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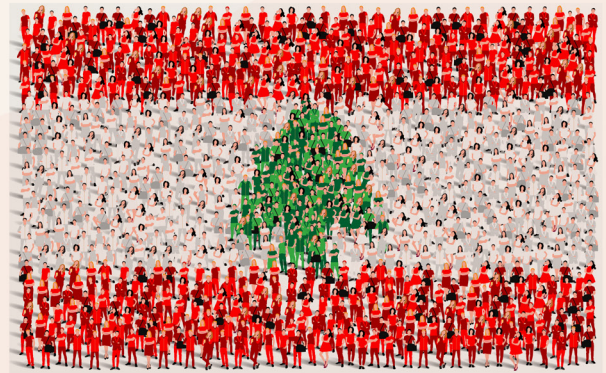
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شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية

# Civic Space Monitor

National Reports on Civic Space 2023

## Lebanon

Report on Civic Space



# Lebanon

## Report on Civic Space



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# Section One – The Political and Economic Situation and its Impact on the Social Reality of the Country

## The Political Reality

Lebanon's political, social, and economic reality comprises a number of constants on the one hand and variables on the other. The constants mentioned in the [previously published report](#) relate to the nature of sectarianism, a political system based on clientelism and power-sharing between different sects prior to the civil war and then amongst the ruling warlords after 1990, as well as to the nature of the rentier and service economy that has wiped out industry and agriculture, creating an uneven distribution of income and social class disparity. As for the variables, the most important ones that have taken place internally include the recent parliamentary elections (May 2022), where a shift in the popular mood, including a general discontent with the existing political parties and the ruling political classes of the country was reflected at the ballot box, resulting in the election of thirteen deputies from various Lebanese regions now referred to as the Deputies of Change. This shift in popular mood also won the opposition two parliamentary seats in the third constituency of the South, previously considered impossible or taboo. The decline in the popularity of the Free Patriotic Movement, the party of the President of the Republic, the de-election of several deputies, and a decrease in the number of parliamentary blocs was also significant.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, for the first time since 1992, political Harirism was absent from the political scene, with the Future Movement refraining entirely from running in the parliamentary elections.

Indeed, the victory of a parliamentary bloc of change positively impacted shifting previous patterns of domestic political life. Despite the differences of opinions among its deputies and their different ideas and political orientations, this bloc added dynamism to political and parliamentary life, expressing views that established authorities could associate with emerging voices of dissent. Despite this new political dynamism and the apparent change in mood felt by citizens, including resentment of all political forces, the overall political situation remains the same. Since the end of the term of former President Michel Aoun on October 30, 2022, after which the government began its ongoing caretaker phase, political forces have failed to undertake the responsibility of electing a president as a result of ongoing political conflicts and parties refusing to budge from their respective positions. In addition to the vacuum in the Presidency and the government, the House of Representatives met on April 18, 2023, and approved the term extensions of municipal and elective councils until May 31, 2024.<sup>2</sup> The country is, therefore, currently experiencing a quasi-constitutional stalemate.

## The Economic and Social Reality

As the economic crisis continues to worsen, as mentioned in the [previous report](#), the scale of the financial and social problems has intensified. According to a report published by Human Rights Watch in early 2023, the Lebanese currency has lost more than 95% of its value, while food prices have increased by 483% since January 2022 compared to 2021. Electricity, water, and gas prices have increased by 595%, making basic services, such as healthcare and access to food, a luxury.

A survey conducted by the same institution between November 2021 and January 2022 found that the average family monthly income is \$122, that 70% of families had difficulty covering basic expenses, and that 22% of them at times did not have access to

enough food at all. The previous month, the impact of the crisis was even more severe for vulnerable groups such as women, children, migrant workers, Syrian and Palestinian refugees, and people with special needs, with education and healthcare being the most affected sectors.<sup>3</sup>

The 2022 Labor Force Survey, launched by the Central Administration of Statistics and the International Labor Organization, laid out the magnitude of the economic crisis in the country, with the unemployed constituting about a third of the labor force and 83% of families residing in Lebanon unable to survive even one month without income while very few stated they'd be able to survive for six months or more in the event of loss of income.<sup>4</sup>

In March 2023, the inflation rate in Lebanon reached 264%,<sup>5</sup> placing the country first in terms of inflation.<sup>6</sup> On the International Day of Happiness 2022, the United Nations published a report ranking Lebanon as the second least happy country after Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

The political and social contexts affected the mood and priorities of citizens, reflected in the civic space used by and activities conducted by activists, political groups, and civil society associations. However, thorough research into the political, economic, and even social realities requires an individual report. For the scope of this report, we shall move on to the challenges facing civil society.

## Section Two: Trade Union Movements During the October 17 Revolution and the Challenges Facing Civil Society

There is no doubt that the activities and work of trade union movements stand out whenever significant challenges face society, mainly if these challenges are political, social, and financial. However, the trade union movement in Lebanon has specific characteristics that emerged after the October 17 revolution. We will review them and then discuss the challenges facing civil society in Lebanon.

### Trade Union Movements

Political parties were sadly successful in eliminating the trade union movement in the country, at least since the civil war that began in 1975 and ended in 1990, as well as during the era of Syrian tutelage – the Taif era. This reality was later reflected in the weak participation of trade unions throughout the October 17 revolution (2019)<sup>8</sup>, in stark contrast to the role played by the coalition group Forces of Freedom and Change in the Sudanese revolution, which contributed to the political transition in the country.<sup>9</sup>

In Lebanon, this role could not be played by the General Labor Union, for the political elites dominate it, and it has therefore always been implicated in the political divisions of the country, especially during the March 8 and 14 era.<sup>10</sup> This led to the emergence of several parallel trade union movements that tried to take over the role of the general trade union movement, stemming from both the public and private sectors, as follows:

## Gathering of Professionals

During the revolution, there was an attempt to replicate the experience of Sudan by establishing a group of professionals that included individuals from the free professions and workers from other sectors. It sought to categorize conflicts following societal factors rather than through primary identification groupings such as sect and region, and an attempt was made to form a group of professors from different universities in Lebanon. The gathering, however, failed in its mission due to inherent political differences.<sup>11</sup>

## Trade Union Work Within the Public Sector

As for trade union work within the public sector, the different bodies and associations within it have been subjected to political dominance and fragmentation. The bodies and associations of the public sector are divided into five primary organizations, including the Trade Union Coordination Committee, whose members include teachers, and the Association of Public Sector Employees, which was also subjected to political interference, radically affecting the role of trade unions.<sup>12</sup> Trade union work did not have any impact on the public sphere, especially regarding the individual demands of association members that came separate from the discourse of comprehensive reform. These demands included raising salaries rather than administration reform, raising hospital grants rather than public hospital reform, and raising education grants rather than formal education reform.

## Lebanese Judges Club

As a result of the weak nature of the unions, significant groupings were formed that broke through the status quo. Perhaps the most important of them was the Lebanese Judges Club, which started in 2017, first through closed WhatsApp groups of judges concerned that the judiciary and everything it represented was in danger, who then came out publicly in 2018. They then obtained registration

from the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities as a non-profit association in 2019, following a struggle with the Supreme Judicial Council and the political establishment. It was an essential step for judges to gain the freedom to establish associations, acquire the ability to operate in isolation from the Supreme Judicial Council, remove the obligation of reservation, and remove the control of the Supreme Council as the central judicial authority.<sup>13</sup> One of the club's main achievements is the emergence of the judiciary as an authority with the people at the forefront of its power. It called for the independence of the judiciary and the recovery of looted funds, aiming to restore confidence and faith in the body.<sup>14</sup>

## Alternative Press Syndicate

Among the various syndicate experiences that emerged after October 17 was the formation of the Alternative Press Syndicate, which includes those working in the media who the Lebanese Editors Syndicate does not represent. They declared a revolution against the pitiful state of their profession, paving the way for a positive impact in the battle for freedom of expression, a role previously abandoned by the Editors Syndicate, controlled by political forces.<sup>15</sup> The candidate, Al-Issar Qubaisi, filed an appeal against the results of the last elections in December 2021 due to major irregularities.<sup>16</sup> The assembly was able to win another legal battle after the Editors Syndicate filed a lawsuit before the Urgent Matters Judge in Baabda, asking him to issue a decision banning the Alternative Press Syndicate from carrying out any activity through any media platform in Lebanon and preventing it in particular from publishing news, statements, or articles of any kind, with the risk of a fine as punishment. Still, the judiciary prevailed, winning the fight for freedom of opinion, issuing a reasoned decision based on international conventions, and rejecting the request.<sup>17</sup> This gathering also positively mobilized public opinion against the abuses and attempts at repression of journalists and activists.

## Committee of Lawyers in Defence of Demonstrators

Within the context of trade union work, a committee called "The Lawyers Committee for the Defence of Demonstrators" had been set up during the 2015 protest movement and continued to grow in scope after the October 17, 2019, revolution. The committee fought to protect demonstrators and activists through the implementation of Article 47 before it was amended by changing the foundations of pleading and litigation before the military court in an attempt to reduce the excesses of the security services and public prosecutions and by applying the critical principle of the right to defence.<sup>18</sup>

Successful Electoral Wins Within the Unions for Liberal Professions

### • The Bar

The Forces of Change won the Presidency of the Bar Association in Beirut in 2019 when lawyer Melhem Khalaf won the elections of the Beirut Bar Association as an independent lawyer not aligned to any traditional political party, a feat considered near impossible before the October 17 revolution.<sup>19</sup>

### • The Syndicate Revolts at the Beirut Engineers Syndicate

The Syndicate Revolts list, representing a group of change-making forces, won the Beirut Engineers Syndicate elections in 2021 and appointed Engineer Aref Yassin as its President.<sup>20</sup>

## The Political Challenges Facing Civil Society

Civil society faces great challenges, starting from the narrative of treason to political assassination and financial difficulties:

### Intimidation

The October 17 revolution no doubt came as a shock, happening suddenly with the political parties finding it difficult to bear. In turn, they began demonizing the movements, each in their way. Hezbollah stood at the frontline of this fight, accusing the demonstrations of receiving funds from the US embassy and using the term "NGOs" to point to foreign dependence and agendas.<sup>21</sup> The narrative of treason has continued from the beginning of the revolution until today,<sup>22</sup> with Hezbollah closing the entrances and exits of the southern suburbs of Beirut, its main center of influence, from the start of the demonstrations, preventing people from participating. It also sent groups to Martyrs Square and Riyadh al-Solh, in what became coined as "the invasion," to break and burn tents and attack peaceful demonstrators. These groups were known as the "people of the region."<sup>23</sup>

The discourse of treason has spread from within the various political parties in power to the whole country, with not a single area spared in which activists have not been attacked and with no political party left whose supporters do not practice repression in its areas of influence.

The parties have used all their cards to suppress activists, from social pressure to verbal threats both in and outside Lebanon, from physical abuse, financial pressure, and even harassment, with the cooperation of the security services in fighting this battle.<sup>24</sup> Undoubtedly, the collapse of a social welfare system in the country helped parties gain political control through a system of clientelism, in which they provided financial aid to individuals instead of the state during the Coronavirus crisis. These factors pressured activists and political groups formed

during the October 17 revolution. They called for a state based on the rule of law, justice, and equality, leading to attempts to blame them for the collapse. This political pattern contributed to an escalation of the discourse of treason and incitement of hate, especially against political activists, refugees, women, and the LGBT community, as television channels, especially political programs, and social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were used to broadcast hate speech and racism.<sup>25</sup>

## Political Assassination

The most prominent example resulting from the discourse of treason and incitement of hatred is the assassination of political activist and thinker Lokman Slim, who had been accused of treason and of collaborating with Israel. Rumors had spread about his personal life, and posters had been pasted on the walls of his home, and of the UMAM Center he'd co-founded,<sup>26</sup> with the words “Glory to the Silencer” written on them in reference to an imminent threat of assassination.<sup>27</sup> The subsequent assassination took place on February 4, 2021, in the Al-Adousiya region in the South of Lebanon. The identity of his killer is still unknown, prompting the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of the Work of Judges and Lawyers, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights defenders to issue a statement in which they all expressed concern over the slow pace of the investigations and urged the Lebanese authorities to ensure that the perpetrators would be punished. There was a reference to the Minnesota Protocol on the investigation of extrajudicial killings,<sup>28</sup> as this protocol also applies to groups working beyond the state and to militias operating in areas within its control.<sup>29</sup> Based on what is known so far, there is no doubt that the murder of the activist Lokman Slim falls within the archetype of a political crime caused by the state's failure to play its role in punishing the criminal(s) responsible for such crimes, preventing hate speech, and extending its security and legal remit over the entirety of Lebanese territory.

## The Financial Challenges Facing Civil Society

Following his visit to Lebanon on 21 November, 2021, the Special Rapporteur on poverty declared the country a failed state, taking into consideration that the financial crisis had been deteriorating by the day and constituted one of the largest economic collapses in history, from the collapse of the Lebanese currency, its economy, official administrations, and social sectors such as education and health-care, the August 4<sup>th</sup> explosion, and the squandering of depositors' money following the smuggling of cash abroad and the suspicious spending on goods that some merchants and smugglers had benefited from, all of which brought the country to a state of complete collapse.

The poverty rate in Lebanon doubled between 2018 and 2019 from 42% to 84%, rendering most of the Lebanese population dependent on humanitarian aid, mirroring their Syrian refugee counterparts. Such a situation brings to light the discord between international funders over what strategy to use for humanitarian aid and its beneficiaries in the absence of a unified understanding of the crisis Lebanon is going through. Such lack of coordination between funders leads to a waste of time and efforts, especially when bureaucracy affects the work of local organizations.<sup>30</sup>

The advent of the Russia-Ukraine war complicated matters, causing a significant rise in prices, affecting many countries in the Middle East, especially Lebanon, which relies heavily on both countries at war for the provision of food.<sup>31</sup> One cannot separate the Russia-Ukraine war from the situation affecting organizations in Lebanon, for it has had a direct impact on the decrease in funding. Several associations reported that projects had been dropped altogether after the start of the war because most of the funders had to redirect their funding to support Ukrainian war efforts.



Undoubtedly, the escalating repression to which the demonstrators were subjected, in addition to the financial crisis and related economic challenges, negatively impacted the people, their desire to gather and demonstrate, and even their general political discourse. Talk on the street shifted from a political one, with demands for the overthrow of the sectarian system, to ones related to people's daily livelihoods, such as access to electricity, food, water, and fuel. The Coronavirus crisis, the Beirut Port explosion, and the accompanying frustrations felt by the Lebanese were also factors that undoubtedly worsened the situation and helped shift the discourse begun on October 17, 2019.<sup>32</sup> Also, mass emigration and the desire to emigrate hurt the movement for change in the country, as the number of emigrants continued to rise, curbed only by the Coronavirus crisis and the subsequent temporary closure of the country's borders. Even the phenomenon of illegal emigration has gained traction in Lebanon.<sup>33</sup>

The disappearance of the middle class due to the collapse of the national currency, high inflation, economic stagnation, the increase in emigration, and the decline in income in Lebanon are also factors that affected the people's demands across the country.<sup>34</sup> The work of civil society was also affected, organizations were forced to keep up to speed with the conditions placed by donors and people's priorities, as many associations shifted their priorities to focus on relief work or to support small projects or training. Many new associations concerned with such issues also emerged, especially following the August 4<sup>th</sup> explosion, when civil society organizations and political parties were forced to replace the state in providing of services.<sup>35</sup>

## Section Three: Violations Against the Public Sphere

The infringement on freedom of expression increased after the October 17 revolution, with the political establishment increasingly concerned and reacting accordingly by increasing repression during demonstrations. We will address the violations committed against freedom of expression and assembly here.

### Violations Against Freedom of Expression

#### Violation of the freedom of journalists and activists and restrictions on cyberspace

Freedom of expression deteriorated under former President Michel Aoun as Lebanon approached the ranks of authoritarian and police states. The Skeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom documented more than 800 violations against the freedom of media and cultural platforms in Lebanon between 2016 and 2022. The violations varied between assassinations, armed attacks on media buildings, attacks on journalists and activists by official and unofficial parties, summoning and interrogating journalists and activists, threats and bullying, court cases related to freedom of expression, official and unofficial censorship of cultural works and activities, blocking of electronic content, jail sentences against journalists, rulings by non-competent courts such as military courts, the arrest, and detention of journalists, activists, and citizens, in addition to the use of excessive force and unjustified violence against demonstrators, photographers, journalists, and correspondents, as well as the trial of dozens of demonstrators and activists before military courts.

The frequency with which journalists, activists, and citizens have been summoned by the Public Pros-

ecution Office and various security agencies, from the Office of Combating Cybercrime and Intellectual Property Protection, State Security, Criminal Investigation, and even the Lebanese General Security and the Information Division, has escalated. Most of the summons were due to complaints of "defamation and contempt" against politicians and security services.

Prosecutions relied on legal texts related to libel and slander in the Lebanese Penal Code, the Military Justice Law, and the Publications Law.

Lebanon recorded a clear decline in the World Press Freedom Index issued by Reporters Without Borders. After ranking 98<sup>th</sup> in 2016, in 2022, Lebanon's rank jumped to 130 out of 180 countries, down 32 from 2016.<sup>36</sup>

It is worth noting that the Lebanese State refrained in 2020 from signing the "Coalition for Media Freedom" statement, which called on member states to provide more freedom for journalists, including those in the digital realm. Also, in 2022, the Lebanese State refused to sign a statement by the same coalition calling for the protection of female media professionals and journalists, as a number of them had come forth with experiences of intimidation and violations committed by security, political, judicial, and economic bodies, people in business and advertisement, and other influential fields, and religious and administrative authorities (including the administration of media institutions themselves).<sup>37</sup>

As for the Publications Law, which journalists are subjected to, it does not guarantee the minimum conditions for a fair trial, as the Publications Court is an exceptional court in which litigation is divided into two levels.

The crime of defamation is a tool used to silence journalists, activists, and all those fighting corruption.<sup>38</sup> These lawsuits have been used to frighten and intimidate people. The Lebanese State has refrained from abolishing this penalty from the Penal Code despite several international recommenda-

tions to do so, including a recommendation issued by the United Nations Human Rights Committee after Lebanon discussed its report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2018.<sup>39</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, "Journalists and activists who criticize the ruling elite are exposed to threats either from private parties, with authorities unwilling or unable to protect them, or by government authorities directly<sup>40</sup>, as they also consider that freedom of expression in Lebanon is under attack, with many journalists having been threatened or persecuted." The most serious example was the assassination of activist and thinker Lokman Slim.<sup>41</sup>

The violation of freedom of expression and the suppression of journalists continues with the systematic summoning of journalists. An example is the claim of Judge Ghassan Oweidat against journalist Jean Kassir and the referral of his file to the State Security Apparatus for interrogation. This is not only a violation of the law but also a way of intimidating him, bearing in mind the reputation of the State Security Apparatus as a repeated offender of human rights violations.<sup>42</sup> Also, the summoning of journalist Lara Al-Bitar before the Office of Combating Cybercrime and Intellectual Property Protection, with a lawsuit filed against her by the Lebanese Forces Party following an article of hers published by the "Public Source"<sup>43</sup> website, and the threat made by banker Marwan Khair El-Din to sue the "Daraj" media website, Marwan Khair El-Din being one of the people being investigated by the French judiciary in financial corruption crimes.<sup>44</sup>

Even the Public Prosecution Office participates in this process of repression by not applying the Publications Law and instead referring the file to the Office for Combating Information Crimes or other security agencies such as the State Security apparatus, where journalists and activists can be arrested and pressured to remove their writings and sign a pledge, in clear violation of Articles 29 and 30 of the Publications Law, which stipulate, among other things, that if the publication case requires an investigation, "the investigating judge shall carry it out."

These transgressions all take place under the silent gaze of the Lebanese Editors Syndicate, which is controlled by the political parties and is the syndicate that controls the affiliation schedule, issues press cards required by the Information Crimes Office to verify the status of journalists and refers any files of complaint to the judiciary for investigation instead of carrying out its investigations.

As previously mentioned, this syndicate tried to suppress non-member journalists, filing a lawsuit against the Alternative Press Syndicate that gathered before the Urgent Matters Judge in Baabda.

### **Violation of Freedom of Expression at the Beirut Bar Association**

It is also necessary to shed light on the disturbing development witnessed by the Beirut Bar Association relating to the amendment of the legal profession's code of ethics in clear violation of international human rights law by restricting lawyers' freedom of expression and infringing on their privacy on social media, adding an additional blow to anti-corruption and human rights defenders. According to Article 39,<sup>45</sup> following the amendment, it became forbidden for lawyers to discuss even major issues of concern to society without prior permission from the Bar Association. Furthermore, according to Article 41,<sup>46</sup> lawyers are now obligated to obtain prior approval from the Bar Association, by any means available, if they wish to participate in a seminar or any related interview whose general legal nature is connected to the media, social media, websites, or associated groups, provided that the requester specifies the time, subject, and name of the method "in a language somewhat similar to the permission issued by the Ministry of the Interior to demonstrate."

The summoning for interrogation of lawyer Nizar Saghie, the Executive Director of Legal Agenda, as well as of other lawyers by the Bar Association, only signifies a context of restricting freedoms, es-

pecially after Saghie raised his concern over the amendment, considering it an infringement of the natural right to expression, and an attempt to limit a group of activist lawyers and anyone who disturbs the political establishment and the system at large, especially since he had filed an appeal against this amendment before the Civil Court of Appeal in Beirut.<sup>47</sup>

### **Violation of Judges' Freedom of Expression**

In the context of restricting freedom of expression, a circular was issued by the Minister of Justice, Henry El-Khoury, "preventing judges from appearing in the media or taking any public position through any media platform, whether electronic or other, without obtaining prior permission from the competent authority."<sup>48</sup> In a separate circular, he also banned them from traveling, communicating with any association, or participating in any symposium inside and outside Lebanon without prior permission<sup>49</sup> in an attempt to restrict judges, hold them to the obligation of reservations, and undermine what the Lebanese Judges Club had previously achieved.

### **Violations Against the Right to Assembly**

Violations against the right to assembly have impacted protesters, the LGBT community, several Arab political groups, and Syrian refugees since 2015.

### **Violations Against Demonstrators**

Since the start of the protests, the security forces have adopted the principle of the use of force, using tear gas and water cannons to disperse protests in Beirut and Tripoli.<sup>50</sup> Demonstrators sustained severe and permanent injuries, the number of which reached hundreds.<sup>51</sup> A report by Amnesty International argued that the security forces had misused French dispersal equipment, using equipment and weapons that did not comply with the principle of necessity and proportionality and that should not

be used by law enforcement officials in the first place.<sup>52</sup>

There is no doubt that repression dating back to the beginning of the October 17 revolution was accompanied by crimes of torture and abuse at the time of arrest,<sup>53</sup> transference, and sometimes during interrogation, as a number of activists in Tripoli and even Beirut were forcibly disappeared and tortured. Violence was a means used to suppress the revolution, with women, minors, journalists, and other workers in the media also subjected to forms of violence. Significantly, civilians affiliated with political parties also participated in violence against demonstrators.<sup>54</sup> Still, none of the perpetrators were held accountable by the judiciary, especially for crimes of torture, as the Public Prosecution Office of the Court of Cassation violated the Prevention of Torture Law No. 65/2017 by referring complaints submitted by lawyers from the Committee for the Defence of Demonstrators to the government delegate of the Military Court instead of the judiciary. The Military Public Prosecution, in turn, violated the law and referred the complaints to the security services for investigation, after which the file<sup>55</sup> was kept without holding anyone accountable.

The Military Court was used as a means of intimidating demonstrators, as the Military Public Prosecution made absurd allegations against the demonstrators without any evidence, accusing them of treating the security forces harshly, of not dissolving the demonstrations peacefully, or of undermining the prestige of the army<sup>56</sup> and other legal articles that give the Military Court the power to investigate and pass judgment. When it comes to the power of intimidation used against civilians, the verdict placed against comedian Shaden Fakih by the military court stands out as prime evidence behind this logic and practice.<sup>57</sup>

## **Violations Against the LGBT Community**

Furthermore, within the context of restricting the right to assembly, the Mashrou' Leila concert in

Byblos was also canceled following a religious intervention that cited the band's encouragement of homosexuality, its violation of social values, and its denigration of Christian beliefs, pressuring the festival committee to shut down the event.<sup>58</sup> Within the same context, the LGBT community was prevented from gathering, with the Minister of Interior sending an urgent letter to the General Directorate of Internal Security Forces and Public Security containing clear instructions to prevent any gathering that aimed at promoting homosexuality. The communication contained a general and vague message that clearly violates the Lebanese constitution, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to assembly,<sup>59</sup> despite the issuance of a decision by the Shura Council suspending the Minister's decision to ban such gatherings.<sup>60</sup>

## **Violations Against Arab Political Groups**

In the context of preventing the right to assembly, the Minister of Interior also prevented a group of Bahraini dissidents from organizing two activities in Beirut because such gatherings would harm relations with Bahrain and other Gulf States.<sup>61</sup>

## **Violations Against Syrian Refugees**

Particular attention must be given to the grave violations that continue to affect Syrian refugees. They include the overall racist discourse, the appalling hatred incited by politicians, who go so far as to accuse refugees of causing the crisis in Lebanon, and the violations committed by the security services and the army against this community.

The intensity of this discourse has grown following the deterioration of the economic situation on the streets, fuelled by some politicians and the media, especially in light of the publication of fake news about the sums that refugees receive from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other donors. These rumors have served to incite hatred amongst the host community against refugees, prompting them to view them

as the cause of the crisis and as competition for income. This premeditated approach by some politicians and security agencies is geared towards diverting people's attention away from the real issues at stake in the country, with the UNHCR unfortunately not taking any serious steps to inform the public about the real details of the situation for asylum seekers in the country.

One of the most heinous violations against refugees, however, is the restriction to their right to movement and the discrimination against them by a number of municipalities in Lebanon which have imposed curfews on refugees, restricting their right to mobility to specific hours of the day and preventing them from going out in the evening, with risk of punishment if not obeyed. The decision to impose a curfew was taken by dozens of municipalities in Lebanon,<sup>62</sup> an old phenomenon that has resurfaced whenever anti-refugee discourses emerge, with the sentiment that Lebanon is being occupied by Syrian refugees under the slogan "our homes do not belong to strangers."<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately, the situation for refugees continues to grow more complicated over time, with the racist discourse against them flaring up as the donor conference approaches, the harassment against them increases year after year, and the financial and economic crisis intensifies.

## Section Four: Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

Lebanon is declining on all political, financial, economic, social, and political levels, with a failing administration, the state's inability to provide the bare minimum in social services and high unemployment.

Unfortunately, the violation of human rights and the absence of accountability have become the norm, with the infringement of fundamental freedoms carried out by political parties and security agencies under the protection of part of the judiciary. What is frightening is the systematic work to suppress activists, which increases along with the opposition movement in the country in an attempt to turn back the clock, going back to an era similar to that of Syrian tutelage when the Syrian army and the Lebanese security services affiliated with it would harass and repress activists and prevent them from freedom of expression and assembly.

What is significant, however, is that society has not yet surrendered, despite the difficult circumstances, with voices still calling for building up the state and its institutions and for separating religion from the state, with activists still supporting each other in every event that affects freedom of expression, and with civil society still fighting hate speech and trying to shed light on the real problems plaguing the country. In essence, as long as there are voices protesting, there is hope.

## Recommendations

### 1. Implementation of International Recommendations Issued by the Treaty Bodies

The government must develop a comprehensive plan to implement the international recommendations issued by the treaty bodies, as the Lebanese State has joined six treaties, and dozens of recommendations have been issued when discussing the following agreements:

- The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment. The relevant committee issued final recommendations on 30/5/2017<sup>64</sup> after discussing the report of the Lebanese State.
  - The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The United Nations Human Rights Committee issued concluding observations on 9/5/2018<sup>65</sup> after discussing the report of the Lebanese State.
  - The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The concerned committee issued final recommendations on 9/1/2021 after discussing the report of the Lebanese state.<sup>66</sup>
  - The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The concerned committee issued concluding observations on 24/11/2015 after discussing the report of the Lebanese state.<sup>67</sup>
- Expediting investigations into the case of the assassination of the activist and thinker Lokman Slim according to what was issued in a statement by a number of special rapporteurs.
  - Reform of the economic and social structures in accordance with international standards.
  - A legislative workshop to issue laws that promote human rights.
  - Supporting independent bodies created by the government.

In addition to the recommendations issued by states during the discussion of the universal periodic review before the Human Rights Council, here, the support of the Reporting and Follow-up Authority issued by Decree No. 3268 dated 6/19/2018 is required, which was entrusted with this task, by establishing an internal system for it, securing a full-time secretariat, funding to conduct activities, training members and employees, and paying travel allowances for the delegation to represent the State during the discussion of reports.

# Endnotes

- 1 The Birth of Political Change and the Decline of Parties. Walid Hussein. <https://shorturl.at/koAR5>
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