

Statement by Lebanese and Regional CSOs

To International Organizations, the United Nations Agencies and International Partners

1. Beirut Explodes

On August 4, 2020, Beirut was hit by the biggest explosion in its history, leading to more than 200 killed, seven thousand wounded, and tens of missing (according to the latest figures by the Ministry of Public Health) before the Lebanese army announced that it would stop the search for the missing in addition to causing disabilities and increasing the suffering of people with disabilities in general.

The explosion also led to billions of dollars in economic losses (the damages have not been surveyed yet) added to the accumulated losses of nearly US\$90 billion, as the country goes through a deep economic, financial, and social crisis, putting its economy on the brink of total collapse.

The social repercussions of the explosion are major. Around 300 thousands of families lost their homes, establishments, and livelihoods. The fragile food security situation brought about by the financial crisis and Covid-19 has become more precarious after the destruction of the granaries and all the imported goods stored at the port. The health sector faces a major crisis, due to the damage caused to three major private hospitals in Beirut, who had to suspend their work, leading to a significant decrease in the capacity of the sector, which is dependent for the most part on private establishments. Furthermore, Covid-19 cases have been rising rapidly and warehouses storing the chronic medications distributed freely by the Ministry of Health and international organizations were destroyed.

These are some of the immediate consequences of the blast, awaiting the results of accurate scientific studies of the direct and indirect impact on the Lebanese economy, which was in the middle of an unprecedented crisis. Dollar exchange rates have been soaring as the country faces hyperinflation (inflation rates exceeded 50% a month over a period of 30 consecutive days). The collapse of the economy is accelerating and cannot be halted through the partial and ad-hoc interventions of a government, which faces its own and no-less dangerous political and institutional crisis.

2. A Political Crisis

The explosion was caused by the presence of 2,750 tons of Ammonium Nitrates, used in manufacturing fertilizers and explosives, at the Beirut port since 2014, without any attempts to move them despite warnings of the danger. Consecutive governments, the Port of Beirut, customs and security forces had knowledge of the presence of dangerous chemicals at the port. The explosion, thus, was not an accident. It is a blatant crime whose responsibility falls on the political, security and administrative authorities overseeing the work of the port, appointed and protected by political forces. The blast was inevitable, waiting to happen whether by accident or on purpose. Regardless of the direct cause or the nature of the spark of this evil that fell upon

Beirut, the real reason is that of all the crises that befell the country since the end of the civil war, the failed political class has been sharing the spoils and accumulating wealth. It contributed to the impoverishment of its people, denying them of their economic, social, civil, and political rights, and now, killing them directly.

Faced by massive issues, people in Lebanon have lost trust in the authorities and the current government, which they hold responsible for the explosion. There is absolutely no trust in any investigation by authorities that failed to solve much simpler crises or prosecute those responsible for the disasters afflicting Lebanon and its people. Those responsible for the catastrophe should not be in charge of the investigation of its causes or recovering from its effects, including receiving aid, managing relief operation, renovation, or reconstruction.

3. Recommendations

The Lebanese people responded immediately to this disaster. Hundreds of individual and collective initiatives and thousands of volunteers from all regions ran down the affected areas to provide assistance. The inaction and absence of state institutions was a reminder of previous crises. This comprehensive popular solidarity is Lebanon's true wealth. It is the one that must be built upon, strengthened, and provided with support to overcome this crisis far from the institutions of corruption, clientelism, and political parading. Accordingly, the civil society organizations signatories to this statement invite the international community to:

- **Call for an immediate, impartial, independent, and transparent international investigation to determine the parties responsible and the causes of deaths and injuries.** As a matter of fact, civil society organizations have been calling for years for an independent judiciary ensuring accountability and transparency at all levels. The Lebanese investigation at the port bombing zone suffered from serious flaws (for example, the lights were turned off early at night leading some to pressure generator owners to bring back power). Whether it is caused by a lack of capabilities or commitment, the process of a domestic investigation is unlikely to reach a plausible conclusion. Further, the credibility of the Lebanese authorities handling the investigation has been questioned by civil society, humanitarian organizations, and a great number of Lebanese (whether in the opposition as well as in the government). It is therefore necessary that an international investigation is conducted to uncover the truth. This shall enable the accountability of those responsible for the presence, transportation, storage, and handling of these materials in the port and the failure to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety and life of the Lebanese over the past years.
- **Stand in solidarity with the Lebanese people and encourage their governments to send humanitarian aid to the country, ensuring that it reaches actual beneficiaries through effective and neutral channels.**
- **Call on the UN and INGOs to develop their cooperation and coordination,** based on the wide network of national and local aid and development organizations providing aid to those in Lebanon. There should be more reliance on local organizations, associations, and initiatives to respond to relief and assistance needs in transparent ways. This support should neither be conditional nor related to untrustworthy state institutions.

- **Support needs assessments conducted by the UN and CSOs and** engage them along with local authorities and the private sector to provide assistance and implement reconstruction plans to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable and set safeguards against further cases of corruption.

Signatories in Alphabetical Order:

From Lebanon

1. ABAAD– Resource Center for Gender Equality
2. Access Center for Human Rights
3. ALEF – Act for Human Rights
4. Arab Institute for Human Rights - Lebanon Branch
5. Arab NGO Network for Development, ANND
6. Association Najdeh
7. Coordination Forum of NGOs Working among the Palestinian Community in Lebanon- Lebanon
8. Committee of the Families of Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon
9. Development Action without Borders/ NABA`A
10. Lamset ward
11. Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, LADE
12. Lebanese Observatory for Workers and Employee Rights, LOWER
13. Lebanese Center for Human Rights
14. Lebanese Crisis Watch at the American University of Beirut
15. Lebanese Democratic Women’s Gathering, RDFL
16. Lebanon Support
17. Mouvement Social
18. NGOs Platform of Saida (Tajamoh)- Lebanon
19. Palestinian Human Rights Organization (PHRO)
20. Palestinian Students’ Fund
21. Proud Lebanon
22. Refugees=Partners
23. Restart Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture
24. Samir Kassir Foundation
25. Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR)
26. Syrian Network for Human Rights
27. Popular Aid for Relief and Development (PARD)

Supporters From the Region:

1. Amals Healing and Advocacy Center
2. Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates- Tunisia
3. Bahrain Transparency Society (BTS)-Bahrain
4. Basamat for Development
5. Espace Associatif-Morocco
6. International Humanitarian Relief
7. Jordanian Women's Union- Jordan
8. National Civic Forum- Sudan
9. New Women foundation- Egypt
10. Palestinian NGO Network- Palestine
11. Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies
12. Reseau Mauritanien Pour l'Action Sociale- Mauritania
13. Tammuz Organization for Social Development (TOSD)-Iraq
14. Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights- Yemen