



HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

26 JUNE - 02 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
26 June 2023

EDL promises 6 hours of power per day in Beirut

Electricité du Liban (EDL) announced on Monday that it will increase the supply of electricity to several Beirut neighborhoods by 2 hours per day, reaching a daily supply of 6 hours. The selected areas were chosen according to their network violation rate, in a wish to encourage customers to pay their bills. EDL only checked 58 substations and plans to check all 800 connection points throughout the country. The fuel used by EDL to provide electricity is currently provided by a Lebanese-Iraqi barter agreement, signed in 2021 and renewed since then. In March 2023, Human Rights Watch published a report highlighting the failure of the Lebanese State to provide sufficient, reliable, safe, clean, accessible, and affordable electricity, therefore hindering people's access to basic human rights such as food, water, education and health care. According to HRW, this situation results from 30 years of failure by the Lebanese politicians to properly manage the electricity company. HRW recommended that the Lebanese authorities invest in renewable energy sources, which would increase access to electricity, lessen pollution, and create job opportunities.

250,000 refugees in Lebanon in need of resettlement, UNHCR says

In its newly released Projected Global Resettlement Needs Assessment for 2024, UNHCR sees a 20% increase in global resettlement needs for next year, reaching 2.4 million refugees worldwide. In Lebanon, 250,000 refugees are in need of resettlement, whereas only 8,224 (7,490 Syrians) were resettled in 2022. The worsening economic crisis pushes refugees to adopt "harmful coping strategies", including child labor and school separation, skipping meals and assuming unsustainable debt, early marriage, engaging in sex work or other high-risk employment. The methodology of the UNHCR to determine who is in need of resettlement is subject to criticism. For example, it prioritizes "victims or those at risk of gender-based violence", but does not consider that all women and girls fall under this scope. It also targets "refugees at particular risk of refoulement", despite indiscriminate deportations from Lebanon. UNHCR calls on States to develop resettlement pathways, noting that "a notable reduction in resettlement opportunities would likely be viewed by host States as a reduction in support from the international community and an implicit endorsement of increasing returns, thus further exacerbating this possibility". The UNHCR stresses the needs of refugees from Syria, but also from Sudan and Ethiopia, as they "are at risk of arbitrary detention and deportation".

5 years on, no tangible progress in enforcing Anti-Torture Law

On the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, a coalition of nine organizations, including CLDH, urges the Lebanese authorities to enforce Lebanon's Anti-Torture Law, adopted on September 19, 2017. The Lebanese authorities have failed to fully implement the law, resulting in impunity and further perpetration of torture. For example, the National Preventative Mechanism against Torture, which was established to monitor the progress of torture complaints and conduct visits to detention sites, remains ineffective, as its implementation decrees are yet to be adopted. This lack of implementation results in new cases of torture. In one prominent example, B.A.S., a Syrian refugee, died in August 2022 after being arrested by the State Security and being allegedly brutally tortured. The complaint was referred to the military judiciary, contrary to the provisions outlined in the Anti-Torture Law. The lawyers were explicitly granted the right to be present with detainees during preliminary interrogations by security services in the 2020 amendment of the Code of Criminal Procedure. However, security services have repeatedly violated this right.

Tuesday

27 June 2023

Journalists refuse to appear before Cybercrime Bureau

Journalists Rabih Farran and Rihab Daher refused to appear before the Cybercrime Bureau to be interrogated. They were previously summoned to appear in a defamation, libel and slander case filed by the Lebanese actress Nadine Njeim, for their criticism of the 'Salon Zahra' series, which she acted in. Several journalists publicly expressed support to Farran and Daher, as summoning journalists to appear before security services is commonly used in an attempt to silence criticism. Such summoning is illegal, as the Lebanese Publications Law stipulates that the body in charge of investigating journalism-related accusations is the Publications Court and not security authorities such as the Cybercrime Bureau. In April 2023, the Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression called on the Lebanese authorities to take measures to ensure compliance with international norms, such as restricting the criminalization only to "statements that amount to advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence".

Wednesday

28 June 2023

Lebanese government works on "repatriation" of "at least 180 000 Syrians"

The caretaker Minister of Displaced People Issam Sharafeddine visited the Syrian Minister of Interior in Damascus on 24-25 June to discuss the return of Syrian refugees and a coming Lebanese ministerial delegation visit. This delegation will include Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Displaced People, Social Affairs, Labour, Agriculture, Culture, Tourism and Information. It will work on a new initiative to "repatriate not less than 180,000 Syrians in the first step", Sharafeddine said. A joint committee would be created between the Syrian and Lebanese governments and the UNHCR to enable a safe return. So far, in Syria, returnees have faced arrest, enforced disappearance, and indiscriminate violence, such as bombings. Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea called for the return of all Syrian refugees by the end of 2023, in a new hate speech escalation. In July 2022, the Lebanese Government had already announced a plan to return 15,000 Syrians per month, but its implementation failed, with only a few hundreds returnees in total.

Lebanon economic crisis worsened by vested interests, IMF says

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) published its first comprehensive financial assessment (called 'Article IV') since the beginning of the economic crisis in Lebanon in 2019. It said the crisis had been compounded "by a failure to take much needed policy action, hampered by a lasting political crisis and resistance from vested interests to reforms". No action could lead the country "down an unpredictable road". More than 1 year after Lebanon and IMF signed a staff agreement in April 2022, the conditions necessary to deblock a \$3 billion financing programme are still unmet. Even the few steps taken, such as the banking secrecy law, do not meet IMF's expectations. The IMF warns of the "very high cost" that an economic stabilization without reforms would imply, despite it being the political leaders' preferred solution. The organization expects a new decrease of the GDP in 2023 and expects the public debt to double up to 547% of GDP by 2023 in the absence of reforms. Due to the absence of financial sector restructuring, banks clients lost \$10 billion between March 2020 and January 2023. The IMF also provided policy recommendations: credible financial sector restructuring, fiscal strategy consistent with debt sustainability, unification of the exchange rates, and efforts in governance and anticorruption.

Lebanon abstains from UN vote on Syria's missing persons committee

The United Nations General Assembly voted in majority in favor of the establishment of an independent commission to clarify the fate of forcibly disappeared persons in Syria. The fate of around 100,000 disappeared persons since 2011 remains unknown. Lebanon abstained from voting, despite many Lebanese being among the persons whose fate will be investigated. Indeed, as the new body does not have any time limitation, it will also cover the disappearances of Lebanese people in Syria during the Syrian occupation (1978-2005). Lebanon has adopted a neutral position regarding the conflict in Syria, with some political parties being strongly opposed to Bashar el-Assad and others providing military support to the regime. The mandate of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic will also cover Syrians forcibly disappeared after being deported by the Lebanese authorities to Syria.

Lebanon ranked 132nd out of 146 in a global gender equality ranking.

In the Global Gender Gap Report 2023 published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Lebanon dropped from 119th in 2022 to 132nd out of 146 countries, and from 2nd to 7th out of 12 Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries. At the regional level, the MENA region has the lowest score globally. Among the different indicators that the WEF uses to score the countries, Lebanon ranks 127th in economic participation and opportunities, 90th in educational attainment, 68th for health and survival and 144th for political empowerment. However, the WEF lacks data on education, where Lebanon ranks the highest, which could impact the value of this data. According to the data, 55.4% of workers in the informal sector are women, compared to only 5.9% in firms top managers and 4.7% in firms majority ownership. In addition to conservative norms, Lebanon is characterized by legal gender inequality: Lebanese women cannot pass their citizenship to their children, and they are at disadvantage compared to men in matters of inheritance, divorce, reproductive autonomy, and access to justice.

Friday
30 June 2023

Salameh ex-assistant charged in France for money laundering

Marianne Hoayek was questioned on Friday in Paris and placed under investigation for criminal conspiracy and money laundering. She is suspected of having taken part in the creation of real estate and banking assets in Europe for the benefit of Riad Salameh and his relatives, through massive misappropriation of Lebanese public funds. Both Salameh and Hoyaek rejected the accusations, the first arguing that he built his fortune when he worked in investment bank Merrill Lynch before he became governor of Central Bank, and the latter claiming that her fortune comes "mainly from donations from her father". In addition to charges in France, Salameh faces an Interpol red notice, asking authorities to detain him pending possible extradition or other legal action. As Lebanon does not extradite its nationals and as the Lebanese judiciary system provides large impunity to the political ruling class, Salameh is likely to remain unpunished.

Salameh's term at the head of the Central bank will end in late July, after 3 decades of ruling. The question of who will then run the Central bank remains unanswered. However, Megaphone recently reported that caretaker Prime Minister Mikati and Speaker Nabih Berri are working on solutions to keep Salameh ruling the Central bank after the end of his term.

Saturday and Sunday
01 and 02 July 2023

Two men shot dead near Qornet al-Sawda

Tensions appear to have escalated on Saturday between residents of Bsharri and the Bkaasafrine locality in Dinnieh, resulting in 2 people being shot dead. The army reported having arrested several individuals. The failure to disarm Lebanese society after the civil war (1975-1990) resulted in the persistence of large amounts of weapons, which now leads to their frequent usage, resulting in deaths and severe injuries. Security situations are common in this region, caused by land disputes and water supply issues. To cope with this situation, the Army declared the region a no man's land and a military training zone. Political and religious leaders quickly called for investigation and de-escalation, due to fears of inter-sectarian tensions.



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