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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement* submitted by the International
Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial
Discrimination (EAFORD), Association Ma'onah for Human
Rights and Immigration, International-Lawyers.Org, United
Towns Agency for North-South Cooperation, non-
governmental organizations in special consultative status,
International Educational Development, Inc., World Peace
Council, non-governmental organizations on the roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Environmental degradation, corruption and sectarianism fuel Lebanon's protests

Introduction

Lebanon is currently facing a major environmental problem regarding pollution and environmental degradation. The situation violates a number of human rights: the rights to life, to health, the rights of the child, as well as, the right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment.

Lebanon's environmental degradation and the problems associated can be traced back to what seems to be the root of all problems in Lebanon: corruption and sectarianism. Waste management is a profitable business and a big proportion of money invested to solve Lebanon's environmental problems goes back into the pockets of politicians and their associates. Thus the current unprecedented protests have united all different sections of the society with the aim of ending once for all the sectarian nature of Lebanese politics and widespread corruption.

Cross-Sectarian protests

On 17 October 2019 Lebanon was shaken by a wave of mass protests against the government. In the midst of one of the worst economic crises in the history of the small Mediterranean nation, the government's proposal to tax WhatsApp along with other austerity measures, proved to be the tipping point for the Lebanese people. The protests eventually led to the collapse of Saad Hahiri's government and, subsequently, Lebanon has been without a government since October 2019. The political deadlock has led to further deterioration of the Lebanese economy with a 30 percent inflation, business closures, growing rates of unemployment, poverty, and the deterioration of public services. As a result the people of Lebanon have been subjected to further hardship.

Instead of addressing the core of the grievances, Lebanese security forces proceeded to use unnecessary and excessive force against the demonstrators. Since the beginning the demonstrators were often met with teargas, water cannons, batons and rubber bullets in several cities. In addition, there have been reports of the authorities using live ammunition against the protestors. Just between 17 to 30 October, the Lebanese Red Cross and Lebanese Civil Defence reported treating 1,790 people for protest-related injuries, including at least six members of the security forces.

At the centre of the Lebanese uprising lie the crippling economic crisis, inflation, high unemployment (37 percent for under 35s), broken public services, nepotism, sectarianism and systemic corruption. The crisis appears to be the worst one yet since the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990. According to the World Bank, should the crisis slide into a recession the number of people living below the poverty line would increase from a third to a half of the population.

The protestors demand the end of sectarian power-sharing system to be replaced by a government of technocrats, end to government corruption, economic reforms and effective governmental services. This include environmental concerns such as working electricity supplies, clean running water and functioning rubbish collection. The most basic of rights such as access to clean water, electricity and clean environment are being majorly compromised in Lebanon on daily basis.

Widespread corruption

Lebanon's problem of systemic corruption is closely tied to the system of sectarian quotas created after the end of the civil war with the aim to balance religious interests in the hope of avoiding more violence and creating inclusive government. Nevertheless, despite the noble intention, over the years the sectarian-based system has proven to have quite the opposite effect. The system has allowed the ruling elites to stay in power indefinitely, effectively

preventing effective governing based on skills, the needs of the population, and the state itself.

Corruption in Lebanon is very prevalent. Although Lebanon is a party to the UN Convention against Corruption and it has comprehensive anticorruption legislation in place, the laws are not being enforced effectively. Pardons of crimes committed by public officials, religious leaders and foreign diplomats against ordinary citizens goes all the way to the end of Lebanese civil war in 1989 and the Taif Agreement. The agreement aiming to reconcile an already divided population established legal protection for crimes committed against ordinary citizens prior to 1991. Nevertheless, on the contrary, it did not pardon the crimes committed against political leaders. It further established the power of political leaders to reinforce divisions within the already fragmented society. Most recently, during the 2019 autumn uprising, in the last attempt to save itself, the Lebanese government proceeded to pass an amnesty bill and a bill establishing a court for financial crimes. Both bills have the potential to place the ruling elite above the law, including tax evasion, corruption, torture, the use of excessive force, and environmental crimes. The legislation was met with another wave of protest with protestors expressing concerns about the ruling class being protected from prosecution in regards to the crimes in question.

Rubbish crisis and environmental degradation

Following the 2015 garbage crises and You Stink campaign the government promised to solve the issue. Nevertheless, yet again the country's sectarian system and connections were used to determine the company to take over the profitable contract. The management of two of the city's major landfills came up with the plan of expanding into the sea. Later, onsite inspections uncovered that the contractual requirements were not being met. The company did not recycle the rubbish as required; instead they just kept unloading it into the landfill without being sorted. The inspection also found out that the company failed to keep the rubbish out of the sea with hazardous waste and liquids being discharged directly into the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, it was also discovered that the company would add water into the garbage in order to increase the weight and thus charge the municipality more money for disposal. Yet, despite the findings the company was able to win additional contracts from the government. As such four years later, Lebanon is still battling rubbish crisis. A gas leakage from the landfill could soon reach the Beirut airport, which is 200 metres away from the landfill, and endangers aviation safety.¹ As a result, Lebanon is facing a major health crisis; decomposing piles of rubbish, pollution and environmental degradation are all affecting people's right to health. Main negative health consequences include respiratory problems, heart disease, various types of cancer and skin rash. The Lebanese government has been continually failing to fulfil its obligations under international law and its citizens' right to enjoy life in a healthy environment.

Water pollution

Furthermore, the garbage crisis affects other sectors as well. Despite the fact that water pollution is not new to Lebanon, it has now reached critical levels as underground currents are now very much polluted too. So are rivers, lakes, wells, and the coastal waters. With the approval of the Council for Development and Reconstruction, untreated waste is being dumped directly into the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, factories located along the coast keep throwing chemical waste directly into the sea too. This includes heavy toxic metals such as mercury, copper, lead, and cadmium.² The current situation is a clear violation of the Barcelona Convention. The EU provides loans and other forms of funding to Lebanon in

¹ *Four Years After Garbage Crisis, Lebanon Grappling with Rubbish Stalemate*, <https://fanack.com/lebanon/history-past-to-present/rubbish-revolution/lebanon-grappling-with-rubbish-stalemate/>, 21.10.2019

² Georgi Azar and Zeina Nasser, *Lebanon's beaches, an environmental disaster in the making* <https://en.annahar.com/article/828843-lebanons-beaches-an-environmental-disaster-in-the-making>, 8.7.2018

order to protect maritime environment and coastal zones. Nevertheless, the entity that oversees how the money is spent is the Council for Development and Reconstruction, which is a government body. There is no independent organisation that checks how the money is spent.

In addition, the problems with untreated sewage have also deteriorated over the years. Currently, most of Lebanon's sewers systems are damaged or operate over their capacity. Despite the large amount of money being spent on the creation of new water sanitation systems, in many places sanitations stations are still not effectively connected to the sewage network and as such sewage ends up being disposed without any treatment.

As a result, the Lebanese water sector is unable to meet the demands of its population. Currently, only 36 percent of the population is using safely managed drinking water services.³ Drinking water that contains heavy metals, micro-plastics and toxic substances can lead to many water and food-borne illnesses. This may include various types of cancer, diarrhoea, typhoid, or salmonella. In addition, infants may be affected by Blue Baby Syndrome.

Recommendations

We are deeply concerned about the corruption and environmental degradation in Lebanon and we urgently recommend to the Human Rights Council the following:

- Investigate all human rights violations by an independent committee and hold all perpetrators accountable,
- Listen to the people call to end the sectarian power sharing system and replace it with another one based on democratic values,
- Investigate and punish individuals responsible for the acts of corruption and ensure that stolen assets are recovered
- Establish a body of independent experts to monitor waste management systems
- Ensure that waste management contract(s) are awarded to reputable companies without links to members of the government
- Fully cooperate with international mechanisms and organizations that provide technical expertise to resolve the country's political and environmental crisis

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), The Arab Lawyers Association-UK, Human Rights Defenders (HRD), The Brussels Tribunal, The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), Organisation for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), The Iraqi Centre for Human Rights, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

³ UNHCR, LEBANON CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN 2017-2020