



HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

18 - 24 SEPTEMBER, 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
18 September 2023

Syrian woman killed, ten-year-old son injured by Lebanon border guard fire

The Lebanese border guards killed a Syrian woman and injured her son on Sunday, while they were trying to enter Lebanon. The family previously fled the Deir az-Zour governorate, where fighting has been raging for weeks between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and local Arab militias. This death adds up to a second similar incident that occurred last week, in which two Syrians were killed and two were injured when landmines exploded as they tried to cross the border into Lebanon. Lebanese authorities recently vowed to clamp down on what it says has been an influx of Syrian refugees trying to cross into Lebanon.

Tuesday
19 September 2023

Water scarcity in Beirut, southern suburbs, and Metn, says Water Establishment

Areas of Beirut, its southern suburbs, and Metn have been experiencing a month-long water outage. The Beirut Mount Lebanon Water Establishment (EBML) stated that electricity cuts at the Dbayeh pump station and a malfunction in the supply of the Mushrif wells are causing water scarcity. EBML said it only had "its own limited resources after donor organizations informed them of the inability to secure more support to repair the flaws". On August 23, EBML announced that it would impose "a harsh" water rationing system due to its "inability to buy diesel in hard currency". Water supply has historically been very unequal in and around Beirut, with the west side suffering greater shortages than the east side. The shortages push residents to rely on private suppliers, despite much higher costs.

Wednesday
20 September 2023

"We will not allow human rights to be a cover-up title to the destruction of our people and our country", says General Aoun

In the framework of a visit to the Land Border Regiments, operating along the Syrian border, Army Commander Joseph Aoun thanked these units for "controlling the borders". He claimed that the army was operating "in accordance with international standards that protect human rights", but limited this to "a way that preserves the supreme national interest, which remains an absolute priority" for the army. In an attack on human rights defenders, he claimed that he "will not allow [human rights] to be a cover-up title to the destruction of our people and our country". He further added that "Lebanon can no longer tolerate it, and every Lebanese is responsible towards his country".

Lebanon's 2023 Draft Budget: Taxing the Many, Sparing the Rich

Lebanon's taxation system is notoriously unfair, regressive, fragmented, and leaky to the point that it has deprived the State of fiscal resources and left the middle- and low-income class to foot the bill., argue the Policy Initiative. The 2023 draft budget is consistent with previous years' drafts, as it disproportionately allocates tax burdens on those with limited income by imposing indirect taxes and minimizing taxes on those with capital and wealth. These indirect taxes (which represent 53% of the State's revenues in 2023, compared to 37% in 2019) will have a detrimental impact on lower and middle-income individuals, who spend a higher share of their income on consumption. Moreover, the budget plans tax exemptions, which will largely benefit more affluent and privileged households. The tax-to-GDP ratio remains 50% lower than the average of emerging economies, raising concerns on Lebanon's budget capacity. The Policy Initiative calls on Lebanon's ruling political class to reform its taxation system "if Lebanon is to build a healthy economic recovery, anchored in an inclusive, rights-based social contract".

Thursday

21 September 2023

Kataeb party presents policy solutions addressing Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Kataeb Leader Samy Gemayel organized a conference to present a policy to address the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. He claimed that 80% of Syria was safe enough to organize returns and that most Syrians in Lebanon were "economic migrants" not refugees. The Kataeb Party proposes the establishment of a Refugee Status Determination mechanism, to provide accurate data on the number of Syrians, their places of origin, and the reasons for each individual's presence in Lebanon. According to the party, this would facilitate informed decision-making. The Kataeb Party also urges the government of Lebanon to collaborate with relevant stakeholders to identify safe zones in Syria to organize returns. Security authorities should implement strict re-entry restrictions, meaning that they should, according to the Kataeb, deport those who entered outside official border crossing points. Gemayel also called for the establishment of camps along the Lebanese-Syrian border, managed by the UNHCR, to host Syrians while waiting for their return or resettlement. He also stressed on the need to register Syrian newborns, to cope with the issue of undocumented births among Syrians in Lebanon.

Friday

22 September 2023

Confusion and political opportunity in anti-UNHCR campaign

A controversy erupted over the spread of a picture of a "housing certificate" for a Syrian refugee obtained by the UNHCR. Officials and citizens sparked a condemnation campaign for what they considered a violation of Lebanese sovereignty. One of the most striking positions came from Hezbollah MP Ibrahim al-Musawi, who claimed that "the UNHCR is attacking Lebanese sovereignty", and considered that the Lebanese people are "required to take immediate measures against the [UNHCR] to deter it". However, the issuance of such documents is in full line with the protocol agreed by the UNHCR and the General Security in 2016, with the aim of renewing the residency of refugees registered with UNHCR. The latter added that these documents were essential for refugees to be able to obtain legal residency in Lebanon and benefit from basic services, such as registering their children in school. These certificates include a QR code, which can only be read by the General Security in order to verify the accuracy of the information on the document.

Saturday and Sunday
23 and 24 September
2023

Syrian refugees are "an existential threat" for Lebanon, says Joseph Aoun

In the framework of a ceremony opening a US-supported network of roads for the Army's border units in the Hermel region, Army Commander General Aoun claimed that "the displacement of Syrians represents an existential threat to Lebanon and the Lebanese". He attacked "some voices questioning the army's role in protecting the borders" based on human rights concerns, claiming they are "trying to obstruct its work and raise suspicions about it". Joseph Aoun responded to these critiques, saying, "We are continuing because our goal is the homeland and its interest, while your goal is your personal interest. We are dying so that the homeland can live, and you are killing the homeland for your own interests". He further stressed that the Lebanese Army was not racist and was giving human rights a top priority, but that "these rights were created to preserve human dignity, not to destroy it".

US Embassy denies threats to end support to Lebanese army

Multiple Lebanese news outlets claimed the US Assistant Secretary of State Barbara Leaf threatened to withdraw the US' support to the Lebanese Army if no president was elected in October. The US Embassy in Lebanon denied these reports, saying that Barbara Leaf "was deliberately misquoted by actors in Lebanon who want to drive a wedge between the United States and our Lebanese partners". The Embassy spokesperson added that "the United States remains fully committed to strengthening the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to secure Lebanon's borders, defend its sovereignty, and mitigate further instability". Washington is the biggest foreign aid donor to the Lebanese Army, both in financial aid and military equipment donation.

UN Human Rights Council Should Move to Investigate Beirut Blast, calls HRW

Human Rights Watch called once again for the Human Rights Council to start a fact-finding mission on the explosion that occurred in Beirut Port more than 3 years ago, in August 2020. At the Council last week, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk highlighted the lack of accountability and the repeated interference by Lebanese officials in the domestic investigation. These structural flaws pushed him to consider that "it may therefore be time to consider an international fact-finding mission to look into human rights violations related to the tragedy". Several countries supported this call, including Spain, speaking on behalf of EU Member States. Support for such a mission is amplifying. On August, 6 UN experts had previously voiced their support. Human Rights Watch calls on Member States to bring a resolution establishing this fact-finding mission at the council's next session in March.

Lebanese army 'exchanged tear gas, smoke bomb fire' with Israeli army

The Lebanese and Israeli armies said that they exchanged tear gas over the border, with each side claiming that the other one started the confrontation. The Lebanese army claimed that "Elements of the Israeli enemy violated the withdrawal line and fired smoke bombs at a Lebanese army patrol that was accompanying a bulldozer removing an earthen berm erected by the Israeli enemy north of the withdrawal line, the blue line, in the Bastra area". The Blue Line refers to the current demarcation line between the two countries, mapped by the UN and marking the line to which Israel withdrew when they left south Lebanon in 2000. UNIFIL said it was in discussion with both parties to decrease tensions and was monitoring the situation on the ground, but it did not state further on the responsibility of each side in this increase of tensions.

Deployment of Joint Palestinian force in Ain el-Hilweh postponed

The Joint Palestinian Security Force, made up of representatives of various political factions, was supposed to be deployed on Sunday 24 September, but was eventually postponed twice until Monday 25. After two successive waves of clashes in recent weeks that have left dozens dead and wounded, this measure aims at restoring stability in the Palestine refugee camp. The Commander of this Force, Mahmoud Ajoury, said that "if this maneuver is successful, it will be followed by the deployment of the joint force to the UNRWA schools after the remaining fighters have withdrawn". Indeed, militants from diverse Palestinian groups have been present in these schools, at the intersection between the conflicting parties' areas of influence, since the beginning of August. Ajoury hopes that the deployment "will make it possible to carry out the rest of the points of the agreement favoring the handover of the people in the killing of Abu Ashraf Armouch". However, other Palestinian groups are skeptical about this force, calling it "just a waste of time".



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