



Briefing Note for the Meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Lebanon's Human Rights Crisis: A Crisis of Accountability

The Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH) welcomes the visit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at a time when Lebanon continues to face unprecedented political, economic and security challenges.

Today, parts of Lebanon remain under Israeli occupation. Dozens of Lebanese nationals have been taken from Lebanese territory and remain unlawfully detained in Israel, while reports of enforced disappearances continue to grow. Civilians in southern Lebanon continue to face attacks and displacement with inadequate protection.

As human rights organizations, we continue documenting these violations and supporting victims, yet too often we stand alone. The international community has not taken meaningful steps to ensure protection or accountability. At the same time, the recently adopted Article 13 of the Tripartite Agreement raises serious concerns by potentially restricting Lebanon's ability to seek accountability through international legal mechanisms, including the ICC, at a time when accountability for grave violations is more necessary than ever.

While the recent war, the economic collapse, and political paralysis have severely affected the country's institutions, the human rights situation in Lebanon today cannot simply be understood as a consequence of crisis. Rather, CLDH continues to document a deeper and more systemic problem: **the progressive erosion of accountability and the rule of law.**

Across our legal aid, detention monitoring, documentation, and advocacy work, the same structural failures repeatedly emerge:

- widespread impunity;
- weak implementation of existing laws;
- prolonged arbitrary detention;



- shrinking civic space;
- increasing discrimination against refugees and migrants;
- continued violations of international humanitarian law.

These challenges require sustained engagement by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), both through public advocacy and continued technical support to Lebanese institutions and civil society.

1. Torture, Arbitrary Detention and Access to Justice

Despite the adoption of **Law No. 65/2017 criminalizing torture**, torture and ill-treatment continue to be reported, while accountability remains extremely limited. CLDH's detention monitoring and legal aid work consistently reveal systemic violations affecting Lebanese nationals, refugees and migrant workers alike.

Among the most recurring concerns documented by CLDH are:

- denial of access to legal counsel during the first hours of detention;
- failure to inform detainees of their rights under Article 47 of the Code of Criminal Procedure;
- prolonged pre-trial detention;
- detention in police stations and military facilities not intended for long-term custody;
- administrative failures that unnecessarily prolong detention;
- language barriers preventing foreign nationals from effectively participating in proceedings.

These are not isolated procedural mistakes but recurring structural deficiencies that undermine the right to liberty and a fair trial.

Illustrative examples and evidence

- CLDH recently represented a migrant worker initially accused of drug trafficking despite the absence of evidence supporting such charges. Both the Investigating Judge and the Indictment Chamber concluded that the facts amounted only to personal drug use. Nevertheless, the individual remained detained for approximately nine months because he had no lawyer, was never informed of his



right to request release, and administrative errors caused the court to process the file as though he were not in detention.

The case demonstrates how the absence of early legal assistance can trigger a cascade of procedural failures resulting in arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

- CLDH's legal aid and detention monitoring programs handled 2,315 cases in 2024, including 522 detention cases, while its 2025 reporting documented persistent patterns of arbitrary detention, poor prison conditions, and abuses affecting refugees and migrant workers. These findings are consistent with broader structural indicators showing 9,254 incarcerated persons, 194.4% prison occupancy, and 87.1% of detainees awaiting trial in Lebanon.

CLDH calls on OHCHR to:

- continue advocating for the effective implementation and amendment of Law 65/2017;
- support the operationalization and strengthening of the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture;
- encourage alternatives to detention and measures to reduce prolonged pre-trial detention;
- continue supporting independent detention monitoring by civil society organizations.

2. Refugee Protection and Respect for the Principle of Non-Refoulement

Lebanon continues to witness growing pressure on Syrian refugees through deportations, discriminatory administrative measures, restrictions on legal residence, and increasing anti-refugee rhetoric.

CLDH's legal work has documented several cases in which individuals fleeing persecution remained at risk of removal despite credible protection concerns.



Illustrative examples and evidence:

- CLDH represented a Syrian Druze refugee who fled Suwayda after sectarian violence and threats against his life. During criminal proceedings, the defense relied upon Article 3 of the Convention against Torture and submitted evidence demonstrating the real risk of persecution upon return.

Despite these submissions, the court ordered his deportation, considering that conditions in his area of origin had improved. This case illustrates the growing gap between Lebanon's international obligations and judicial practice regarding the principle of non-refoulement.

- CLDH's research on newly arrived Syrian refugees and pushbacks has documented persistent protection gaps, including barriers to legal residency, increased risks of deportation, and limited access to essential services. In 2024, CLDH provided direct support to 4,075 individuals through its legal aid, rehabilitation, advocacy, and capacity-building programs, many of whom faced heightened protection risks. These findings mirror the broader context in Lebanon, where approximately 1.12 million Syrian refugees reside, while only 17% of Syrians aged 15 and above possess legal residency, according to UNHCR, significantly increasing their vulnerability to exploitation, detention, and forced return.

CLDH calls on OHCHR to:

- publicly reaffirm the absolute prohibition of refoulement under international law;
- strengthen monitoring of deportations and returns;
- encourage greater international responsibility-sharing for refugee protection;
- support legal documentation and access to protection mechanisms.

3. Migrant Domestic Workers and Structural Exploitation under the Kafala System

CLDH continues to document serious human rights violations affecting migrant domestic workers under Lebanon's sponsorship (Kafala) system.

These include:



- confinement within employers' homes;
- confiscation of documents;
- non-payment of wages;
- barriers to justice;
- arbitrary detention;
- forced labor indicators;
- exclusion from Lebanese labor legislation.

The multiple crises affecting Lebanon have further increased the vulnerability of migrant workers.

Illustrative examples and evidence:

- One migrant domestic worker left an abusive employer after months of exploitation and later survived through informal work. She was arrested, sentenced to pay a financial penalty that she was unable to afford, and remained imprisoned solely because of her inability to pay. Only after intervention by legal aid providers was she released.

Her case illustrates how structural vulnerability, poverty and lack of legal representation combine to produce disproportionate criminal consequences.

- CLDH's latest research demonstrates that Lebanon's overlapping political, economic, and security crises have significantly deepened the vulnerabilities created by the Kafala system. Before the country's collapse, Lebanon hosted an estimated 250,000 migrant domestic workers, the vast majority of whom were women. More recent data indicate that 160,738 migrant workers were identified in Lebanon in 2023, with women representing 65% of the migrant population. CLDH's latest documentation further shows that the recent conflict exacerbated existing patterns of discrimination, leaving many migrant workers excluded from humanitarian assistance, exposed to arbitrary detention, and facing serious barriers to healthcare and legal protection.

CLDH calls on OHCHR to:

- advocate for the abolition of the Kafala system;



- support the adoption of legislation extending labor protections to domestic workers;
- strengthen accountability for trafficking, forced labor and exploitation;
- improve access to legal assistance and remedies.

4. Shrinking Civic Space and Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression remains under increasing pressure in Lebanon.

CLDH remains concerned by:

- judicial harassment of journalists and activists;
- intimidation of human rights defenders;
- increasing restrictions on criticism of both Lebanese and foreign public authorities;
- proposed legislative amendments that risk undermining media freedom, particularly Article 104 of the draft Media Law currently before Parliament.

A vibrant civil society remains essential for Lebanon's democratic future and requires continued international support.

Illustrative examples and evidence:

- CLDH's UPR reporting warns that the current draft Media Law could significantly undermine freedom of expression through broadly worded provisions that may be used to criminalize legitimate speech and restrict media independence. This legislative trend is accompanied by increasing harassment, intimidation, and censorship targeting journalists, activists, lawyers, content creators, and other public voices, contributing to a climate of self-censorship. Against this backdrop, the work of civil society remains essential. In 2024, CLDH alone produced 40 weekly human rights briefs, 28 public statements, 16 advocacy letters, 13 press releases, 12 advocacy videos, and organized 12 roundtable discussions, demonstrating the critical role of independent organizations in documenting violations, informing public debate, and advocating for accountability.



CLDH calls on OHCHR to:

- continue engaging Lebanese authorities regarding freedom of expression;
- monitor restrictive legislative initiatives;
- support the protection of journalists and human rights defenders.

5. Accountability for Violations During the Recent Conflict

The recent conflict generated devastating humanitarian consequences for civilians across Lebanon. CLDH has documented repeated attacks on healthcare facilities, ambulances, and medical personnel, raising serious concerns regarding compliance with the protections afforded to medical missions under international humanitarian law. The organization has also documented patterns of attacks affecting civilians and civilian infrastructure, reinforcing the need for independent investigations and accountability for violations committed during the conflict.

Particularly concerning are the repeated attacks against medical personnel and healthcare facilities, raising serious concerns under international humanitarian law. These violations require independent investigation and accountability.

Illustrative examples and evidence:

- CLDH's article "A Ceasefire That Never Held" reports that by October 2024 intensified hostilities had resulted in more than 2,400 deaths and the displacement of approximately 1.2 million people, according to humanitarian reporting cited by CLDH.
- The same CLDH article highlights attacks affecting civilian infrastructure and essential services, including reported strikes on approximately 30 branches of Al-Qard Al-Hassan, and frames these incidents as raising serious concerns under the principle of distinction.

CLDH calls on OHCHR to:

- support independent investigations into violations of international humanitarian law;



- promote accountability for attacks against civilians, medical personnel and healthcare facilities;
- strengthen protection for humanitarian workers.

6. Justice, Accountability and the Rule of Law

CLDH remains concerned by several broader rule of law challenges.

Although progress has been made through the establishment of the National Commission for Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons, implementation remains slow, and many families continue to be denied their right to truth.

CLDH also welcomes continued efforts toward abolition of the death penalty.

At the same time, CLDH remains concerned by the current draft General Amnesty Law, which risks institutionalizing impunity by granting broad amnesties without ensuring victims' rights, accountability, or effective remedies. Any future legislation should instead adopt narrowly tailored humanitarian criteria while preserving access to justice.

CLDH calls on OHCHR to:

- continue supporting implementation of the Law on Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons;
- encourage technical cooperation on identification and documentation processes;
- support abolition of the death penalty;
- encourage accountability-centered justice reforms rather than broad amnesties.

Conclusion

Lebanon's current human rights challenges extend beyond the consequences of conflict and economic collapse. They reflect a broader and increasingly entrenched crisis of accountability.

Whether documenting torture, arbitrary detention, attacks on healthcare, restrictions on civic space, exploitation of migrant workers, or risks of refoulement, CLDH continues to



observe the same underlying pattern: institutions that too often fail to protect the most vulnerable and mechanisms of accountability that remain weak or ineffective.

CLDH therefore calls on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to maintain sustained engagement with Lebanon through public advocacy, technical cooperation, support for independent civil society, and continued efforts to strengthen accountability and the rule of law.