



HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

31 JULY - 06 AUGUST, 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.

The articles shared in this brief are the liability of their respective news outlets and do not reflect the views of CLDH.



LEBANON

Monday
31 July 2023

'Clean up your country': Lebanon's environment ministry launches 100-day campaign

The Ministry of Environment launched a 100-day campaign under the slogan "Clean up Your Country". The programme started from the Beirut waterfront, with dozens gathering to collect what had been left by passersby, or trash thrown by people from their cars. Environment Minister Nasser Yassin said that this campaign is "a message to prohibit throwing waste randomly". The Ministry also targets municipalities: "It is also a way to affirm that the role of municipalities is crucial in cleaning up their cities, towns, and forests, and to support them, in order to spread environmental awareness". Waste collection companies are forced to reduce the frequency of their rounds, as they receive much less funding due to the economic and financial crisis. The question of where the trash will be treated remains unresolved. Sites where trash is collected for treatment and landfilling have turned into garbage mountains, causing environmental and health concerns. This raises concerns over health consequences, as, according to Human Rights Watch, "residents of areas where waste is dumped, landfilled or burned in the open air suffer from health problems including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, coughing, throat infections, skin conditions, and asthma". An improved waste management system, especially based on recycling and composting, could generate \$74 million annually, according to the American University of Beirut.

UN reports 11 killed as clashes continue to rock Ain Al-Hilweh camp

Fighting in Ain Al-Hilweh camp continued on Monday, after starting on Saturday between Islamist factions and the Fatah movement. On Sunday, parties had reached an agreement over a ceasefire, but it failed to be implemented. UNRWA reported that 11 individuals were killed and 40 were injured, including one of its staff. More than 2,000 people were displaced due to the clashes. All UNRWA services in the camp have been temporarily suspended. Shells also fell outside the camp, resulting in shops closing and a hospital being evacuated. The camp hosts 20% of the 250,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, meaning around 54,000 individuals, according to UNRWA figures. In response to the clashes, the Lebanese army closed all entrances to the camp. Rights groups and local officials warned of worsening humanitarian conditions for civilians trapped in Ain al-Hilweh camp, which hosts more than 50,000 individuals. A member of the Ain al-Hilweh Popular Committee reported that people "have been stuck in the camp without food and water for two days", as most humanitarian organizations stopped their activities due to security concerns.

Tuesday
01 August 2023

Cyprus deports 73 migrants to Lebanon

On Sunday, Cyprus deported 73 migrants, including 11 children, 9 women, and 53 men, to Lebanon. They were previously rescued off the Cypriot coasts. Cyprus has signed a readmission agreement with Lebanon, authorizing the return of individuals which “may be validly assumed” that they come from Lebanon. The 73 individuals, which included Syrians and Palestinians, actually departed in Syria, likely from Tartous. Despite this, they were returned to Lebanon. Lebanese authorities reportedly deported them to Syria, via the Masnaa Border Crossing Point. Their fate remains unclear.

Anti-LGBT rhetoric undermines rights in Lebanon, says HRW

Human Rights Watch reported “panic and terror among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people” after Hezbollah chief Nasrallah called for anti-gay violence. Nasrallah described same-sex relations as a “sexual perversion” and warned that gay people’s existence is a “threat to society”. Earlier in July, he explicitly called for gays and lesbians to be killed, and “to collectively face this phenomenon, by all means necessary, without any limits”. Such statements have sparked a homophobic wave, with multiple social media hate posts. However, such a wave is not exceptional, as the Government repeatedly bans pro-LGBT events, especially since an unlawful directive issued in June 2022 by Interior Minister Bassam al-Mawlawi. Security forces have also “regularly interfered with human rights events related to gender and sexuality”. Human Rights Watch called on the government and nongovernment actors [to] uphold freedom of expression and assembly for LGBT people and rights defenders and not attempt to undermine their fundamental human rights.

15 Ambassadors express ‘concern about ongoing obstruction’ of the probe on Beirut port blast

15 ambassadors gathered to urge Lebanese authorities to speed up judicial investigations and to express their concern about the “ongoing obstruction”. The ambassadors met with Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib to convey their message. The caretaker Minister replied that his government was “committed to revealing the circumstances surrounding the Beirut port explosion”, but that the responsibility “falls on the Lebanese Judiciary”. International pressure for an effective probe appears to increase. Earlier in July, the European Parliament also criticized the deadlock and called for “an independent and impartial fact-finding mission in order to determine the facts and circumstances of the Beirut explosion”. Despite repeated moves by Judge Bitar to restart the investigation, the latter is still in a deadlock. No step forward has been made since February, except for failed attempts, especially in January 2023, when Judge Bitar tried to resume the work but was countered by Prosecutor General Oueidat. The probe has been locked since 2021.

Wednesday
02 August 2023

Central Bank reserves fall by \$600 million in only 2 weeks

In the last two weeks of July, the Central Bank foreign exchange reserves fell by \$608 million, from \$9.65 billion to \$9.04 billion, as shown by BDL’s bi-monthly balance sheet published on August 1. Since April, the reserves have remained stable, as BDL was purchasing dollars in exchange for Lira, before re-injecting the dollars in the economy via the Sayrafa platform. However, starting in mid-July, BDL has funded Sayrafa operations “directly from BDL’s foreign exchange reserves, without resorting to the parallel market to purchase them”, explained Marwan Barakat, head of Bank Audi’s research department.

Thursday
03 August 2023

Israel files complaint against Lebanon at UN Security Council

Israel filed an official complaint to the UN Security Council, demanding Lebanon and the UNIFIL to take “immediate action” to prevent Hezbollah from establishing military infrastructure along the border. The Israeli Ambassador to the UN warned that “if immediate action is not taken against the continuing deterioration at the borders, the results could be devastating and lead to catastrophe”. Lebanon had previously sent dozens of complaints to the UN against the Israeli regime repeatedly violating the border, in particular for the near-daily flights over Lebanon, for reconnaissance purposes, or to bomb targets in Syria. Tension along the border has risen in the past months, with multiple ground violations from both sides, in particular the de facto annexation by Israeli forces of the Northern part of Ghajar, despite being on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line, and the establishment of tents by Hezbollah in the southern side of the Blue Line.

Towards the legalization of the State borrowing from the Central Bank?

The first vice governor of the Central Bank, Wassim Mansouri, stated in the past weeks that he would not authorize the government to borrow external currencies from the BDL, considering that there was no legal basis for it. This would mean the end of a long-term policy of financing the State with BDL reserves, against international standards of Central banks' independence, and clear separation from the Government. The caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati is therefore pushing for the submission of a law proposal that would allow the government to borrow foreign currencies from the Central Bank. Observers believe that legalizing these loans will not solve the negative consequences that are correlative to the financing by the Central Bank of the State's expenditures. Such legalization, which would require the Parliament to adopt a new law, is not likely to happen in the near future, as the Parliament is not allowed to vote on legislative proposals before electing a new President.

Joint letter to Human Rights Council calling for an international fact-finding mission into the Beirut blast

More than 300 organizations and individuals called the UN Human Rights Council to establish an international, independent, and impartial fact-finding mission into the 2020 Beirut Port Blast. Politicians charged with crimes related to the explosion have filed over 25 requests to dismiss judges involved in the probe, leading to the suspension of the investigation since December 2021. The last attempt by Judge Bitar to resume the investigation, in January 2023, was prevented by prosecutor Ghassan Oueidat, who filed a lawsuit, issued a travel ban against Bitar, and ordered the release of all those suspected of involvement in the explosion - a decision considered as illegal by the Beirut Bar Association, the Lebanese Judges Association, and the Lebanese Coalition for the Independence of the Judiciary. Lebanese authorities have failed to effectively respond to the call of 38 States at the Human Rights Council to safeguard the independence of the judiciary and carry out a swift, independent, impartial, credible, and transparent investigation. It is based on this failure that the letter calls for the Human Rights Council to establish a fact-finding mission.

Friday
04 August 2023

3 years after Beirut Port Blast, Lebanon remains unprepared to face a new disaster

Despite Lebanon being particularly vulnerable to natural (earthquakes, wildfires, floods, landslides, and droughts) and human-made catastrophes (in particular explosions), it lacks effective risk and disaster management strategies, the Public Source reports. Lebanon is considered one of the best Arab countries in disaster risk reduction policies, but many reasons prevent their enforcement. First, the economic crisis has considerably reduced the capacities of the State's funded agencies, including first-response ones such as the Beirut fire brigade or the Civil Defense, as they are funded in Lira but have to purchase equipment in dollars. For example, Lebanon has no planes for firefighting, and army helicopters are not sufficient to cover unreachable areas. Risk management projects have also been criticized for ignoring socio-cultural factors, excluding local communities, and lacking a clear command structure. For example, when Storm Norma struck Lebanon in January 2019, refugee camps were heavily impacted but were not included in the national strategy, leaving many behind. The different agencies also lack coordination mechanisms (for example, there is no structured coordination among hospitals) and have loosely defined responsibilities. This situation results in further deaths. For example, authorities could have coordinated to evacuate areas neighboring the port when the fire broke out, before the explosion, which could have avoided many deaths.

TikTok scammers target Syrian refugees with promises of immigration to Europe

In a statement, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) warned Syrian refugees against criminal schemes on TikTok. The scammers lure people with promises of visas or undocumented journeys to Europe and kidnap them for ransom or extort them for money. The victims are regularly brought to Syria, subjected to beatings, torture, and in some cases, death. This risk would be particularly important along the Syrian-Lebanese border and the Bekaa region. The absence of resettlement possibilities for most Syrian refugees pushes them into these dangerous practices. In an earlier report, the Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) highlighted how individuals deported to Syria by the Lebanese security agencies were subsequently kidnapped by non-state actors, beaten, and extorted for money. The warning by the ISF, therefore, contradicts the practical consequences of the security forces' policies, which empower kidnapping networks, as stressed by the ACHR: "The recent security campaign targeting Syrian refugees in Lebanon, resulting in their forced deportation, has contributed to the escalation of financial extortion cases across the border by human traffickers".

Saturday and Sunday
05 and 06 August
2023

UNRWA gradually restarts operations in Ain el-Hilweh after ceasefire

UNRWA reported that the situation in Ain el-Hilweh remains calm, after a ceasefire was declared on Thursday, August 3, and was mainly respected, despite the killing of an individual affiliated with an Islamist group on August 3. This new death brings the total death toll to 13, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent hospital in Saida. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) reopened all camp entrances, enabling some displaced to return to their homes. UNRWA stated that it was "unable to undertake a comprehensive damage assessment", as well as clearance of unexploded devices. Local organizations and UN agencies met on the 4th of August to coordinate the immediate relief response, after thousands were displaced, and after the camp residents remained without humanitarian support for days. UNRWA hosted hundreds of individuals in schools but announced that it will wait for the security situation to be stable before closing these temporary emergency shelters. Its activities are gradually restarting, beginning from the least affected areas.

Controversy over Kuwait funding to rebuild of Beirut Port silos

Caretaker Economy and Commerce Minister Amin Salam was criticized by Kuwait's foreign minister over calls for Kuwait funding to rebuild Beirut Port silos. The Minister called on Wednesday Kuwait to unblock funds that it promised in 2020 for the reconstruction of the silos, which were destroyed in the Beirut Port explosion in August 2020, and which further collapsed 2 years later. He stated that it could be done "with the stroke of a pen". Kuwait's foreign minister strongly condemned this statement, considering that it was an "intervention in its decision-making and domestic affairs". Amin Salam then held a press conference aimed at clarifying his previous statement: it "was not intended to transgress the principles and constitution and legal mechanisms in force in Kuwait or in Lebanon". The absence of reconstruction of the silos increases the risks of food insecurity. They previously had a capacity for 120,000 of wheat and grains, and were the only large storage in Lebanon. As a result, Lebanon is now unable to import large quantities of wheat as it has nowhere to store it. Lebanon was able to hold enough reserves for up to a year, but its reserves are not limited to 3 months at most. However, families of victims rejected the demolition and the reconstruction, arguing that the silos should be a memory building. According to former minister Fadi Abboud, the reconstruction of the silos on land would cost \$10 billion.



UNDEF
The United Nations
Democracy Fund



FNUD
Fonds des
Nations Unies
pour la démocratie

FUNDED BY THE UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND