

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity

Ref.: AL LBN 2/2025

(Please use this reference in your reply)

4 February 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 50/7, 50/6, 53/5, 52/20, 52/36 and 50/10.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received regarding the alleged inadequate provision of protection services to women and girls in Lebanon, particularly internally displaced persons and non-Lebanese nationals, in the aftermath of Israel's attacks in September 2024, and the failure to ensure participation of affected women and girls in the design and implementation of humanitarian responses.

According to the information received:

Background

As a result of the airstrikes and ground offensive launched by Israel between 23 September 2024 and 8 January 2025, over 4,000 persons were killed and 17,000 persons injured in Lebanon, including women and children. It is estimated that 1.2 million persons have been displaced at the height of the conflict, out of which 530,000 are women, including 62,000 women who are the main breadwinners in their families.

The recent Israeli aggression has negatively affected the economy of Lebanon, resulting in a contraction of GSP by 7% and adding \$5.1 billion in losses to an already critical economic crisis. Key sectors, such as housing, agriculture and health have been disrupted. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 160 attacks by Israel were registered on healthcare facilities in Lebanon, leading to the closure of 19 primary health centres and dispensers, and three hospitals, while over 300 schools were reportedly damaged, including 29 schools that were converted into shelters.

Since the entry into force of the ceasefire on 27 November 2024, around 860,000 internally displaced persons in Lebanon reportedly returned to their

areas of origin (as of 9 January 2025). However, about 160,000 persons remain internally displaced unable to return home.

Limited access to protection services, including shelter, by internally displaced and non-Lebanese women and girls

Prior to the ceasefire, there was reportedly an inadequate number of shelters available to the forcefully displaced persons because of the ongoing conflict. The shelters that existed did not sufficiently take into consideration the needs of women and girls, especially in terms of their privacy, including in the bathrooms, and did not provide access to satisfactory showers and toilets. According to UNICEF, displaced young women and girls also suffered from unsafe access to sanitation, particularly at night.

A number of women reported being exposed to increasing incidents of sexual harassment while in shelters, which impacted their freedom of movement there. Several women also reported being exposed to an increasing level of domestic violence. Victims allegedly did not have access to effective referral mechanisms, assistance and protection, and were not provided with information on which actions they could take.

Furthermore, women who had sought safety and shelter in different parts of Lebanon reportedly experienced discrimination on the grounds of their religious affiliation, mainly by persons running and coordinating the shelters. In the case of foreign women, some of them allegedly experienced discrimination on account of their skin colour, race, and/or legal status. In addition, since the Israeli offensive on Lebanon in September 2024, many women foreign domestic workers in the Beqaa Valley and the southern suburbs of Beirut were reportedly left behind by their employers who mostly fled the conflict zones, leaving the workers without shelter, resources, or documentation. Some of them were subsequently denied access to protection services, including shelter and were forced to sleep outdoors with limited access to basic needs.

In addition, women refugees in Lebanon displaced as a result of the conflict, particularly from Syria and Palestine, have also reportedly faced barriers to accessing various types of social support and assistance since the start of the military aggression by Israel, including, but not limited to, access to healthcare services, shelter and food and basic necessities. Syrian women refugees who became internally displaced in Lebanon in September 2024 were allegedly denied the opportunity to place their children in schools in several municipalities while experiencing increasing pressure to return to Syria. There were reported incidents of the separation of family members, the disappearance of children, as well as an increase in the trafficking of women and children across the border to Syria from September until December 2024. In addition, there was allegedly an increase in the reported incidents of sexual violence against migrant women between October and November 2024 in Akkar and in Beirut and Mount Lebanon (BML). The BML, which reportedly had the highest number of migrants prior to displacement, witnessed the highest number of sexual violence against migrant women among all the other governorates in Lebanon. Furthermore, women who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT)

have reportedly faced increased barriers to accessing protection services, including limited access to sexual and reproductive health care and an elevated risk of gender-based violence within collective shelters. Pregnant women were unable to get the assistance and care they needed, including sexual and reproductive care. As a result, some women reportedly gave birth in inadequately equipped shelters.

Deteriorating situation for women and girls deprived of their liberty

According to the information received, the start of the conflict in September 2024 had a negative impact on the situation of women and girls deprived of their liberty. Allegedly, the facilities' conditions deteriorated as each women's prison allegedly received double its capacity and, as a result, became unable to provide sufficient food and hygiene supplies. Reportedly, the families of those deprived of liberty were forced to provide and cover the cost of health services, while those detainees who had no families around, particularly Syrian women, were left with no supplies. Before the conflict, the prisons heavily relied on donations from Non-Governmental Organizations and charities, while the situation allegedly became worse since the start of the conflict as the support from these organizations had been redirected elsewhere. There have also been reports of women and young girls subjected to sexual violence in detention centres while waiting for their trials, which time had been increased due to the ongoing financial crisis deteriorated by the start of the conflict.

Engagement of affected women and girls in implementation of the humanitarian support

While Lebanon's National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 committed to preventing gender-based violence against women and girls, enhancing women's participation, and addressing women's needs in recovery, it allegedly has not had the desired impact in the context of the crisis, as the humanitarian response has not adopted a sex and gender-sensitive approach. Furthermore, the humanitarian response allegedly did not meaningfully engage women and girls in the design and implementation of the humanitarian support and did not seek their feedback on the effectiveness of the assistance and protection services. The role of local civil society organizations, particularly women's organizations, was also reportedly sidelined. Few women were assigned to manage the shelters, which often led to the reprioritization of women's specific needs. Local and grassroots organizations already working in relevant areas were not sufficiently supported and/or empowered. The humanitarian response also did not map out the actors who were already present on the ground.

Without prejudging the veracity of the above allegations, we wish to express our concern about the insufficient attention that has been paid to the needs of women and girls who have been displaced as a result of the last cycle of attack by Israel on Lebanon in September 2024. We are also concerned about the difficulties that non-Lebanese women and girls encountered in accessing shelter and protection, as well as the reported discrimination they faced on different grounds. This is particularly troubling in view of the current security and political context, which continues to be volatile.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please indicate what measures have been taken by your Excellency's Government to ensure that non-Lebanese women and girls are not discriminated against in accessing assistance and protection during a humanitarian situation.
3. Please clarify what measures have been taken or are envisaged to provide protection and assistance to displaced women and girls living in shelters, including their access to sanitation, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and effective referral mechanisms, as well as steps taken to ensure access to justice for victims and accountability for attacks on displaced women and girls.
4. Please provide information on any measures and steps taken to guarantee that women and girls fully participate in the design and implementation of a humanitarian response and that women are involved in the management of shelters and protection services.
5. Please provide details on measures taken to ensure that children separated from their parents, including their mothers, in the course of fleeing are reunited.
6. Please provide details of all financial interventions being undertaken in order to mitigate the situation.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Reem Alsalem
Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Paula Gaviria
Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons

Cecilia M. Bailliet
Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity

Gehad Madi
Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants

K.P. Ashwini
Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination,
xenophobia and related intolerance

Graeme Reid
Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual
orientation and gender identity

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the relevant international norms and standards that are applicable to the issues brought forth by the situation described above.

The facts alleged, if proved correct, appear to be in contravention of international human rights law, specifically the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by Lebanon on 3 November 1972, and the Four Geneva Conventions, ratified by Lebanon on 14 August, 1950. In its general comment 36, the Human Rights Committee notes that article 6 of the ICCPR recognizes and protects the right to life of all human beings, without derogation even in situations of armed conflict, adding that the inherent right to life and its effective protection are prerequisites for the enjoyment of all other human rights.

Protection of the rights of women, including pregnant women and new mothers

We would like to refer to the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), acceded to by Lebanon on 9 August 1997. CEDAW obliges States to refrain from engaging in acts or practices of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions act in conformity with this obligation. Article 2 of the Convention also calls on States Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization, or enterprise.

General recommendation No. 19 (1992) of the CEDAW Committee defines gender-based violence as "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately." It includes acts inflicting physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. General recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict, and post-conflict situations calls on States Parties to protect women's human rights at all times, ensure substantive gender equality before, during, and after conflict, and provide access to justice for victims of sexual violence (CEDAW/C/GC/30).

General recommendation No. 35 (2017), updating general recommendation No. 19, underscores the obligation of States to take appropriate measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute, punish, and provide reparations for gender-based violence committed by non-State actors. It stresses that States are accountable for omissions that result in such violence (CEDAW/C/GC/35). General recommendation No. 32 addresses the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality, and statelessness. It calls for measures to combat discrimination against migrant women and girls, ensure non-discriminatory access to healthcare for pregnant women and children, and guarantee an adequate standard of living. States are also urged to prohibit the expulsion or return of women to countries where they may face severe discrimination or violations of their fundamental rights. General recommendation No. 26 emphasizes the need to address exploitation, abuse, and trafficking of women at all stages of the migration process.

Pregnant and new mothers are entitled to specific protections under international law due to their compounded vulnerabilities. Article 38 of Geneva Convention IV states: "Pregnant women and mothers of children under seven years shall benefit by any preferential treatment to the same extent as nationals of the State concerned." Reproductive rights are intrinsically linked to other fundamental rights, such as the right to equality and non-discrimination enshrined in article 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and articles 2 and 3 of CEDAW. States are obligated to ensure women's access to reproductive health services free from legal restrictions or discriminatory practices.

The right to life under article 6 of the ICCPR guarantees that women can survive pregnancy and childbirth through access to adequate medical care, including emergency obstetric services. Similarly, article 12 of the ICESCR requires States to ensure the availability of acceptable and good-quality reproductive health services and materials, free from discrimination, violence, or coercion. Specific protections for women and girls in armed conflict include the prohibition of sexual violence under article 27 of Geneva Convention IV and additional protocol I, articles 76–77.

The Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls, in its report on sexual and reproductive health rights in crisis (A/HRC/47/38), highlights the widespread impunity for violations of these rights and emphasizes the need for reparations, including restitution, compensation, satisfaction, rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-repetition. It stresses that sexual and reproductive health rights must be upheld even in crisis situations, as they are integral to international human rights, humanitarian, refugee, and criminal law. The report also acknowledges barriers to justice faced by women and girls, including a lack of recognition of harm and the absence of effective mechanisms for redress.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

We also wish to remind your Excellency's Government of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement of 1998 (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2), which establishes that internally displaced persons shall enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country. They shall not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of any rights and freedoms on the ground that they are internally displaced (principle 1). All authorities and international actors shall respect and ensure respect for their obligations under international law, including human rights and humanitarian law, in all circumstances, so as to prevent and avoid conditions that might lead to displacement of persons (principle 5). Every human being shall have the right to be protected against being arbitrarily displaced from his or her home, including due to serious violations of human rights, discrimination and fear of persecution (principle 6). Prior to any decision requiring the displacement of persons, the authorities concerned shall ensure that all feasible alternatives are explored in order to avoid displacement altogether. The authorities undertaking such displacement shall ensure, to the greatest practicable extent, that proper accommodation is provided to the displaced persons, that such displacements are effected in satisfactory conditions of safety, nutrition, health and hygiene, and that members of the same family are not separated and adequate measures shall be taken to guarantee to those to be displaced full information on the reasons and

procedures for their displacement and, where applicable, on compensation and relocation; (c) The free and informed consent of those to be displaced shall be sought; (d) The authorities concerned shall endeavor to involve those affected, particularly women, in the planning and management of their relocation; (f) The right to an effective remedy, including the review of such decisions by appropriate judicial authorities, shall be respected (principle 7) Displacement shall not be carried out in a manner that violates the rights to life, dignity, liberty and security of those affected (principle 8) States are under a particular obligation to protect against the displacement of indigenous peoples, minorities, peasants, pastoralists and other groups with a special dependency on and attachment to their lands (principle 9). Every human being has the inherent right to life, and internally displaced persons shall be protected in particular against genocide, murder, summary or arbitrary executions, and enforced disappearances including abduction or unacknowledged detention, threatening or resulting in death; threat and incitement to commit any of the foregoing acts are also prohibited (principle 10(1)). Attacks or other acts of violence against internally displaced persons who do not or no longer participate in hostilities are prohibited in all circumstances (principle 10(2)). Every human being has the right to dignity and physical, mental, and moral integrity, and shall be protected in particular against inter alia rape, mutilation, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other outrages upon personal dignity, such as acts of gender-specific violence, forced prostitution, and any form of indecent violence, acts of violence intended to spread terror among internally displaced persons, and threats and incitement to commit any of the foregoing acts shall be prohibited (principle 11). All internally displaced persons have the right to an adequate standard of living, which at a minimum should include essential food and potable water, basic shelter and housing, appropriate clothing, and essential medical services and sanitation (principle 18).

Special attention should be paid to the health needs of women, including access to female health care providers and services, such as reproductive health care, as well as appropriate counselling for victims of sexual and other abuses (principle 19(2)). The primary duty and responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons lies with national authorities (principle 25). Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Such authorities shall endeavour to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons (principle 28).

Protection of children's rights

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by Lebanon in 1991, enshrines four guiding principles: non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life and development, and the right to participate in decisions affecting them. Article 6 of the CRC recognizes the child's inherent right to life and obliges States to ensure their survival and development. Articles 37 and 9 prohibit torture, arbitrary detention, and separation from parents without just cause. General comment No. 13 (2011) elaborates on the right of children to freedom from violence and references additional protections under articles 19, 20, and 24.

Under international humanitarian law, article 77 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions requires that children be afforded special respect and protection from the effects of warfare, in addition to general civilian protections.

Protection against racial discrimination

We would like to remind to your Excellency's Government of its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which was ratified by Lebanon on 12 November 1971. Article 1 of ICERD defines prohibited racial discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life". Article 2, paragraph 1, obliges States Parties to condemn racial discrimination and to pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms.

In particular, we would like to refer to article 5 which provides that State parties have the obligation to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to the right to security of person and protection by the State against violence or bodily harm. We would also like to recall article 6 of ICERD, which states that State parties shall assure everyone within their jurisdiction of effective protection and remedies through the competent national tribunals and State institutions.