



# HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

11 - 17 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**  
11 September 2023

### **UN Rights chief urges international probe into Beirut Port Blast**

Before the Human Rights Council, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights denounced the lack of accountability for the persons responsible for the Beirut Port Blast, explaining that “concerns have been raised about interference in the investigation”. He added that “it may therefore be time to consider an international fact-finding mission to look into human rights violations related to this tragedy.”

### **The government adopts new measures against Syrians in Lebanon**

The government has announced new measures against the entry of Syrians into Lebanon and their presence in the country. First, the ministers decided to send a delegation to Damascus, headed by Minister Bou Habib, to discuss the subject with Syrian authorities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also tasked to request the UNHCR to facilitate the return of Syrians, and to sensitise the international community to the alleged “gravity” of the situation. The Lebanese Security Forces, represented in the forum by Joseph Aoun, commander of the Army, and Elias Baïssari, interim head of the General Security, were asked to cooperate to reinforce border control at sea and land to send back those entering so-called “illegally” in Lebanon, to lead operations against smugglers, and to work on the media coverage of all these operations. The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities has been asked to establish databases on Syrians in each municipality. It must also ask “all organizations”, whether Lebanese or not, to cooperate with the authorities (in an unspecified manner), threatening them with sanctions if they do not.

**Tuesday**  
12 September 2023

### **Sidon a ‘ghost town’ as clashes rock Ain al-Hilweh camp**

As sporadic clashes continue to shake Lebanon’s largest Palestinian refugee camp, the adjacent coastal city of Sidon has been described as a ghost town as roads, schools, and businesses have had to close. Among the dozen persons killed, a Lebanese civilian was killed while driving on the outskirts of the camp. Other stray bullets and shells have fallen on schools, government buildings, businesses, and Lebanese army checkpoints in the city, wounding civilians and soldiers. The main road linking Sidon to Beirut and south Lebanon both ways has been cut off, and residents have been asked to stay indoors. The clashes have seen an increase in anti-Palestinian sentiment from some Lebanese on social media.

Wednesday  
13 September 2023

### UNRWA: New clashes in Ain al-Hilweh worse than those of July-August

In its 7th Situation Report since the beginning of the clashes in Ain al-Hilweh in July, UNRWA states that clashes have taken a greater scale compared to the July-August ones. "With fighting taking place on multiple fronts, the majority of neighborhoods in the camp are reported to have been affected", which represents a "more widespread [impact] than the July-August clashes, which were focused primarily on the camp's northern sector". UNRWA considers "severe" the damage to property and infrastructure in multiple areas of the camp, based on media and social media coverage. UNRWA counted at least 11 persons killed and over 100 injured.

### Lebanon-Israel-UNIFIL discuss land border demarcation

The Lebanese Army announced that a tripartite meeting was held on Tuesday between Lebanon, the Israeli regime, and UNIFIL to discuss the land border demarcation between the two countries. Reportedly, no agreement was reached. Lebanon considers that its borders were demarcated in 1923 through the Paulet-Newcombe agreement between the British and French governments, although in practice, the Blue Line, drawn by the UN following the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, currently marks the separation between the 2 countries. 13 points remain unmarked by the Blue Line and disputed. They are mainly located in the three villages of Ghajar, Kfar Shuba, and the Shebaa farms. The Lebanese Army "denied the information circulating about reaching an agreement in this regard", and added that "it was decided that meetings would continue under the auspices of the United Nations". Tuesday's meeting follows several months of tensions over Lebanon's southern border, including at the village of Ghajar, which Israeli forces *de facto* annexed in July.

### Human Rights Watch: New school year at risk

Human Rights Watch calls on the Lebanese Ministry of Education and foreign donors to "reach an agreement that opens schools without interruption and averts a disastrous fifth year of lost learning for students". The school year is set to begin in October. However, as the caretaker Government only provided a third of what the Ministry had originally requested, the schools only have enough budget for three or four months, leaving at least four months unfunded. Donors are still to say how much funding they will provide for the coming school year, although their funding is "crucial for public schools, which teach both Lebanese and Syrian refugee children". Bill Van Esveld, associate children's rights director at HRW said "Over the last four years, school closures in Lebanon have pushed over a million Syrian and Lebanese children to the brink. If the government and foreign donors don't reach an agreement that will keep schools open, Lebanon is looking at a children's rights catastrophe". Since 2019, education has been considerably impacted, as schools remained closed for protests, COVID-19 restrictions, and teachers' strikes. Donors are reluctant to pay salaries for staff fulfilling their normal job duties, even though they have provided \$132 million to top up the salaries of Lebanese security forces since late 2022. "Donor governments concerned for Lebanon's national stability should consider the massive, destabilizing impact of a lost generation of children for Lebanon and the region", HRW highlighted. It also stressed that "Lebanon should drop undue restrictions that have prevented refugee children from access to education, like requirements for documents or residency in Lebanon", or the shutdown in second shift classes for Syrian children due to the first-shift teachers' strike, justified as an "equality" measure.

Thursday  
14 September 2023

### The Army's recommendations on refugees: Coordination with Syria and controlling NGOs

The Army Commander Joseph Aoun and the acting Director General of the General Security Elias Al-Bisari presented a report to the caretaker Government containing key information and recommendations on the refugee file, in particular the alleged recent arrival of a few thousands of Syrians in Lebanon. The Army presented the measures it takes to control the Syrian border, including the deployment of almost 5,000 staff who carry out dozens of patrols per day. It stated that it arrested and deported 23,597 persons back to Syria since the beginning of the year, including 8,183 in August. The Army's main recommendation is to establish a political coordination between Lebanese and Syrian States to solve the alleged issue. The Army also recommended the government to adopt a clear policy of organizing, under the government's supervision, the work of non-governmental organizations supporting Syrian refugees, stressing that it should not be "the other way around".

### IMF mission faces status quo of MPs and employers

After arriving on Monday in Lebanon, a delegation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) held several meetings with Parliamentary Commissions and with economic organizations representing employers. The Lebanese representatives have reportedly tried to convince the IMF to ease its position, although the delegation maintained that it will not make concessions. The main point of disagreement remains the way the financial loss - \$70 billion according to the IMF - should be shared in the country. Employers have argued the necessity of a "fair and trustworthy financial recovery plan which preserves property and deposits" and which would not jeopardize the alleged beginning of an economic recovery. On the contrary, the IMF's position necessarily implies that major depositors have to give up parts of the remaining \$97 billion (90% of them are in dollars). An employer anonymously acknowledged that the talks did not lead to anything. The IMF stressed that the more the Lebanese State waits to effectively implement reforms, the less deposits will be saved. It considers that the lack of financial sector reform between March 2020 and January 2023 has led to an additional loss of \$10 billion for the banks' clients.

### Lebanese Army arrests 48 Syrians preparing to migrate by sea

The Lebanese Army reported in a statement that it had arrested 48 Syrians who were reportedly attempting to leave Lebanon by boat. A raid was carried out at the home of one of "two Lebanese men, who were preparing an illegal escape operation by sea from the port of Abdeh" in northern Lebanon. This operation is only the latest of a series of similar ones; for example, in August, the army also said that it intercepted 130 Syrians and five Lebanese nationals who were allegedly planning to migrate to Europe by sea.

### Lebanese Army says blocked entry of 1,200 Syrians

The Lebanese Army said it had prevented the entry of around 1,200 Syrians last week, and 700 two weeks before. Although Lebanon adopted an open-door policy during the first years of the war in Syria, it turned into much harsher measures in early 2015. This resulted in the increased use of smugglers by Syrians to cross the border to Lebanon. Public officials in Lebanon say Syrians have again been pushed to flee at a time of protests against dire living conditions.

**Friday**  
15 September 2023

### **IMF criticizes Lebanon for failure to adopt reforms**

At the end of a visit to Beirut, the International Monetary Fund renewed its criticism of Lebanon for failing to enact the reforms required in return for releasing billions of dollars in emergency bailout loans. Despite Lebanon and the IMF reaching a staff agreement in April 2022, a year and a half ago, politicians have yet to enact the reforms demanded to begin the 46-month financing program, in particular the unification of the multiple exchange rates, the restructuring of the banking sector, and a formal capital control. Steps taken by the Lebanese authorities are not enough, says the IMF. Ramirez Rigo, head of the IMF Mission, said that the increase in foreign currency inflows due to the recent seasonal uptick in tourism “gives the impression that the economy has bottomed out of the crisis and is leading to complacency. However, receipts from tourism and remittances fall far short of what is needed to offset a large trade deficit and lack of external financing”. The IMF repeatedly warned in the last years, and again during this visit, that Lebanon’s failure to implement reforms could have “irreversible” consequences for its economic and social stability, and will “weigh on the economy for years to come”.

### **Cyprus calls for aid to Lebanon, asks EU to review whether Syria unsafe for repatriations**

Cyprus, a Member State to the EU, said it has asked the bloc to review whether Syria remains an unsafe country to which member states should be barred from repatriating asylum-seekers. After a flurry of racist attacks on foreigners in recent weeks amid growing anti-migrant sentiment in Cyprus, Interior Minister Ioannou said he would try to persuade the EU and the UN to end Syria’s status as an unsafe country for refugees to be returned to. He added that his position was shared by “other member states”, and that the EU Asylum Agency had already recognized 2 areas as safe. Ioannou said he had also raised the need for aid to Lebanon. The Lebanese authorities reportedly informed him that they detected an “increase in Syrians moving to Lebanon”, making the Cypriot Minister say that “Lebanon is a barrier. If Lebanon collapses, then all of Europe will have a problem”.

**Saturday and Sunday**  
16 and 17 September  
2023

### **Despite calm returns, displaced of Ain el-Hilweh fear return**

After a week of clashes, which killed at least 18 persons, wounded hundreds, and displaced thousands, the calm seems to have returned in Palestinian refugee Ain el-Hilweh camp. After several ceasefires whose implementation failed, an agreement was reached Thursday night between involved parties, leading to a potential end of clashes. Despite the precarious calm, displaced fear to return, as previous temporary ceasefires led to new clashes. Heavy destruction of civilian buildings were reported. Several meetings between top Palestinian and Lebanese officials continued to be held after the ceasefire, to ensure its implementation and the end of the clashes. The agreement reportedly includes a withdrawal of all fighters from UNRWA-run schools and the handing over of Abdel Rahman Farhoud, accused of having killed an Islamist official, and the killers of Fateh official Abou Achraf Al-Armouchi to the Lebanese authorities.



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