



HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

17 - 23 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

Tuesday
18 April 2023

Lebanon's Parliament Votes to Postpone Municipal Elections

Lebanon's parliament postponed municipal elections for up to a year for a second time amid concerns the government would not be able to secure the needed funding in time for the polling. The delay comes as Lebanon's economy and infrastructure continue to crumble, with legislators in the deeply divided parliament unable to reach a settlement to end a presidential vacuum for almost six months, the Associated Press said. Lebanon's municipality elections were originally slated for May 2022 but were postponed for a year because they coincided with parliamentary elections. "This session is unconstitutional," MP Melhem Khalaf told the press before the session, which he did not attend. "It's one episode in a series of serious constitutional violations that... undermine democracy in Lebanon." Constitutionally, in the absence of a president, Lebanon's Parliament can meet only for electoral sessions until a head of state is appointed.

Cabinet Approves 4-Fold Increase to Public Sector Wages

The Cabinet approved a 4-fold increase to public sector wages, in addition to the two salaries that were previously approved, provided that attendance is 14 days per month. A temporary transportation allowance has also been approved at LBP 450 thousand per day, provided that attendance does not exceed 18 days per month. As for the private sector, the minimum wage for employees has been set at LBP 9 million per month, and a daily wage of LBP 400,000. The cost of living is to be increased to LBP 4,500,000, and daily transportation at LBP 250,000 for the private sector.

Clash Between Protestors and Security Forces as Lebanon's Cabinet Convenes

Hundreds of workers from Lebanon's public sector protested in front of the seat of government as the nation's caretaker cabinet convened to discuss their salaries. Public school teachers, retired army and police officers, and civil servants – angry at a lack of action to address the nation's currency crisis and the devaluation of their pay – demanded better wages and threatened to escalate action if the government did not deliver. They demanded a partial dollarization of their salaries and pensions, rather than payment in the constantly fluctuating and devaluing national currency, which has lost over 95 percent of its value. Protesters also demanded increased medical coverage, as their salaries allow for little economic mobility with which to seek medical care. Public sector salaries are now worth a fraction of what they were once worth, with some public sector workers making as little as the equivalent of \$50 a month. Meanwhile, public education is in disrepair, with the school year affected by months of off-and-on strikes as teachers, some of whom cannot afford to travel to school, demand living wages.

Thursday
20 April 2023

104 Syrian Refugees Poisoned in Arsal, Lebanon

104 Syrian refugees were poisoned in Arsal, Lebanon, after eating meals provided by an unnamed organization. Doctors have been assigned to examine them and an investigation has been opened in order to take the appropriate measures. The refugees were distributed between two hospitals and were later all discharged after receiving treatment. The number of meals provided by said organization reached 1,400 in 4 different camps. Governor of Baalbeck & Hermel, Bachir Khodr has added that he will not be naming the organization before making sure whether the meals were prepared by the organization itself or were bought ready-made from a restaurant. "I would rather wait for the investigation", he said via Twitter.

Lawyer Nizar Saghie Faced the Beirut Bar Association Council

Lawyer Nizar Saghie faced the Beirut Bar Association council today in a 5-hour-long hearing. The council had summoned him without giving a reason after he fought back against the amendments it approved last March to restrict lawyers' freedom. The council is expected to issue a decision about the summons in a few days. As he left the session, Saghie revealed that the atmosphere was positive and that he expects the syndicate's decision to be reversed, with some council members also hinting at it. Saghie stressed his commitment to opposing the amendments, and to lawyers' right to freedom of expression and defending community issues.

Lebanon Lawyers See Ban from Union as Political Interference

Lawyers in Lebanon have been increasingly alarmed by a recent ban from their union on media appearances not authorized by the syndicate, saying it amounts to political interference. Lawyers and human rights activists say the ban also violates laws on free speech and muzzles their accountability work. Lebanon's judiciary is widely seen as politicized and beholden to the government. 13 lawyers have filed a legal appeal against the association's ban; the judiciary is to decide on the case early next month. The International Monetary Fund and human rights organizations have urged Lebanon to reform its judiciary so it can function independently and effectively. The Beirut Bar Association lashed out at what it called a slanderous and misleading campaign by those seeking to defame the union and said it "would not yield to any pressure."

Friday
21 April 2023

Dozens of Syrians Expelled from Lebanon

Lebanon has deported dozens of Syrians back to the war-torn country they fled from as anti-Syrian sentiment grows amid a dire economic crisis. "The army has deported more than 50 Syrians from Lebanon in the past two weeks," an army official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to speak to the press. Another security official said dozens of Syrians had been expelled. They said Lebanon's army intelligence unit had been cracking down on undocumented Syrians, arresting them and handing them to border guards, who expelled them from Lebanon. "The army's detention centers are full," and other security agencies have refused to take in the arrested refugees, the army official said. "So the army had to take this measure and place them outside Lebanese borders," he added. The security and army officials said that Lebanese authorities did not coordinate the effort with Damascus, adding that some of the expelled refugees had returned to Lebanon with the help of smugglers who charged them \$100 per person. A humanitarian source told AFP they had noticed increased army intelligence raids on Syrian communities in Beirut and the Mount Lebanon area since the beginning of April. Approximately 450 Syrians had been arrested and at least 66 confirmed deported, they said.

Lebanon's Human Smugglers Ready for the Post-Ramadan Rush

People smugglers in Lebanon say migrant boats will soon be departing for Italy now that Ramadan is over. Interviewed as part of a wider research project on smuggling, migrant smugglers in Beirut and Tripoli revealed that as many as 2000 people have paid a deposit to reserve their place on the boats. Mohammed A. is a 42-year-old Lebanese taxi driver in northern Lebanon. "I met the smuggler a month ago," he told us. "I'm now counting the days to the travel date." He has paid \$2000 in advance to book places for himself, his two young sons, and his wife. The full price for the four of them is \$10,000. "We are going to borrow money, sell the car, and everything we have, including my wife's wedding ring," he said. In his view, the prospect of a dangerous journey to reach Europe is better than barely surviving in Lebanon.