



HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

13 - 19 February, 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

13 Feb 2023

Lebanon – Regional and western powers to reconsider ties with Lebanon if no president elected

Five regional and western countries have threatened to “reconsider all relations” with Lebanon if parliament fails to elect a president, the Prime Minister’s Office said on Monday. The warning comes as Lebanon’s rapidly deteriorating economic situation – one of the worst crises in modern history – stretches into its fourth year. Representatives of the US, France, Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia said in a joint statement that “the real support for Lebanon will start following the election of the future president” and after reforms have been passed – a condition for Beirut to gain access to billions of dollars in aid. The announcement comes on the heels of a meeting hosted in Paris last week, in which representatives of world powers met Lebanese politicians in an attempt to end the months of political and social deadlock that has prevented the election of a president. Electing a head of state is often a politicised affair in Lebanon, although the country has never before faced a double governance vacuum. Lebanon has been without a president since former leader Michel Aoun’s mandate expired in October, and the country is administered only by a caretaker cabinet, limited in its power.

Tuesday

14 Feb 2023

Lebanon – World Bank most concerned in MENA about Lebanon and Tunisia

The World Bank is particularly concerned in the Middle East and North Africa region about Lebanon and Tunisia and, to a lesser extent, Egypt and Jordan, the bank’s vice president for MENA said on Tuesday. “We have a number of tensions in those countries,” including debt levels and high inflation, Ferid Belhaj told Reuters on the sidelines of the World Government Summit in Dubai. “The role of the state in the economy, generally in MENA, has always been a matter of concern for us,” he said, adding there was a “a chunk” of public debt that is not disclosed, referring to debts of state-owned enterprises. While Lebanon has long had high levels of public debt, it is becoming “extremely problematic,” Belhaj said. “People are feeling the brunt of the almost-collapse of the financial sector,” he said, adding Lebanon “is really one of those places that, as they say, keeps you awake at night.”

Lebanon – Lebanon pleads for aid at World Government Summit in Dubai

Cash-strapped Lebanon is trying to convince donors that their money will be spent “in the right way” as its usual backers remain wary of extending aid without a reform agenda. “We expect aid from all of you once we convince you it’ll be spent in the right way, caretaker Finance Minister Youssef El Khalil told a meeting of government and institutional officials in Dubai. Donors have pledged billions of dollars on the condition that Beirut embarks on critical economic reforms and tackle endemic corruption. Lebanon struck a \$3 billion deal with the International Monetary Fund last year on the condition it carries out measures including audits of the central bank and its banking sector. “We are explaining our situation to the UAE and all those participating,” El Khalil said on the sidelines of the conference. The UAE is listening and asking questions, and Lebanon hasn’t formally asked for aid and they haven’t offered, he said. No specific amounts are being discussed.

Wednesday
15 Feb 2023

Lebanon – [UNICEF calls stakeholders to ensure learning for all children](#)

UNICEF issued a statement on Tuesday stating that Lebanon's public school closures caused significant and persistent damage to children's learning and their mental and physical well-being. The organization acknowledged the teachers' commitment to their students and recognized the profound and negative impact of the economic crisis on their lives, while supporting the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's efforts to secure the allocation of domestic funding to support teachers. "It is time now for all stakeholders to come together to ensure that all children get back to school and that learning is never interrupted again," said UNICEF, highlighting the need to "sound the alarm" on the education crisis. "When schools close, early marriage increases, sexual exploitation and abuse of children and child labor rise," added the organization. The World Bank, in a report, estimates that a lost year of schooling would translate into losses to the Lebanese economy of up to US \$2.5 billion in the coming years. UNICEF highlighted that the international community will continue supporting the education sector and ensure that all children in Lebanon have access to education.

Lebanon – [Lebanon Releases the Death toll and Missing Lebanese in Turkey](#)

The Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants released the latest figures on Lebanese casualties of the recent earthquake in Turkey. The Lebanese embassy in Ankara has reported that the number of fatalities is currently at 9, with 3 of the deceased bodies having been transported back to Lebanon, and the other 6 buried in Turkey, at the request of the families. Additionally, 6 people are still missing and presumed to be under the rubble, while 70 have been confirmed as safe or rescued. A Lebanese father and daughter were confirmed dead in Turkey. Missing Bassel Habkhouk was rescued from under the rubble of a hotel in Turkey, but two other Lebanese who were staying there too were reportedly heard alive but not rescued and are still missing. A Lebanese novelist and activist, along with her 3 sons and grandson were killed in Turkey, and a Lebanese father and son were rescued, but the mother didn't make it.

Lebanon – [Social unrest grips Lebanon after pound plunges](#)

A sudden fall in the value of the Lebanese pound has sparked confusion in the markets, widespread anger on the street, and warnings that people "can no longer afford to buy anything." The exchange rate in the parallel market reached 77,000 pounds to the dollar on Wednesday, less than 24 hours after it fell to 68,000 per dollar, creating a huge discrepancy between purchase and sale prices. Gas station owners refused to sell fuel, while government officials tried to head off protest attempts for fear of unprecedented chaos on the street. The threat of civil unrest was highlighted by General Labor Union President Bechara Al-Asmar, who said that the union "has received information about the possibility of rioters entering the line of action." His comments came after gunmen in Tripoli fired in the air to force shops to close, while protesters took to the streets in Beirut and rural areas, blocking roads in anger at the alarming deterioration in their living conditions.

Lebanon – [CLDH releases a statement on the recent attack on a Syrian minor by a municipal police officer](#)

On February 12, 2023, a municipal police officer in Bezbina, D.S., brutally attacked fifteen-year-old Syrian refugee, G.B., whom he accused of stealing a wallet, which was used as a pretext for intervention. Bezbina's municipality initially failed to take action and further investigate D.S.'s crime, as it resorted to covering for him and stating that "the incident was personal" and happened while the officer was off duty. Nevertheless, the municipal council later decided to dismiss D.S. from his duties as a municipal officer. CLDH emphasizes that no accusation can be used as a justification for human rights violations. CLDH additionally calls for further investigations into this attack to hold D.S. accountable for his actions under Law No. 65/2017 on Punishment of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Unless this culture of impunity is countered, Syrian refugees will continually risk falling victim to hate crimes and further marginalization, especially considering the recurring waves of racism against refugees in Lebanon.

Thursday
16 Feb 2023

Lebanon – [Lebanon depositors smash up, burn Beirut banks](#)

Several dozen Lebanese protesters attacked banks in a Beirut neighborhood on Thursday, while blocking roads and protesting against informal restrictions on cash withdrawals in place for years and rapidly deteriorating economic conditions, Reuters reports. At least six banks had been targeted as the Lebanese pound hit a new record low on Thursday, a spokesperson for "Depositors Outcry", a lobby representing depositors with money stuck in the country's banking sector, said. A bank in the Badaro neighborhood smoldered as firefighters sprayed water, while riot police stood nearby with shields. Since 2019, Lebanese banks have imposed restrictions on withdrawals in US dollars and Lebanese pounds that were never formalised by law, leading depositors to seek access to their funds through lawsuits and, often, by force.

Lebanon – [Lebanon's basketball team speak up on men's mental health](#)

With the support of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon, Embrace launched the "Men's Mental Health" campaign featuring Jad El Hajj, Wael Arakji, Hayk Gyokchyan, Sergio El Darwich, Elie T. Chamoun, and Ali Mansour. "Behind moments of success and victories [...] there are incredible stories. Stories of men who are struggling, fighting hard through every day, feeling weak and helpless, and going through some of their most difficult challenges," said Embrace. According to the organization, which is dedicated to mental health in Lebanon, men have a higher risk of dying by suicide than women. However, 90 percent of deaths by suicide result from treatable mental illnesses. The campaign aims at removing the stigma around men's mental health, as it is still a taboo subject in Lebanese society. According to Embrace, "This perception has created damage for men on many levels, preventing them from expressing their emotions and seeking support for treatable and preventable mental illnesses."

Lebanon – [Six killed in Lebanon army raid on drug smugglers](#)

Three Lebanese soldiers and three suspects wanted for drug trafficking were killed Thursday in a gun battle during a raid in the eastern Bekaa region bordering Syria, the army said. Troops were carrying out searches in the village of Haour Taala in the homes of "people wanted for drug trafficking" when the soldiers came under attack, with the officers opening fire in response. "Three soldiers and three wanted men were killed during the clashes," the army said. The army often carries out raids in the Bekaa region hunting drug smugglers amid efforts to counter a surge in captagon production and trafficking after backlash from Gulf nations.

Saturday and Sunday
18 and 19 Feb 2023

Lebanon – [Syrian refugees in Lebanon turn to TikTok to ask for money](#)

Soliciting money through TikTok live streams has become a popular but controversial trend in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon, where individuals are using the platform to earn an income that is paid in fresh dollars, amid the local currency deprecation. The method has allowed thousands to ask for money from donors online by exposing their children and poor conditions to the outside world. Human rights activists told Al-Monitor that the trend heightens the risk of exploitation and trafficking of children. For users to go live on TikTok, they must have at least 1,000 followers, who in turn can donate digital gifts. A wide range of gifts can be purchased with real money, from roses and hearts for less than a dollar to larger gifts for hundreds of dollars. Nevertheless, the process of obtaining the funds they receive from viewers is subjecting the platform to controversy. A report published by the BBC revealed the "exploitation" by TikTok of such content, where in some cases the company takes 70% of the proceeds. Some of the livestreams have generated up to \$1,000 an hour, but users in refugee camps received only a tiny fraction of that, the BBC said. Cash withdrawals can only be requested if the user has a withdrawal method supported by TikTok in their region or country. PayPal is the most frequently used payment method, but it is not available in Lebanon. Users in Lebanon are instead turning to private cash withdrawal agencies, or by transferring the money through PayPal to someone they trust overseas, who then sends it back to the user through Western Union or other agencies accessible in Lebanon.