

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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LEBANON: JOINT LETTER TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CALLING FOR AN INTERNATIONAL FACT-FINDING MISSION INTO THE BEIRUT BLAST

To the Permanent Representative of Member and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Excellencies,

We, the undersigned Lebanese and international organizations, survivors and families of the victims are writing once again to urge you to support the adoption of a resolution by the United Nations Human Rights Council at its 54th regular session to establish an international, independent and impartial fact-finding mission into human rights violations related to the Beirut port explosion of 4 August 2020.

On the third anniversary of the explosion, we are no closer to justice and accountability for the catastrophe that damaged half of the capital city and killed at least 236 people, including nationals of Lebanon, Syria, Bangladesh, Philippines, Egypt, Palestine, Ethiopia, Pakistan, the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, France, Belgium, Australia, the United States and Iran.

Instead, the Lebanese authorities have repeatedly interfered with, obstructed and undermined the domestic investigation. The politicians charged with crimes related to the explosion have filed over [25 requests](#) to dismiss the lead investigator, Judge Tarek Bitar, and other judges involved in the case, with the latest series of challenges resulting in the suspension of the investigation since December 2021.

When Judge Bitar attempted to resume the investigation in January 2023, Lebanon's top prosecutor, Ghassan Oueidat, whom Bitar had charged in the case, filed a lawsuit against Bitar, issued a travel ban against him, and [ordered the release](#) of all those suspected of involvement in the explosion who remained in detention. At least one defendant has since [fled](#) the country. The prosecutor's unprecedented move, amid rampant political interference and which violates the law, bypassed the ongoing criminal investigation into the explosion. The [Beirut Bar Association](#), the [Lebanese Judges Association](#) and the [Lebanese Coalition for the Independence of the Judiciary](#) all criticized his decision to release the remaining suspects from detention as illegal.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Margaret Satterthwaite, condemned the blatant political interference in the investigation and [expressed her concern](#) that "former state officials and others who have been implicated in the case have disingenuously resorted to recusal proceedings and other challenging actions directed at the investigating judges appointed to examine the case." Satterthwaite also noted that there is an ongoing media campaign to discredit Judge Bitar and said that he "reportedly received credible death threats and currently has military protection."

In a positive step, Australia delivered a joint statement at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council on behalf of 38 states, [expressing concern](#) that the domestic investigation into the explosion had been "hampered by systemic obstruction, interference, intimidation, and a political impasse." The statement called on the Lebanese authorities to abide by their international human rights obligations and safeguard the independence of the judiciary, and to carry out a swift, independent, impartial, credible and transparent investigation.

However, more than five months since Australia delivered the joint statement, the Lebanese authorities have failed to take any steps to ensure that the domestic investigation can move forward or to adopt a law guaranteeing the [independence of the judiciary](#) in line with international standards.

In order to show that such deliberate inaction has consequences, and to uphold the right of the victims and survivors to truth, as well as their right to access to justice and effective remedies, including reparation, UN member states should put forward a resolution at the Human Rights Council establishing a fact-finding mission into the explosion that would:

- Establish the facts and circumstances of the explosion, including its causes, with a view to establishing state and individual responsibility;
- Identify human rights violations arising from the Lebanese state's failure to protect the right to life;
- Identify the obstacles in the investigation of the blast that would constitute a violation of the state's duty to investigate gross violations of international human rights law effectively, promptly, thoroughly and impartially and, where appropriate, to take action against those allegedly responsible in accordance with domestic and international law;
- Identify violations of the victims' rights to access to justice and effective remedies, including reparation; and
- Formulate recommendations to ensure justice and reparations for the families.

The findings of an international, independent investigation, conducted in accordance with the highest international standards and practices, will support the Lebanese authorities investigating the explosion as well as any effort in Lebanon and in third countries where individuals have filed criminal and civil cases to hold accountable any individual or any legal entity reasonably suspected of responsibility. Further, the investigative mission would make recommendations to Lebanon and the international community on steps that are needed both to remedy the established violations and to ensure that these do not recur.

The survivors of the explosion and the families of the victims have previously sent [two letters](#) to the member and observer states of the Human Rights Council urging them to support a resolution establishing an international investigation. They sent another letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in March 2022. In addition, 43 members of the Lebanese Parliament have also sent letters to the Human Rights Council with same requests.

The Lebanese authorities have been given every opportunity to demonstrate that they are willing and capable of holding those responsible for the explosion to account. But three years later, they have proven that they will use every tool at their disposal – legal and extra-legal – to evade accountability and perpetuate a culture of impunity in the country.

In light of this, Human Rights Council member states have a responsibility and the opportunity to support the Lebanese people's calls for accountability, the rule of law and protection of human rights. Uncovering the truth of what happened on 4 August 2020 is the only way to prevent such a tragedy from occurring in the future and is pivotal to ensure redress after the devastation of that day.

LIST OF SIGNATORIES:

GROUPS:

ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality

Accountability Now

Alternative Media Syndicate

Amnesty International

Dar Al Jadid

Daraj

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

Human Rights Research League

Human Rights Watch

International Commission of Jurists

IPP RC BEIRUT COSMOPOLITAN

Justice for Lebanon

Kulluna Irada

Legal Action Worldwide

Lokman Slim Foundation

Mada

Maharat Foundation

MENA Rights Group

NOUN Collective

Our City, Our Silos Campaign

Pax for Peace

Samir Kassir Foundation

SMEX

Tajammo Mouwakabet al Thawra

The August 4th Collective

The Legal Agenda

The socio-Economic justice initiative MAAN

TIMEP

UMAM Documentation and Research

World Lebanese Cultural Union

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Abdallah Halabi

Abdallah Mohamad

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Ahmad Fatfat

Ahmad Mohamad

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