

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

1 July 2024 MDE 18/8230/2024

LEBANON: JOINT LETTER – RIGHTS GROUPS AND VICTIMS' FAMILIES CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION IN THE BEIRUT BLAST CASE

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

We, the undersigned survivors and families of the victims of the August 2020 Beirut port explosion, and Lebanese and international organizations, are writing to urge you, during the current UN Human Rights Council session, to support a resolution – or at a minimum a joint statement – at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 56th regular session calling for the establishment of an international, independent and impartial fact-finding mission into human rights violations related to the Beirut port explosion of August 4, 2020.

During the Human Rights Council's 52nd session in March 2023, 38 States issued a joint statement condemning the pervasive obstruction and interference with Lebanon's domestic investigation into the Beirut Port explosion. They called on Lebanon "to take all necessary measures to safeguard, in law and in practice, the full independence and impartiality of the Lebanese judiciary," and to ensure that a "swift, independent, impartial, credible, and transparent investigation into the explosion" be carried out.

More than a year later, an investigation into the explosion remains stalled and continues to be "hampered by systemic obstruction, interference, intimidation, and a political impasse," as noted in the March 2023 statement. Victims of the blast and their families have been left with no recourse for truth and justice, as Lebanese officials have repeatedly **obstructed** the course of the domestic investigation.

For years, Lebanese and international rights groups have **documented** political interference with the judiciary, in addition to flawed investigations of politically sensitive murders, and criticized the lack of an independent judiciary, which has allowed a culture of impunity to flourish in Lebanon. Lebanese authorities have failed to take any significant steps since March 2023 to enable the domestic investigation to resume without undue interference and to uphold the rights of victims to an effective remedy, truth and justice.

Moreover, Lebanese authorities have yet to adopt a draft law on the independence of the judiciary that is in line with international standards or adopt necessary legal amendments that may allow the domestic investigation to proceed. In March 2023, nine members of Lebanon's parliament introduced two draft laws that would **strengthen** the independence of judicial investigations and prevent political interference with the judiciary, but parliament has yet to vote on these laws.

In light of this deliberate inaction of the Lebanese authorities, an international, independent, and impartial fact-finding mission into human rights violations related to the Beirut port explosion is urgently needed.

In August 2022, six UN experts **voiced** their support for such an international investigation. In September 2023, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk denounced the lack of accountability for the Beirut port explosion and the repeated interference by Lebanese officials into the domestic investigation. He clearly stated that "it may therefore be time to consider an international fact-finding mission to look into human rights violations related to the tragedy."

In March 2023, the UN expert on judicial independence **warned** that the interference into the domestic investigation impacted "the very ability of the Lebanese justice system to ensure accountability." And on the three-year anniversary of the Beirut blast, in August 2023, **more than 300 organizations and individuals** called for the creation of an international fact-finding mission into the blast.

We jointly call on you to heed the calls of the victims of the Beirut blast, their families, Lebanese and international rights groups, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN experts in order to build support for a resolution that establishes such an international fact-finding mechanism and bring this resolution forward at the Human Rights Council's current 56th session.

The findings of an international, independent investigation, conducted in accordance with the highest international standards and practices, could support a Lebanese domestic investigation if one is allowed to proceed, as well as any efforts in Lebanon and in third countries where individuals have filed criminal and civil cases to hold those responsible to account. Additionally, the investigative mechanism would provide recommendations to Lebanon and the international community on necessary steps to address the identified violations and prevent their recurrence.

We thank you for your attention to this important issue and stand ready to provide your delegation with further information.

Sincerely,

Lebanese and International Organizations

1. Accountability Now
2. Alternative Press Syndicate
3. Amnesty International
4. Arab NGO Network for Development
5. Cedar Centre for Legal Studies (CCLS)
6. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
7. Helem
8. Human Rights Research League
9. Human Rights Watch
10. Kulluna Irada
11. The Legal Agenda
12. Lokman Slim Foundation
13. Samir Kassir Foundation
14. Syrian Center for Media and Expression
15. UMAM Documentation & Research
16. MENA Rights Group
17. The August 4 Collective
18. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)

Families of the Victims of the Blast

1. Arlette Hajj Abdou
2. Layale Abdallah
3. Degaule Abourjeili
4. Tania Daou Alam
5. George Bazergy
6. Elie Brax
7. Sarah Copland
8. Maroun Dagher
9. Wissam Diab
10. Jack Dib
11. Cedric El-Adm

12. Cyril El-Adm
13. Dalal El-Adm
14. Nazih El-Adm
15. Eliane Jean El-Hajj
16. Laura Jamil El-Khoury
17. Leila Metri El-Khoury
18. Nawal El-Murr
19. Pierre Gemayel
20. Joseph Ghafary
21. Nabil Hajj
22. Lara Hayek
23. Najwa Hayek
24. Lara Hojaiban
25. Noha Hojayban
26. Youmna Hojayban
27. Zita Hojayban
28. Dolly Kanaan
29. Yvonne Kfoury
30. Mireille Bazergy Khoury
31. Bassam Khoury
32. Lydia Khoury
33. Michel Khoury
34. Elham Maacaron
35. Marie Makhlouf
36. Abdo Matta
37. Paul Naggear
38. Tracy Naggear
39. Craig Oehlers
40. Gilberte Rahhal
41. Cecile Roukoz
42. Arze Salloum
43. Therese Salloum
44. Michel Sayegh
45. Carmen Khoury Sayegh
46. Lara Sayegh
47. Sarah Sayegh
48. Ajwad Shayya
49. Georges Zaarour

Families of the following firefighters

1. Joe Bou Saab
2. Sahar Fares
3. Misal Hawwa
4. Charbel Hitti
5. Najib Hitti
6. Ramy Kaaky
7. Charbel Karam
8. Eli Khouzamy
9. Ralph Mellehy
10. Joe Noun