



# HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

20 - 26 March, 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**

20 March 2023

### Lebanon and Afghanistan named unhappiest countries

According to the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network's 2023 World Happiness Report, Afghanistan (ranked 137) and Lebanon (ranked 136) are the two unhappiest countries in the world. The report ranks countries based on six key factors to help explain variation in happiness levels, namely social support, income, health, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption. According to the survey, Finland remained in the top position for the sixth year, followed by Denmark, and Iceland. In contrast, war-torn Afghanistan and Lebanon remained the unhappiest countries, preceded by Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, and Congo. Moreover, the Middle East and North Africa is the least happy region after sub-Saharan Africa.

**Tuesday**

21 March 2023

### Lebanese currency collapsing at record speed

The Lebanese pound depreciated at record speed, reaching 143,000 pounds to the US dollar on Tuesday afternoon, after dropping 20,000 pounds in under 24 hours. Hundreds of people took to the streets to protest in Beirut, Tripoli, and the Bekaa Valley, blocking roads and burning tires. Several gas stations, supermarkets, and pharmacies suspended their daily services while protesters forcibly shut down shops in the capital's popular Mazraa Corniche area. The Lebanese pound's exchange rate to the dollar has dropped by about 300 percent since the beginning of this year. The latest drop resulted in unprecedented chaos in the markets, in a country where all products are priced in dollars, purchasing power is degrading and the average public sector monthly wage now equates to around \$150 a month.

### Pharmacies in Lebanon shut, as bankrupt government plans airport expansion

The Syndicate of Pharmacists announced the closure of all pharmacies across Lebanon after running out of medications citing the "lack of concern of officials." Drug importing companies have been withholding medication for two weeks now as they refuse to sell them to pharmacies at the prices fixed by the Ministry of Health. Many Lebanese are already unable to access lifesaving medicine, which has become either too expensive or is no longer available on the market. Some gas stations in Lebanon were also closed on Tuesday amid the currency collapse, claiming that the government's fixed pricing did not reflect the rising prices in the black market. After a meeting on Tuesday, the Syndicate of Gas Stations Owners called on the government to allow fuel stations to price gasoline in US dollars. Meanwhile, caretaker Minister of Public Works and Transport Ali Hamie announced on Monday a project to build a new terminal at the country's only international airport in Beirut, with a foreign investment of \$122 million.

**Wednesday**  
22 March 2023

#### **Tear gas, clashes as Lebanon protesters try to storm government headquarters**

Lebanese security forces fired tear gas to disperse hundreds of protesters, mainly retired soldiers, who tried to break through the fence leading to the government headquarters in downtown Beirut. The violence came amid widespread anger over the harsh economic conditions in the country, where mismanagement by the ruling class has been rampant for years, preceding the economic meltdown that started in late 2019. The retired soldiers and policemen demanding better pay clashed with riot police and troops. Several people suffered breathing problems from the tear gas. The protesters hurled stones at the officers protecting the government headquarters and repeatedly tried to break through the fence. There was no immediate information about any injuries during the violence. The protest was called for by retired soldiers and depositors who have had limited access to their savings after local banks imposed informal capital controls amid the crisis.

**Thursday**  
23 March 2023

#### **EU and UNICEF inaugurate a pumping station to provide water services for more than 500,000 people in Beirut**

To mark World Water Day, the Beirut and Mount Lebanon Water Establishment (EBML) inaugurated the recently rehabilitated Tallet Al Khayat station, one of Beirut's oldest water pumping stations, in partnership with UNICEF and the European Union. The project aims to provide sustainable water services to more than half a million people in Beirut through a system that relies on gravity and pumping. "Amid the continuous crisis affecting the water infrastructure, access to water is still one of the biggest challenges, putting the health of millions of people, particularly children, at risk," said UNICEF in a statement. Through a partnership with UNICEF, the European Union has been one of the main supporters of the country's water sector amid the ongoing crisis. Since November 2018, it has contributed EUR130 million to develop and implement water projects and reinforce the national capacity of the water establishments to secure public access to water resources. Moreover, Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF Representative in Lebanon, stated that water access is a basic right, reaffirming the priority of strengthening water establishments' capacity and ensuring the sustainable provision of water to reduce the infections' spread.

#### **Kuwait's Al-Najat Charity distributes iftar meals to Syrian refugees in Lebanon**

Kuwait's Al-Najat Charity has celebrated the advent of Ramadan by distributing iftar meals among Syrian refugees in camps near the border in northeastern Lebanon, Kuwait News Agency reported. The charity's public relations officer, Tarek Al-Essa, said a delegation joined refugees in Arsal to welcome Ramadan and hold Taraweeh prayers. A mobile kitchen prepared breakfast as part of the "One Million Fasting Meals" campaign, which includes Lebanon and other countries.

#### **UNESCO launches \$2.2 million project to revive Lebanon's cultural industry**

A new project was launched to support cultural production and help revive cultural life in the neighborhoods most affected by the Beirut Port explosion. The UNESCO Beirut Office announced this call for project proposals during a ceremony held at Sursock Palace, attended by potential beneficiaries interested in the project as well as cultural experts. According to the statement, the project aims to "provide emergency support through grants to artists, creators, and cultural sector institutions in the areas affected by the Beirut explosion, with a focus on an urban recovery approach for the city." The activities to be funded include the creation, production, distribution, and presentation of cultural and creative activities as well as the transfer of skills in the fields of performing and visual arts, including photography, fine arts and crafts, intangible cultural heritage, audio-visual and interactive media, literature, journalism, heritage and tourism. At least 65 formal and informal cultural organizations and 85 individual cultural professionals are expected to benefit from the project directly, 50 percent of which are women and 40 percent of which are youth. In addition, around 10,000 individuals in local communities are expected to benefit indirectly. The support will also prioritize applications from economically vulnerable individuals, single-parent families, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly.

Friday  
24 March 2023

### Situation in Lebanon is 'very dangerous,' International Monetary Fund warns

"Lebanon is in a very dangerous situation," the International Monetary Fund warned on Thursday, a year after authorities in the country committed to a program of reforms they have failed to implement. The financial agency urged "the Lebanese government to halt borrowing from the central bank." And the IMF's mission chief to Lebanon, Ernesto Rigo, said during a news conference in Beirut that authorities must accelerate their efforts to meet the conditions required for a \$3 billion bailout plan. "One would have expected more in terms of implementation and approval of the legislation" relating to economic reforms, he said, noting that progress has been "very slow." Members of the IMF mission have spent nearly a month in Lebanon, during which they met many Lebanese officials and diplomats in an attempt to persuade them to step up efforts to introduce the reforms they had promised. Lebanon signed an agreement with the IMF nearly a year ago but has yet to meet the conditions necessary to secure the full financial assistance program that is widely viewed as crucial to the country's recovery from one of the worst economic crises the world has ever seen.

### Lebanon's internet could go dark amid strike by state-owned Ogero's workers

Lebanon faces internet blackout threats as employees of its state-run telecoms company Ogero began an open-ended strike on Friday to demand pay increases reflecting the sharp depreciation of the national currency. "We are heading to a catastrophe if a deal is not found with the government: the network will completely stop working as our generators will gradually run out of fuel", Imad Kreidieh, Ogero's chairman, told The National on Friday. He warned that Alfa and Touch, Lebanon's telephone operators, will also be affected. "Lebanon completely relies on Ogero for its bandwidth, leaving no one exempt from a blackout," he said. He said that the workers' demands were "legitimate", as their salary is not enough to cover transportation costs. The currency crisis has slashed Ogero's yearly budget to the equivalent of \$4 million, he added. This amount is barely enough to cover the expenses for the fuel required to operate the internet relay stations, leading to drastic salary cuts. The development will depend on talks with the parliament, which is set to convene on Monday.