskirts of Makneh town in Baalbek collapsed after thieves stole their iron bases. The thieves used 4x4 vehicles or trucks to remove the bases, causing power outages in the affected areas for several hours. However, the feeding hours have been limited to just two hours a day in some regions after Labweh and Hermel power generation plants went out of service. Additionally, Electricité du Liban (EDL) estimated the losses at around \$3 million, and despite their efforts to report these incidents, perpetrators were not caught. In the past few hours, there have been similar incidents in Metn and Zgharta regions, with the EDL reporting up to 40 complaints per month and millions of dollars in losses. EDL has called on MPs and local authorities to help combat these criminal acts and not just rely on reporting power cuts after they happen. These thefts are not only causing significant financial losses to EDL but also negatively affecting the daily lives of citizens.

Tuesday
04 April 2023

Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression: Authorities must respect freedoms of the press and legal profession and fundamentally amend defamation laws

The Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression in Lebanon condemned in a statement the increasing number of summons for investigation issued by different authorities over the last two weeks, which aim to restrict freedom of expression. On 3 March 2023, the Council of the Beirut Bar Association issued a decision amending Articles 39 to 42 of Chapter Six of the Lawyers' Code of Ethics which regulate lawyers' relationship with media outlets. The amendments stipulate that lawyers need to obtain prior permission from the head of the Bar Association to participate in any legal seminars, conferences, interviews, or discussions with media outlets, social media platforms, websites, or groups. Based on this decision, the Bar Association summoned lawyer Nizar Saghie, executive director of the Legal Agenda, to a hearing without specifying the reasons. During the past week, powerful political and judicial figures in Lebanon resorted- once again- to the use of criminal defamation laws to silence criticism. Public prosecutors also summoned journalists for interrogation at security agencies, in violation of the Publications Law. On 30 March 2023, Jean Kassir, co-founder of Megaphone, an independent media outlet, was intercepted by two State Security officers who informed him that he was summoned to appear at the Central Investigation Directorate of the General Directorate of State Security without disclosing the reason behind the summons. Summoning Kassir in this way does not comply with the procedures set out by law, and is instead an intimidation tactic. On 31 March 2023, less than 48 hours after Kassir was summoned, the Cybercrimes Bureau summoned journalist Lara Bitar, editor-in-chief of the Public Source website, to appear for interrogation based on a complaint from the "Lebanese Forces" political party regarding an article she published eight months ago on toxic waste. International standards for the protection of the right to free expression, which are binding on Lebanon, underscore the need to abolish laws that allow for imprisonment in cases of peaceful expression, especially defamation and replace those with civil remedies.

Wednesday
05 April 2023

Families of port explosion victims present statement during their monthly vigil

The families of the port explosion victims offered a detailed accounting of the actions of political, judicial and security authorities, who took control of the investigation and obstructed the work of Judge Tarek Bitar. The families presented their statement today during the vigil that they organize on every fourth day of the month, to commemorate the victims, and demand truth and justice for them. The families described the attempted return of released detainees to their jobs as "disrespectful and insolent, while they are still wanted by justice, and the shackled investigation has not reached no conclusion," adding that the detainees were released by an illegal decision of Judge Ghassan Oueidat.

In Lebanon, girls and women are increasingly under threat of going missing

According to a Gender Alert published by UN Women, Fe-male, and KAFA, incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) increased during the spread of COVID-19, with women and girls unjustly affected. Moreover, during the last three years, Lebanon saw more reporting of domestic violence and an increase in the emergency of these incidents. Based on the Gender Alert, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) data reflects an increase of 241 percent in domestic violence reported during the spread of COVID-19 compared to the 18 months before. In 2021, 81 women and girls were reported missing for unknown reasons and reasons associated with mental health, escaping domestic violence, family disputes, and other reasons. Furthermore, there are many challenges regarding this issue, including reporting, investigations, accountability, and justice for missing persons, made more complex concerning the current context of the Lebanese crisis, as the judicial paralysis and the lack of resources for police stations "hinders the police's ability to follow-up and investigate cases of missing women and girls." Based on Gender Alert's observed trends, the cases of missing women and girls can indicate murder or femicide, as "a total of 50 femicides were investigated by ISF in 2021 and 2022," stating that since 2021, incidents of human trafficking into and across Lebanon increased, with women and girls, especially migrants and refugees, most likely to be the victims. Evidence also shows that kidnapping for forced marriage or early marriage may also be linked to women and girls being reported missing by their families.

Lebanon's Ministry of Health and Private Hospitals Syndicate reach agreement on Kidney Dialysis treatment coverage

Caretaker Minister of Public Health in Lebanon, Firass Abiad, held a meeting with the head of the private hospital owners' syndicate Suleiman Haroun, to discuss the issue of kidney dialysis. The discussion resulted in an agreement to develop a mechanism to cover kidney dialysis sessions, and the following measures were agreed upon:

- Adopting a fluctuating tariff for kidney dialysis sessions to keep up with exchange rate changes.
- An agreement between hospitals and the Ministries of Public Health and Finance on a mechanism to accelerate the submission of invoices and the settlement of financial dues to treatment centers, as well as doctors' fees, within a maximum period of one month.
- Confirming that hospitals or treating doctors will charge no additional fees to patients.

To ensure proper implementation of the agreed measures, the Ministry of Public Health's media office reminds patients facing violations or asked to pay additional fees to contact the Ministry's hotline at 1214, where complaints will be the subject of an investigation to take the necessary actions.

Friday
07 April 2023

[UN expert voices concern over 'interference' in Beirut blast probe](#)

A United Nations expert expressed grave concern over interference in the probe into the deadly 2020 Beirut port explosion, including threats against the investigating judge, Anadolu News Agency reports. In a statement, Margaret Satterthwaite, UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, denounced the "undue delays that have prevented justice for those affected by the blast." "I am deeply disturbed by reports that former state officials and others who have been implicated in the case have disingenuously resorted to recusal proceedings and other challenging actions directed at the investigating judges appointed to examine the case," Satterthwaite said. "This has led to the replacement of an investigating judge in February 2021, as well as several suspensions of the investigation in recent months." She cited reports that, since the explosion was submitted to the Lebanese Judicial Council for investigation, authorities have refused legal requests to remove parliamentary immunity and permit questioning of security personnel. Additionally, the government has not carried out arrest warrants issued against former ministers.

[Skin infections surge in Lebanon's isolated Syrian refugee camps](#)

Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon suffer from dilapidated and blocked sewage systems that send dirty and potentially contaminated water into areas where families, children, and the elderly live. This has culminated in a rise of skin infections that are linked to a lack of clean water and dreadful sanitation conditions in the camps, which were also blamed for the cholera outbreak. Moreover, large families living in cramped spaces make it easy for infections to spread. Lebanon's water and sanitation infrastructure is already ailing, particularly in the poorest areas such as those bordering Syria, and Lebanon's crippling economic crisis has only exacerbated these problems. Refugees say the support they receive from the United Nations is being steadily whittled away. They also complain that they are now receiving cash aid in the largely volatile local currency, rather than in US dollars as before. Residents of the camps say they can barely survive with the meagre resources they have, and that they are unable to afford sufficient clean water. A reduction in water dislodging, where dirty water is removed, is further exacerbating the problem, they say.

Saturday and Sunday
08 and 09 April 2023

[Compounding crises dampen Easter joy for Lebanon's Christian community](#)

Many Lebanese people who celebrated Easter were unable to uphold family traditions, such as making maamoul cookies, due to the increase in prices. Similarly, very few people decorated for Easter this year, and many were unable to buy eggs to paint as a symbol of resurrection and life. Those who bought chocolate eggs are rare as the treats have become too expensive. A World Food Program report showed that more people than ever are relying on food assistance across Lebanon as the country suffers from one of the world's worst economic crises. "We decided to make homemade Palm Sunday candles, using an olive branch and some ribbon to decorate them. We cannot deprive our children of joy. The simplest candle costs \$15 and that's 1,500,000 Lebanese pounds, the equivalent of half of my salary as a public sector employee," says Lebanese resident Hala Dagher. Claudine Pichon, a Lebanese woman of French origins who sells homemade sweets, said, "A kilo of pistachios cost \$16 last year; it's \$22 this year. A big box of butter costs 9,500,000 Lebanese pounds, compared to 3,000,000 Lebanese pounds last year. If we take into account the cost of gas, electricity, and delivery, the cost of making and selling maamoul cookies has doubled."