



HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

22 - 28 MAY, 2023



UNDEF
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Democracy Fund



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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
22 May 2023

Physical and sexual abuse and exploitation of Kenyan and Ethiopian workers

This Is Lebanon published the stories of two migrant workers, Cheryl and Marta, who accused engineers Rana Eid and her husband Qassem Bayram of physical and sexual abuse and exploitation. Cheryl, a Kenyan worker, said that Qassem Bayram sexually assaulted her twice, while Rana Eid deducted \$50 from her monthly salary, beat her, and threatened to kill her, prompting Cheryl to flee a few months after starting to work for them in 2019. After Cheryl's escape, the couple hired Marta, an Ethiopian worker, between 2019 and 2022, who ended up only receiving \$1,321 out of the \$6,600 she was owed. Marta said that she was beaten and burned with an iron by Rana Eid, who also banned her from communicating with her family and only paid her salary twice during the entire three years of work. This Is Lebanon stated that they contacted Labor Minister Moustafa Bayram to request help in this case but have received no response. The group holds him responsible for investigating cases of forced labor and holding those involved accountable.

Tuesday
23 May 2023

Lebanese security agencies arrest 30 Syrian refugees during raid on village in Matn district

Lebanese security agencies stormed Baskinta village in the Metn district at dawn and arrested 30 Syrian refugees, according to sources from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR). The fate of the arrested refugees remains unknown, as their families could not know if they were deported to Syria or if they are still in the custody of the Lebanese authorities.

Wednesday
24 May 2023

Prominent Egyptian rights activist briefly detained in Lebanon

Lebanese authorities briefly detained a prominent Egyptian blogger and human rights activist, his lawyer and sister said, but the reason for his arrest was unclear. Tarek was taken to police intelligence headquarters in Beirut where he spent about five hours and was later released, according to his lawyer, Farouk Moghrabi. The reason behind the arrest was not immediately clear, Moghrabi said. Sara Tarek later wrote that her brother was released and is at home. Security officials did not directly confirm Tarek's arrest and later release. Mary Lawlor, the UN's independent expert on human rights defenders, tweeted: "I hear extremely disturbing news" that an Egyptian human rights defender in exile in Lebanon was arrested today "with no warrant." She tagged Lebanon's foreign ministry in her tweet. A group of Lebanese activists had planned to hold a protest outside police headquarters to demand Tarek's release, but it was called off after he was set free.

Thursday
25 May 2023

Eligible Syrian refugees in Lebanon to receive aid in dollars

Syrian refugees in Lebanon who are eligible for cash assistance will be able to withdraw money in US dollars by the end of May, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees announced. The change in cash assistance for Syrian refugees was made to match similar assistance programs that provide cash aid to support Palestinian refugees and economically vulnerable Lebanese citizens in dollars rather than the rapidly devaluing Lebanese pound. "As of the end of May, refugees will be able to redeem their cash assistance in both currencies," said UNHCR spokeswoman Lisa Abu Khaled. "The option of retrieving cash assistance in Lebanese pounds will still be available." Eligible Syrian refugee families can now receive a maximum of \$125 monthly in cash assistance from UNHCR and the World Food Programme. However, most families receive only partial assistance. "Cash assistance provided to vulnerable persons in Lebanon, both Lebanese and refugees, should reflect the increasingly deteriorating situation with a view to ensure that minimum survival standards are fulfilled," Ms. Abu Khaled said. Syrian refugees who qualified for the needs-based assistance previously received 2,500,000 Lebanese pounds, or about \$25, from UNHCR, while the WFP provided eligible families with 1,100,000 Lebanese pounds (around \$11) per person for up to five people. This meant that the maximum that a family of five could receive in assistance was about \$80. When handed out in the local currency, the aid was susceptible to significant devaluation. This change would mark the first time Syrian refugees receive cash assistance in dollars since Lebanon's economic crisis began in 2019, contrary to popular belief.

Lebanon struggles with high suicide rates

Lebanon has seen a troubling rise in deaths by suicide amid prevailing economic meltdown and political turmoil that has affected everything, including mental health. More than 80% of people in Lebanon are struggling with multi-dimensional poverty, according to the United Nations, with wages often worth only 10% of what they used to be. This situation creates fear in households across the country, who are desperate for jobs to feed their families. More than 38 suicide cases have been recorded in Lebanon since the beginning of 2023, but the real number can be much higher, as many cases are not recorded due to fear of social stigma. According to Embrace, one person ends their life every two days and one person tries to end their life every 6 hours in Lebanon. Moreover, the suicide attempts cannot be attributed solely to socio-economic factors, as risk factors vary.

Lebanon's Education Minister holds meeting focusing on academic year continuity, holding of official exams

Lebanon's Caretaker Minister of Education and Higher Education, Abbas Halabi, met with the heads of the secondary, primary, vocational and technical public education associations to discuss teachers' demands, the continuity of the academic year, and the conduction of official exams. Attendees expressed their insistence on continuing the academic year and holding official exams on time. Additionally, the rights of students to complete the school year and the completion of exams were emphasized, in addition to securing the rights of teachers and meeting their demands, paying productivity allowances on an ongoing basis, and not depriving teachers of the summer months.

Friday
26 May 2023

Internal Security Forces agent suspected of killing his ex-wife

An Internal Security Forces agent is suspected of killing his ex-wife in Baba, Lebanon, by running her over with his car before fleeing. The victim's body was still at the scene, awaiting the arrival of the coroner, while forensic investigations have begun. The suspect is described as being in his fifties, and the incident is currently under investigation by the security forces. Women's rights associations have highlighted a rise in violence against women in Lebanon, which they attribute to the country's worsening economic and social conditions.

Lebanon's poor and vulnerable households to get \$300m from World Bank

The World Bank approved \$300 million in additional financing for Lebanon's national social safety net programme to provide cash support to poor and vulnerable Lebanese households. The financing will "further support the development of a unified social safety net delivery system in Lebanon to allow a better response to ongoing and future shocks", the World Bank said in a statement. The financial package is the second wave of financing to Lebanon's Emergency Crisis and Covid-19 Response Social Safety Net (ESSN) project, which benefits approximately 82,000 vulnerable households for up to 14 months through cash transfers. The ESSN was approved in 2021 with \$246 million, two years into Lebanon's economic crisis and following the global pandemic, to provide financial aid to some of Lebanon's poorest and most vulnerable. The World Bank said the additional financing would "continue to help Lebanon protect its population from the impact of various crises".

Saturday and Sunday
27 and 28 May 2023

UN delays dual-currency cash help to refugees in crisis-hit Lebanon

The United Nations has delayed a decision to give Syrian refugees in Lebanon cash help partly in US dollars after objections from senior Lebanese officials that this could exacerbate tensions with hard-pressed locals. The UN said in a statement that following Lebanese requests a decision had been made to temporarily pause the use of dollars alongside Lebanese pounds for next month's disbursement of cash assistance to refugees, while discussions continue on the appropriate way to give aid. The Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon Imran Riza and other UN officials had on Tuesday said their agencies would begin distributing aid to refugees in both dollars and Lebanese pounds. They said the "rapid depreciation" of the pound, fluctuations of the exchange rate, and the logistical challenges of securing large amounts of local currency had made it "impossible for the United Nations and partners to continue to disburse cash assistance only in Lebanese Pounds." But the same agencies reversed course after meetings on Friday with Lebanon's caretaker prime minister Najib Mikati and social affairs minister Hector Hajjar. Hajjar had told a press conference his ministry had not been properly informed of the decision to provide aid in dollars, which he said would increase tensions between refugees and Lebanese. A government source said Mikati, too, had not been aware of the "dollarization" of aid.