

# Political rights and Freedoms

## Lebanon's 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle UPR Review

July 2020

Joint Submission by:

*ALEF – Act for human rights*

*Lebanese Association for Democratic Election -LADE*

*Lebanese Transparency Association*

*Arab NGO Network for Development –ANND*



Lebanese non-profit, non-partisan human rights watchdog organization that works on documenting, and promoting human rights violations and values in Lebanon.

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A regional network of Arab civil society organizations, headquartered in Beirut and working in 12 Arab countries with over 250 CSOs in its extended membership. ANND aims at strengthening the role of civil society, and enhancing the values of democracy, respect of human rights and sustainable development in the region

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## **Executive Summary**

The following report highlights Lebanon's improvements and setbacks in a series of most pressing human rights issues throughout the implementation phase of the second cycle following Lebanon's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2015. The country, currently going through a series of crises such as the Lebanese protests that started on October 17, 2019, the financial crisis coupled with a socio-economic crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic, has seen a deterioration in terms of human rights over the past few years.

Even though the Lebanese governments have shown willingness to comply with certain human rights matters, however it clearly lacks capacity and funds to improve legislation, enforce laws, and report to UN mechanisms properly. Further, threats on democratic processes such as elections, which have been postponed from 2009 to 2018, the increased pressure on journalists, activists and humanitarians, and the overall shrinking civic space (threats on freedom of expression and assembly), are issues that have been exacerbating tensions. Corruption, political willingness and ability of the Lebanese government remain the strongest obstacles for the protection, promotion and fulfillment of human rights in Lebanon. In addition, there's also a lack of public support, and awareness on certain rights.

Lebanon still lacks a comprehensive institutional and legislative framework for the universal protection of human rights. A long period of political stalemate has enforced a suspension of legislative activity, one that only rejuvenated in infrequent and limited intervals. Such intervals saw the self-extension of the parliament inconsistent with constitutional mandates. In 2016, following more than two years of presidential vacuum, Lebanon's Parliament elected Michel Aoun as president. Two years later, in 2018, following five years of extending its mandate, the Lebanese Parliament was renewed through elections where several infractions to the law were documented.

Finally, the various crises are increasing divide and polarization between the Lebanese political blocs, as well as between the Lebanese society's communities. Tensions that are constantly rising have led to stereotyping and scapegoating narratives, the dangerous increase in fake news and information being shared, hindering the capacity of the Lebanese society, as well as decision-makers, to navigate the crises.

## **The Right to Access Information**

1. On February 10, 2017, the Right to Access Information Law No.28 was approved by Parliament, nine years after its submission by MPs. Almost three years after it was passed, several NGOs, including the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA), Gherbal Initiative, Nahnoo Association, and others, decided to test the extent of compliance by the public administration. They were faced by the practical realities of these departments, some of which are applying the Law unevenly and others still refusing requests under various pretexts.
2. In practical terms, these reasons could be summarized by the fact that some employees in departments where information is being sought are not familiar with the provisions of the Law in question. In other departments, employees in charge tend to refuse to issue a "notification of receipt" to petitioners, which nullifies legal deadlines. Yet other departments would only follow-up on requests through personal visits. In some cases, they might refuse the request for information altogether without clarifications, refer them to higher authorities, or challenge them based on the lack of executive decrees. For example, in August 2018, Gherbal Initiative contacted 133 public departments for information regarding how they publish the information requested to be made public by the Law on their website and the identity of the employee assigned to look into requests. It reported the following results:
  - 85 departments received the request and issued a notice of receipt.
  - 4 departments received the request sent to them electronically without issuing a notice of receipt.
  - 15 departments verbally referred the initiative to the trustee authority.
  - 2 refused to receive the request.
  - 2 had no physical presence.
  - Out of 133 departments, only 34 responded to the initiative, 18 of which assigned an employee to consider requests for information, 19 departments responded within the deadline set by Law (15 days), and another 15 responded after the deadline.
3. On the other hand, the departments fail to fulfil their duties to publish financial and accounting documents according to the Law. For example, it stipulates that all expenditures related to public funds that exceed five million Lebanese pounds must be published. However, to avoid applying this condition, some public departments tend to split these expenditures into costs of less than five million. For example, LTA requested information from 47 municipalities in the North and 34 in Dinniyeh. Some did not receive the requests. However, field visits indicated that none of these municipalities had an information officer. Furthermore, they found that 60% of requests are not received by the clerk unless directed by the head of the municipality and that 20% of municipalities had not received the request.
4. From a procedural point of view, there is a disagreement regarding the need to issue executive decrees for the Law to come onto effect, knowing that its enforcement begins from the date of publication in the Official Gazette. However, to avoid this controversy, the Legislative and Consultative Authority had provided three consultations in this field, which explicitly said: "Since Article 25 of Law No.28 of 10/2/2017 (the right to access information) states that the details of implementing the provisions of this law by decrees taken in the Council of Ministers based on the proposal of the Minister of Justice are 'determined when necessary.'" The opinion indicates that the Law does not need executive decrees to come into effect and be enforced.

5. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Justice had prepared executive decrees in 2018, which were adopted by Saad Hariri's "Towards Action" government in its ministerial statement. During that year, the ministry held a series of meetings with CSOs to discuss the decrees and provide suggestions. On the other hand, in June 2019, the Ministry of State for Administrative Development, in cooperation with UNDP and OECD, held a workshop for stakeholders and experts to draft a two-year "plan of action to implement the access to information law."
6. The plan included the Law's objectives to secure the right to expression and media based on UDHR Article 19; preventing and contributing to the fight against corruption per the United Nations Convention against Corruption, which Lebanon joined in 2009; contributing to the development of effective, transparent, and accountable institutions per SDG Goal 16 related to peace, justice, and strong institutions; enhancing transparency in public administration as a condition for Lebanon's joining the Open Government Partnership; raising citizens' trust in the country, the cornerstone of any effective democracy; attracting investments; and enhancing the level of competition between public and private legal personalities bound by the Law on the Right to Access Information.
7. However, the new government of January 21, 2019, named the government of "Facing the Challenges" and headed by Dr. Hassan Diab, did not commit to adopting the plan of action, despite promising to issue the Law's executive decrees.
8. It should be noted that the effective implementation of Law No.28 is contingent on the adoption of the Law to establish the national anti-corruption commission, which has not been passed to date.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We urge the Working Group and the members of the Human Rights Council to call upon the Lebanese government to:

9. Implement the Right to Access Information Law effectively and appoint an information officer to receive citizen requests for information, in addition to adopting the draft action plan on the right to access information.
10. Issue implementation decrees for the Right to Access Information Law (No.28/2017) in a manner respecting the spirit of the Law, the constitution, and the international principles of the right to access information.
11. Amend the Law on the Right to Access Information by ensuring the practice of that right in line with the democratic nature of society and the Lebanese constitutional system, through:
  - Work to align Lebanese legislation with the aim of the Right to Access Information Law, based on Article 24 of the Constitution, particularly laws regarding secrecy, Parliament's bylaws, and the decree organizing the work of the Council of Ministers.
  - Approach all types of legislation related to the right to access information from the perspective that in disseminating information in the possession of the Lebanese public administration, the public interest is realized.
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## **The Right to Free Vote and Democratic Elections**

12. The ruling political parties in Lebanon have shown little interest in respecting the right to vote, especially in relation to the principle of periodic elections. Before the latest parliamentary

elections in 2018, parliament members had extended their own term three times under various pretexts, including supposed security concerns and the lack of logistical preparedness to hold nation-wide elections.

13. Civil society groups have long campaigned for a new electoral system that is more fair and democratic in terms of representation, along with a series of reforms that aim at improving transparency, women's participation, inclusion of people with disability, among other priorities.
14. The Lebanese parliament passed the current electoral law on..., The law was based on proportional representation but with major distortions, most notably the "preferential vote", where every voter chose one preferred candidate from list of choice.
15. The law fell short of achieving the basic democratic principle of equality between voters and between candidates, for a variety of reasons that can be summarized as follows:
  - The number of registered voters per seat in each district is not equal. In other words, the weight of every vote differs from one district.
  - Voters in some districts elect a larger number of seats than in others.
16. The ceiling for campaign expenses was raised from the previous law, rather than lowered as it was previously demanded by civil society.
17. The law did not include a quota for women's representation despite demands by civil society and promises by many major political groups.
18. Many social groups remained deprived of the right to vote without any clear justification. Those include:
  - The military and police.
  - Adults under 21 years of age (citizens aged between 18-21)
  - Citizens who have filed for bankruptcy.
  - Detainees who are yet to be sentenced.
19. More groups were also left out in practice, i.e. discouraged from voting due to the lack of measures to ensure their inclusion. Those include:
  - People with disabilities.
  - Patients in hospitals- by practice
  - People living far away from their place of registration.
20. It is clear that the electoral law was tailored to renew the mandate of existing political parties, rather than encouraging democratic participation and fair representation. The result reflected these priorities, with most political blocs gaining a similar number of seats in parliament compared to previous elections. In that sense.
21. During the campaigns for the 2018 parliamentary election and its implementation, LADE documented a number of violations that compromised its democratic nature. These included:
  - Inequality amongst the candidates in the media coverage: While the electoral law distinguished between paid media coverage of the election and paid advertisement, most major television channels charged candidates/parties large amounts for coverage and interviews. This gave an outright advantage to richer and more politically connected candidates, especially given that most channels are politically affiliated.

- Biased management of elections and abuse of power for elections purposes: The management of the election remained the responsibility of the ministry of interior, which was headed by a minister who was also running for parliament despite the obvious conflict of interest. A total of 17 ministers in the Council of Ministers at the time were candidates for parliament. Moreover, the ministries of interior and information failed to ensure the rule of law when it comes to preventing and mitigating violations. For instance, when the election supervision committee referred 45 media outlets to the Publications Court over violations of the law, the Ministry of Information opposed the prosecution, prompting the court to neglect the violations.
- Foreign interference in the electoral process.: LADE documented political interference by ambassadors of foreign countries, including visiting and supporting candidates, and participating in public events where electoral discourse was present. Moreover, one month before the election, the conference CEDRE was held in Paris, where foreign states and international organizations pledged soft development loans to Lebanon. Lebanon's Prime Minister at the time, Mr. Saad Hariri, also exploited those funding pledges as part of his party's electoral campaign, most notably by promising 900 thousand new jobs.
- In-kind services and briberies.: The electoral law allows the provision of assistance and services during electoral campaigns on the condition that similar assistance had been consistently provided over the three years before the election. This is a legitimization of bribery, especially when taking an in-kind form.
- Absence of electoral awareness campaign.: Despite the fact that the electoral law was very different from its predecessor and citizens required education on methods of voting among other aspects, the election supervision committee failed to play this role. The Ministry of Interior filled the vacuum with information campaigns that remained superficial and insufficient, and most of the education on the law was done by political parties who have vested interest in the election.

22. Violations were also documented during the election and the voting process:

- Significant pressure was exerted on voters by political parties to ensure their conformity. Ballot secrecy was often violated, especially by the delegates of electoral lists who accompanied voters to the booth under the pretext of the voters suffering from a disability related to reading, writing, sight, etc. Moreover, the 48-hour silence period ahead of voting day was violated by candidates and media outlets, which might have had an effect on voters' choices.
- In many cases, chaos erupted in polling stations over issues related to election management, such as the absence of many voters' names from the electorates lists.
- The heads of polling stations in many cases explicitly showed their political affiliation ahead of the election, especially that they had voted along with other state employees a number of days before the general population.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We urge the Working Group and the members of the Human Rights Council to call upon the Lebanese government to:

23. Amend the Lebanese Constitution to:

- Reduce the age of voting to 18 years and unify the legal and political age in Lebanon.
- Clearly specify the parliament's term.

- Enable citizens and civil bodies to submit reviews and complaints before the Constitutional Council.
- Prohibit the occupation of seats in Parliament and the Council of Ministers simultaneously, to ensure a clearer separation of powers.
- Prohibit the amendment of the electoral law one year or less before a given election.
- Impose participatory mechanisms to discuss and approve the electoral law.

24. Amend the parliamentary electoral law 44/2017 and other relevant laws to:

- Adjust the size of electoral districts and their divisions to ensure improved representation and equality among voters and candidates.
- Abolish the electoral threshold, which disqualifies any electoral list that receive votes below a certain number.
- Abolish the “preferential vote” which turned the electoral battles to personal battles, so that the system would have better representation and be truly proportional.
- Impose a women representation quota on all lists, and ensure female candidate have equal chances to their male counterparts on the same list.
- Establish an independent electoral administrative body and remove the electoral administration authority that the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities currently possesses, on condition that this independent body is granted full financial independence, and full responsibility to administrate parliamentary elections conducted abroad.
- Abolish any articles pertinent to the “magnetic card”, as this card may contribute to introducing an additional element of pressure on voters.
- Allow candidates to vote in their region of residence, through introducing clear registration mechanisms for those wishing to vote in their region of residence.
- Modify the method of dividing polling stations and counting votes inside the polling centers/stations instead of the polling room, in order to maintain the secrecy of the ballot.
- Reduce the allowed campaign expenditure ceiling and impose more financial transparency by obliging candidates to disclose their bank and assets accounts.
- Impose clear organization rules for fund-raising and funding campaigns, and considering “in-kind” aids to electorates as a form of bribe. Also, considering travel/transport fees bribes, and considering the voluntary work of delegates as part of the electoral expenses.
- Remove the additional parliamentary seats for Lebanese residing outside Lebanon and respect law 44/2017 in its stipulation that Lebanese diaspora electorates vote for candidates running in their districts of origin in Lebanon.
- Establish strict and comprehensive election media coverage mechanisms.
- Establish comprehensive and strict election spending mechanisms.

25. Commit to the implementation of law 44/2017; particularly by:

- Implementing the chapter on electoral media and advertising, which was not implemented during the past election, which led to flagrant inequality in media coverage between candidates and candidate lists.
- Preparing all electoral centers and stations to receive citizens with disabilities.

- Forbidding delegates to accompany voters inside the isolated voting box, to avoid disclosure of ballot secrecy.
- Strictly preventing the use of public resources and facilities for electoral purposes.

26. Adopt the following other legal amendments:

- Amend the Penal Code, which currently makes it difficult to prove bribes, and thus makes it difficult to hold accountable individuals responsible for bribes
- Amend the “Declaration of Assets and Liabilities Law” (Illicit Enrichment), and obliging the Constitutional Council to publish the financial reports it receives from the elected MPs.
- Amend the “Right to Access Information” law in order to compel the Lebanese authorities to publish any contract it conducts.
- Approve a law for the independence of the judiciary.

## **Freedom of Opinion, Expression and Belief**

27. Freedom of opinion, expression, and association is guaranteed ‘within the limits of the law’ under Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution.<sup>ii</sup> The limits of the law, however, are wide and allow for prosecution on a variety of charges. Insulting public authorities carries a sentence of up to 1 year imprisonment; insulting the President carries a sentence of up to 2-years imprisonment; and insulting religious rituals and the Military carries a sentence of up to 3 years imprisonment.<sup>iii</sup> Articles 582 and 584 of the Criminal Code lay down the general charge for libel of private citizens.<sup>iv</sup> This carries up to a 3-month prison sentence or a 50,000 LL to 400,000 LL fine.<sup>v</sup> International law provides ‘everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression’ under Article 19(2) of the ICCPR with exceptions for (i) the rights and reputations of others and (ii) the protection of national security or public order.<sup>vi</sup>
28. In practice, prosecutions related to defamation go beyond these exceptions in Lebanon. Over the past 5 years there has been an alarming increase in the number of cases being brought against journalists, activists, and private citizens. On one count, from October 2016 to February 2019, there was more than 90 prosecutions against artists, journalists, and activists involving legitimate speech.<sup>vii</sup> The main reason for this is that defamation is a criminal offence, rather than a civil claim.
29. It is also clear that many of these prosecutions have been instrumentalized by political leaders and parties to muzzle opponents and stifle freedom of expression. 2015 saw a spike in defamation cases directed against protesters and activists involved in the movement triggered by the waste management crisis.<sup>viii</sup>
30. So far, the signs point to an increasingly restrictive environment for freedom of expression, especially as some politicians begin to use defamation laws as a tool to stifle criticism. Dozens of individuals were summoned or detained while protesting or for sharing criticism online. According to Human Rights Watch<sup>ix</sup>, security agencies summoned 29 people for charges related to freedom of speech between October 17 and March 6. Furthermore, several opposition voices such as bloggers and journalists were summoned after sharing news or criticism online, and minors were also arrested and interrogated. Finally, many journalists being beaten or attacked during protests by the security forces such as the case of Mohammed Zbeeb <sup>x</sup>in Hamra in February, or when journalists were assaulted and forced to leave the airport premises after interviewing passengers coming back to Lebanon in early July. <sup>xi</sup>



31. The Cyber Crimes Bureau (CCB) of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) has the authority to investigate and prosecute crimes related to libel, insult, slander and/or incitement which take place on the internet.<sup>xii</sup> The powers exercised by the CCB are substantial and regularly go beyond their jurisdiction. This has a broad chilling effect on freedom of expression and opinion in Lebanon. From January 2015 to May 2019, 3,599 defamation investigations were commenced by the CCB<sup>xiii</sup> (in 2018 alone, the CCB investigated 1,451 defamation cases, an increase of 325% in online defamation cases from 2015<sup>xiv</sup>
32. In its handling of these cases, the CCB has also resorted to tools that violate the right to free expression. The most common practice has been to offer defendants an end to prosecution in return for deleting existing publications and/or signing written pledges not to defame the alleged victim in the future.<sup>xv</sup> Using pledges to attain individual self-censorship is ultra vires and is primarily used as a means of intimidation; it also violates the right against self-incrimination if elicited under coercion. One of these cases was that of the journalist Amer Shibani, who was questioned by the CCB for a tweet he sent on 1 October 2019 in which he complained about the shortage of dollars in his bank. Mr. Shibani deleted the tweet after the interrogation by the CCB. Others like Shibani were also summoned and asked to delete their post such as Wadih al-Asmar, president of CLDH (Lebanese Center for Human Rights)<sup>xvi</sup> a local NGO working on the protection of vulnerable groups and focusing on detention and criminal justice. Al-Asmar was summoned after sharing a post where he defended a Lebanese activist for sharing a joke on a religious symbol.
33. Film and television censorship continue to exist in Lebanon and is subject to the Law of November 17, 1947.<sup>xvii</sup> This allows censorship for the following reasons: maintenance of public order, respect for public morals, prevention of sectarian incitement, and insulting public authorities.<sup>xviii</sup> The General Directorate of General Security (GDGS) exercises the function of applying the law. It applies the law loosely, using a high degree of discretion.<sup>xix</sup> The justifications used for exercising censorship have been increasing, and cases of censorship have spiked in times of major political developments, such as elections or widespread protests.<sup>xx</sup>
34. In January 2018 it was reported by the Electronic Frontiers Foundation (EFF) that GDGS was behind a global espionage campaign directed against activists, journalists, lawyers, educators and military personnel.<sup>xxi</sup> The GDGS chief Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim has admitted conducting surveillance.<sup>xxii</sup> This is a violation of Law 140/1999 which prohibits the unlawful interception of communications. It is also unlawful according to Article 17 of the ICCPR. In addition, Articles 2 and 3 of Law 140/1999, which stipulate that a judicial or administrative order is required for the lawful interception of communications, are regularly violated as suspects are forced to hand over their phone data in custody without the relevant warrant.
35. A new media law, which would amend the Publications Law, was submitted to parliament before 2020 but has not been voted on yet. The proposed law does not accord to international standards on freedom of speech.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We urge the Working Group and the members of the Human Rights Council to call upon the Lebanese government to:

36. Replace the criminal offence of defamation and its penalties with a civil claim for defamation.
37. Abolish pre-censorship for all types of artistic productions.
38. Ensure suspects under investigation from the CCB are informed 24 hours prior to their summons. Provide the reason for the summons and identity of the person who filed the charges.

39. Abolish the practice of getting suspects to sign pledges before their trial.
40. Apply the provisions of Law 140/1999 which protects the public from surveillance.
41. Ensure the new media law is amended in accordance with international standards.

## **Freedom of Association**

42. Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution deals with freedom of association. This stems from the 1909 Ottoman Law on associations. There are approximately 8,500 civil society organizations (CSO) in Lebanon. The Ministry of Interior routinely fails to adhere to the 30-day response time for registering CSOs, citing a challenging security situation and the presence of Syrian activists who allegedly create illicit group as a pretext for delay<sup>xxiv</sup>. 29% of CSOs wait more than 90 days to register with the Ministry of Interior, with some not receiving any response from the ministry for years.
43. Lebanese security forces have also restricted the civic space by targeting events related to the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. In 2018, officers affiliated with GDGS disrupted and attempted to shut down a conference organized by a Beirut-based Arab LGBTQ rights organization, which had been held annually since 2013. The GDGS, which is the official immigration authority in Lebanon, also collected information of non-Lebanese participants in the conference.
44. In May 2018, the Internal Security Forces detained an LGBTQ + rights activist and pressured him to cancel Beirut Pride events, including a poetry reading, a karaoke night, a discussion of sexual health and HIV, and a legal literacy workshop. After these incidents, a complaint was subsequently filed with the UN Special Rapporteurs on the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, asserting that the disruption was contrary to international law<sup>xxv</sup>.
45. The right to peaceful assembly was also put under significant strain during the October 2019 uprising. Internal Security Forces (ISF) used excessive violence to disperse protesters, including directly targeting them with pepper spray, excessive use of tear gas canisters, water cannons, and rubber-coated bullets. A major problem is the absence of security measures to regulate demonstrations, ensuring adequate conditions for protests to take place peacefully (ensuring safety to protesters and to public order). Though many have mentioned the fact that ISF members have been dealing with extreme stress, in addition to being deployed all over the country, there is a clear lack of knowledge retention within the institution. The Lebanese security institutions, including the ISF, have been benefitting from several SSR (Security Sector Reform) programs, in addition to several trainings. The high turnover within their ranks, and the lack of systems to make sure knowledge is maintained and passed to new generations of officers and recruits, can only lead to an excess of use of force. This has manifested itself in arbitrary arrests and torture during the protests<sup>xxvi</sup>.
46. There are no clear measures to protect protesters, which is also a threat to freedom of association. Between October 17 and October 30 almost 2,000 people were treated for injuries.<sup>xxvii</sup> Security forces have failed to protect protesters who were attacked by non-state actors on many occasions, including supporters certain political parties including Amal and Hezbollah..
47. Migrant domestic workers (MDW) , who are subjected to the controversial Kafala System, have also been deprived from the right to unionize. Article 7 of the Lebanese labor law excludes domestic workers from all of the law's stipulations. Moreover, article 92 the same law prohibits all foreign workers from running or even voting in union board elections. In 2015, a group of 300 MDWs challenged this reality and announced the creation of the Domestic Workers' Union under

the umbrella of the National Federation of Workers' and Employees' Union in Lebanon (FENASOL),<sup>xxviii</sup> However, the successive ministers of labor have refused to acknowledge the union, with article 7 and 92 of the labor law being used as justifications.

48. Public sector employees, who are subjected to the 1959 Public Sector Staff Regulation (PSSR) and not the labor law, are also banned from unionizing. Article 15 of the PSSR states that government employees can neither go on strike nor create unions, which violates ILO convention C087 of 1948.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

We urge the Working Group and the members of the Human Rights Council to call upon the Lebanese government to:

49. Ensure there is a fixed period for registering associations under the 1909 law.
50. Reform article 3 of the 1909 to clearly state that interpretations for not granting notification or dissolving associations is subject to Lebanese law.
51. Ensure that the law of associations is applicable to all associations in Lebanon, including sports associations.
52. Amend Law Decree No. 112 issued in 1959 to allow civil servants (and by extension judges by virtue of article 132 of the Code of Judicial Conduct) to be members and/or founders of professional associations.
53. Grant official recognition to LGBTQ+ associations, and refrain from any targeting of LGBTQ+ events and actions.
54. Abolish Article 7 of the Labor Law to ensure equality between workers across sectors.
55. Abolish or amend article 92 of the labor law to allow migrant workers to form and lead unions.
56. Ratify ILO Convention 189.

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<sup>i</sup> Opinions of the Legislative and Consultative Authority at the Ministry of Justice: 1) No. 441/2017 on 22//5/2017; 2) No.890/2018 on 15/11/2018; and 3) No.951/2018 on 24/12/2018; available on Gherbal Initiative's website: <http://elgherbal.org/home/index/en>.

<sup>ii</sup> WIPO, *The Lebanese Constitution* (1995). <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/lb/lb018en.pdf> [Accessed 12 February 2020].

<sup>iii</sup> ALEF-Act for Human Rights, *Annual Report 2018: The Situation of Human Rights in Lebanon* (2019). [https://alefliban.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/annual\\_report\\_2018\\_FINAL.pdf](https://alefliban.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/annual_report_2018_FINAL.pdf) [Accessed 12 February 2020].

<sup>iv</sup> Articles 582 and 584 of the Penal Code.

<sup>v</sup> Aya Majzoub, *There is a Price to Pay: The Criminalization of Peaceful Speech in Lebanon*, November 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/11/15/there-price-pay/criminalization-peaceful-speech-lebanon> [Accessed 17 February 2020].

<sup>vi</sup> Article 19 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx> [Accessed 17 February 2020].

<sup>vii</sup> Aya Majzoub, *Misplaced Trust, Freedom of Speech Under Threat in Lebanon*, February 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/20/misplaced-trust> [Accessed 17 February 2020].

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- xiii Ibid.
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