

# The Time for Change Is Now

## Immediate Action Needed to Promote Accountability and a New, Non-sectarian Political System in Lebanon

Considering the recent tragic explosion in Beirut, we, the undersigned organizations, express our sympathy to the families of all the victims, wish a full and quick recovery to all the injured, and call for continued efforts to locate and account for all who remain missing. We acknowledge the massive local and international humanitarian response and recognize the ongoing efforts to coordinate and provide aid to meet the immediate needs of victims.

We also collectively stress the importance of addressing the fundamental issues at the root of the country's many crises and call upon the Government of Lebanon to push forward with the many and long-awaited reforms needed to end impunity and prioritize justice and accountability. The government must denounce corruption, mismanagement, and negligence and urgently undertake the crucial reforms that have long been needed to address the country's chronic and various political, financial, economic, and health crises, which are all now compounded by the explosion in Beirut's port.

### The Roots of the Crisis

The roots of the current crisis are deep and long precede the tragedy of the port. Since the end of the civil war, no sustainable or effective mechanisms have been put in place to address the culture of division and impunity that has pervaded Lebanese society for decades. In fact, the signing of the Taef agreement in 1989—ostensibly to end the civil war—formally reinforced a system of power-sharing among the different warring factions. This increased the levels of clientelism and corruption in the country and created an atmosphere where civil servants and security actors tend to act based on nepotism and partisanship rather than in the public interest. It also undermined the role of the state and basic principles of separation of powers and independent oversight, rendering concepts such as good governance and justice unattainable. Meanwhile, the flawed economic model affected socioeconomic stability and left the country with massive national debt and a bloated banking sector.

The Amnesty Law passed in 1991 prevented Lebanon from examining and prosecuting wartime violations and fostered the culture of impunity that has allowed perpetrators to remain in power until today. Successive Lebanese governments have employed divisive rhetoric, casting blame on others to justify wrongful policies and practices at the expense of stability and rule of law. They have also failed to make any serious attempts to comply with national or international legal obligations to pursue perpetrators of serious human rights violations, address the needs and rights of victims, or implement essential transparency measures such as the Law on the Right to Access Information. Tellingly, as of 2019, Lebanon [ranked](#) near the bottom worldwide for corruption, at 137 out of 180 nations. This has left victims bereft of their right to justice and deepened public mistrust of state institutions.

Arising out of this collapsing political system, the youth-led revolution that erupted in October 2019 condemned widespread corruption among the political class and urged civil war era-leaders to step aside. Their grievances were many: deteriorating social welfare and quality of life, lack of public services, economic collapse, political deadlock, and escalating political violence. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic brought the demonstrations to a temporary halt and accelerated the slide toward economic collapse, driving greater numbers of Lebanese into poverty.

### The Path from Emergency to Reform

The massive, and likely preventable, blast exposed the country's weak governance and represented yet another devastating consequence of Lebanon's dysfunctional sectarian political system. This latest tragedy should be a turning point that catalyzes meaningful efforts to implement tangible measures to curb impunity, promote accountability, and invest in a deep transformation of the state. Without urgent action, an already volatile situation is likely to unravel further.

We, the undersigned, call for:

- a credible, impartial, and independent investigation into the August 4, 2020, explosion and meaningful support for ongoing efforts to learn the truth about what happened, document the harms suffered, and protect victims' right to pursue reparations in the future;
- reconsideration of the full scope of the wide immunity currently granted to government officials and parliamentarians, in order to allow for perpetrators of violations to be put on trial and, if responsible, be held accountable;
- a full and swift transition to a non-sectarian political system that favors justice and ensures that accountability at all levels is endorsed and upheld;
- the prompt implementation of measures to strengthen the independence and effectiveness of the judicial and security sectors to bring them into compliance with international standards;
- the promulgation of political reform legislation (for example, a new electoral law, a new law governing political parties, and others as needed) that is not based on a confessional or otherwise sectarian system and that guarantees citizens full equality in their rights and duties;
- a comprehensive plan for dealing with the economic and financial crisis;
- full respect for citizens' rights to freedom of speech and assembly;
- additional initiatives and reforms (including of the education system) that will actively promote tolerance and respect for equal rights regardless of religion, gender, sect, or other factors; and
- public debate on the concept and meaning of active citizenship in Lebanon, including through a multi-level national dialogue on political reform and other means of promoting democracy, justice, human rights, and equality.

ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality, Act for the Disappeared, Adyan Foundation, Arab NGO Network for Development, Centre for Lebanese Studies, Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon, Fighters for Peace, Forum Civil Peace Service/Forum ZFD, House of Peace, International Center for Transitional Justice, Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, Lebanese Association for History, Permanent Peace Movement, The Arab Institute for Women, and The Third Voice.



If you would like to sign onto this joint statement, please send an email to [beirut@ictj.org](mailto:beirut@ictj.org)