

UPR Statement on Lebanon:

My Name is Ramzi Kaiss and I am speaking on behalf of Human Rights Watch.

In Lebanon, while the recent election of a new president and the appointment of a new prime minister in 2025 have resulted in increased government commitments to strengthening human rights protections and judicial independence,<sup>1</sup> Lebanon has failed to make sufficient progress on several recommendations from its prior UPR. These include matters related to justice and accountability, social and economic rights, freedom of expression, women's rights, and the rights of migrant workers.

### **Justice, Accountability, and Judicial Independence**

- In its last UPR, Lebanon accepted recommendations related to adopting a law guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary and completing an independent and credible investigation into the causes of the port explosion of August 4, 2020, and holding those responsible to account.<sup>2</sup> Lebanon has also noted recommendations calling on it to accede to and ratify the Rome Statute.<sup>3</sup>
- Despite resuming a long-stalled investigation into the port explosion in 2025, Lebanese authorities to date have yet to hold anyone accountable.
- Human Rights Watch and other rights groups have documented unlawful attacks and apparent war crimes by the Israeli military in Lebanon, including apparently deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on journalists,<sup>4</sup> peacekeepers,<sup>5</sup> medics,<sup>6</sup> and civilian objects;<sup>7</sup> the unlawful use of booby traps;<sup>8</sup> and the unlawful use of white phosphorus<sup>9</sup> over residential areas. Lebanon, however, has not yet acceded to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and in May 2024 it reversed course on a decision to give the ICC jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute serious crimes committed on Lebanese territory since October 7, 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> "Lebanon: Rights Agenda for New Government," Human Rights Watch news release. January 30, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/01/30/lebanon-rights-agenda-new-government>

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Lebanon, [A/HRC/47/5](#) and [A/HRC/47/5/Add.1](#), see for instance, recommendations 150.62; 150.136; 150.143.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, recommendations 150.31; 150.32.

<sup>4</sup> "Israel: Strikes on Journalists in Lebanon Apparently Deliberate," Human Rights Watch news release. December 7, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/07/israel-strikes-journalists-lebanon-apparently-deliberate>.

<sup>5</sup> "Lebanon: UN Inquiry needed on Israeli Attacks on Peacekeepers," Human Rights Watch news release, October 11, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/11/lebanon-un-inquiry-needed-israeli-attacks-peacekeepers>.

<sup>6</sup> "Lebanon: Israeli Attacks on Medics Apparent War Crimes," Human Rights Watch news release, October 30, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/30/lebanon-israeli-attacks-medics-apparent-war-crimes>.

<sup>7</sup> "Lebanon: Israeli Strikes on Financial Group are War Crimes," Human Rights Watch news release, October 23, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/23/lebanon-israeli-strikes-financial-group-are-war-crimes>

<sup>8</sup> "Lebanon: Exploding Pagers Harmed Hezbollah, Civilians," Human Rights Watch news release, September 18, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/18/lebanon-exploding-pagers-harmed-hezbollah-civilians>. Lama Fakih (Human Rights Watch), "Weaponizing pagers may constitute a war crime," Op-ed, *Washington Post*, September 20, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/20/opinion-new-kind-war-unfolding-lebanon>

<sup>9</sup> "Lebanon: Israel's White Phosphorus Use Risks Civilian Harm," Human Rights Watch news release, June 5, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/05/lebanon-israels-white-phosphorous-use-risks-civilian-harm>.

- Lebanon’s parliament adopted a new law on judicial independence earlier this year that included positive reforms for Lebanon’s judiciary but fell short of guaranteeing judicial independence. Lebanon’s president Joseph Aoun has since requested that parliament reconsider the law, which remains pending before parliament.
- Lebanese officials have also continued to use the military courts’ jurisdiction over civilians as a means to intimidate or punish them for political activism or to stamp out dissent.<sup>10</sup>

**As such, we urge you to make the following recommendations to the state of Lebanon:**

- Ratify the Rome Statute and urgently grant the ICC jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute grave crimes committed on Lebanese territory since at least October 2023, regardless of nationality, under article 12(3) of the Rome Statute. Carry out legislative reforms necessary to support the fair and effective investigation and prosecution of serious international crimes in Lebanese courts.
- Amend the law on judicial independence so that it is in line with international human rights standards and principles on judicial independence, including the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary.
- Remove immunities protecting sitting members of parliament from being held to account in the Beirut Blast investigation and ensure that security forces can execute investigation and arrest requests issued by the investigative judge in the case.
- Amend article 751 of Lebanon’s Code of Civil Procedure and article 52 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to ensure that judicial investigations are not subject to political interference and obstruction.
- Enact a law to remove civilians from the military court’s jurisdiction entirely.

**Freedom of Expression**

- Lebanon has previously noted recommendations to decriminalize blasphemy, defamation, and criticism of public officials<sup>11</sup> and supported recommendations to ensure that the new media law is amended in accordance with its international obligations.<sup>12</sup>
- Lebanese authorities, however, have repeatedly issued summons against individuals for merely criticizing the actions of government and public officials, alleging corruption within the banking sector, or making jokes about Lebanon’s army.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2023*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2023), “Lebanon”, p. 377 -384, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/lebanon>.

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Lebanon, [A/HRC/47/5](#) and [A/HRC/47/5/Add.1](#), recommendation 150.154.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, recommendations 150.165.

<sup>13</sup> “Lebanon” Journalists, Activists Summoned for Investigations,” Human Rights Watch press release, April 14, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/14/lebanon-journalists-activist-summoned-investigations>; “Lebanon: Comedian Arrested for Critical Jokes,” Human Rights Watch press release, August 31, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/31/lebanon-comedian-arrested-critical-jokes>; Ramzi Kaiss (Human Rights Watch), “Beirut Bar Association Seeks to Muzzle Lawyers,” Human Rights Watch dispatch, April 19, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/19/beirut-bar-association-seeks-muzzle-lawyers> ; “Lebanon:

- Lebanese authorities have failed to amend Lebanese laws and finally decriminalize blasphemy, defamation, and criticism of public officials. Lebanon’s new media law is still under review by a parliamentary committee.

**As such, we urge you to make the following recommendations to the state of Lebanon:**

- Lift all restriction on freedom of expression, including insult and criticism of public or religious officials.
- Ensure that the new media law meets international human rights standards, including by eliminating criminalization of peaceful speech.
- Repeal criminal insult and defamation provisions in the penal code and replace them with civil penalties.
- Ensure that security services halt practices of summoning journalists for investigation based on acts protected under the right to freedom of expression.

**Women’s Rights**

- Lebanon has previously noted several recommendations to adopt legislation prohibiting gender discrimination and guaranteeing women’s equality with men in marriage, inheritance, divorce, child custody, and passing on citizenship to their children and spouses.<sup>14</sup>
- To date, the government has failed to take adequate steps to ensure equality between men and women and to combat gender-based discrimination.
- Various discriminatory religion-based personal status laws remain in place. These laws allow religious courts to control matters related to marriage, divorce, and child custody. They fail to protect women and girls from discriminatory practices by the courts and, by giving jurisdiction to these courts, they deny women and girls protections they would otherwise have.
- Lebanon’s nationality law bars children and foreign spouses of Lebanese women, but not men, from obtaining citizenship through their mother or spouse .<sup>15</sup>

**As such, we urge you to make the following recommendations to the state of Lebanon:**

- Amend the nationality law to give children and spouses of Lebanese women the same ability to obtain citizenship as the children and spouses of Lebanese men.

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Release Detained Journalist,” Human Rights Watch press release, December 8, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/08/lebanon-release-detained-journalist>.

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Lebanon, [A/HRC/47/5](#) and [A/HRC/47/5/Add.1](#), recommendations 150.216; 150.93.

<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Trapped: How Male Guardianship Policies Restrict Women’s Travel and Mobility in the Middle East and North Africa*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2023), [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2023/09/wrd\\_mena0723%20web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/09/wrd_mena0723%20web.pdf); Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2025), “Lebanon”, p. 278 -284, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/lebanon>.

- Adopt a civil status code that would ensure equal rights for all Lebanese people, and ensure that it complies with Lebanon’s international human rights obligations.
- Lift all reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- Enact robust legal protections against all forms of gender-based violence for all people in Lebanon, including migrant domestic workers and other non-citizens.
- Ensure that all reports of sexual harassment or gender-based violence are thoroughly investigated and that perpetrators are held to account.

### **Rights of Migrant Workers**

- The legal status of thousands of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon is regulated by a restrictive and abusive regime of laws, regulations, and customary practices known as the Kafala (sponsorship) system.<sup>16</sup> Lebanese and sending-country recruitment agencies have been repeatedly accused of subjecting workers to abuse, labor violations, and human trafficking.<sup>17</sup>
- Lebanon has failed to act on accepted UPR recommendations to implement and enforce a Standard Unified Contract to protect the rights of migrant domestic workers and afford migrant workers full legal and labor protections. This leaves migrant workers, especially migrant domestic workers, vulnerable to abuse and lacking recourse when they experience abuse..<sup>18</sup>

### **As such, we urge you to make the following recommendations to the state of Lebanon:**

- Amend Lebanon’s labor law to ensure that domestic workers are granted the same legal protections afforded to other workers.
- Officially abolish Lebanon’s Kafala system by explicitly granting migrant workers all workers’ rights. Reform the visa sponsorship system so that workers’ legal status in the country is not dependent on sponsors and workers can end or change their employment without the consent of their sponsor.
- Ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, and the ILO C190 violence and harassment convention.

Thank you

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<sup>16</sup> “Lebanon: Abolish Kafala (Sponsorship) System,” Human Rights Watch press release, July 27, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/27/lebanon-abolish-kafala-sponsorship-system>.

<sup>17</sup> United States Department of State, “2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Lebanon,” June 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/lebanon/#:~:text=NGOs%20and%20international%20organizations%20reported,such%20as%20nonpayment%20of%20wages%2C>

<sup>18</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Lebanon, [A/HRC/47/5](#) and [A/HRC/47/5/Add.1](#), recommendations 150.263; 150.262; 150.26; 150.270.