



3 August 2023

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:

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

Individuals, survivors, families of the victims:

Abdallah Dfouni

Abdallah Halabi

Abdallah Mohamad

Abed Darazi

Ahmad Fatfat

Ahmad Mohamad

Alaa Halabi

Alaa Kaddah



Alessandro Obeid

Alexandre Ibrahimchah

Alfred F. Jelwan

Aline El Fady

Amale Dfouni

Amani Al Roz

Amin Lebbos

Amine Bachir

André Najm

Andre Sleiman - Lebanon Country Representative, Democracy Reporting

International

Andrea Arslanian

Angie Meskawi

Anna Marie Obeid

Anthony Lorfing

Anthony Naoum

Anthony Obeid

Antoine Bou khaled

Antoine Kassab

Antoinette Khouri

Areej Azzam

Arze Salloum

Asma Meskawi

Asma-Maria Andraos

Aya Meskawi

Azmi Haddad

Badri El Meouchi

Bassam Khoury



Bouchra Boustany
Caline Chbeir
Candice Lorfing
Captain Riad Halabi
Carine Farran
Carine Kesserwani
Carine Panayot
Carine Tohme
Carine Zaatar
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Carol Kozah
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Caroline Moukarzel
Catherine Chalhoub
Cecilia Assouad
Cedric El-Adm
Celine Najm
Chadia El Meouchi Naoum
Charbel Moarbes
Charles Nehme
Chibli Mallat
Christine Porcherot
Claude Harik
Craig Oehlers
Cyane Haroun
Cybele Asmar



Cyril El-Adm

Dalal El-Adm

Degaule Abourjeily

Diane Tabib

Dina Sue Mussallam

Dolly Kanaan

Doris Najm

Dr Christina Khater

Dr. Nasser Saidi

Elias Youssef Akiki,

Élie Panayot

Elie Touma

Elise Moukarzel

Elvia Saghbini

Emmanuel Najm

Enya alford

Fadia Berberi

Fady Obeid

Fares Soueid

Ferris Wehbé

Fouad Rahme

Général Maroun Hitti

George Bazergy

Georges Ibrahimchah

Georges Tamer

Georges Zaarour

Ghada Chahla

Ghassan G. Haddad

Giancarlo Chalhoub

Guy Chidiac

Hanan Khoury

Hassane Rifai

Henri Najm

Hilda Haddad

Hisham Farhat

Hussein Ali Ataya

Isabelle Eddé

Jacques Dib

Jad Kobeissy

Jamil Mrouwé

Jean Boustani

Jean-Marc Matta

Jean-Paul Kandalaft

Jeremy Alford

Jihad Nehme

Jihane Dagher Hayek

Jimmy Dahdah

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Karen Toubia

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Karine Mattar

Kayla Haroun

Khaira Halabi

Khajak Papazian

Khalil Antoun

Khodor Sino

Kyra Panayot

Lara Saade

Lara Sayegh

Lara Zeitouny

Larissa Farés

Laura Khoury

Lawyer Assaad Hage

Layale Abdallah

Layla Karameh

Lila Haroun

Lina Rizkallah

Lina Sahmarany

Louisa Bechara

Lyna Comaty

Maha Obeid

Maher Achi

Marc Dfouni

Marcelle Moussa

Mariana Karam

Marianne Chebel Issa El-Khoury

Marie Nader

Marie Vida Obeid



Marine Aoun

Maroun Darwiche

Mary Elias Akiki

Maud Naggear

Maurice Sursock

Maya Majzoub

Mayssa Najm

Melissa Fardel, Legal Advisor, Switzerland

Michel Awad

Michel Haroun

Mikita alford

Mireille Bazergy Khoury

Mireille Habib

Mirna Bassoul

Mirna Habboush

Mohamad Chamseddine Majzoub

Mona Fayad

Myra Rizkallah

Myrna Mezher Helou

Myrna Panayot

Nabil Najm

Nabil Panayot

Nada Akiki Abi Akl

Nada Kilzi Saad

Nadine Haroun

Nadine Khazen

Nagham Akoumi

Najwa Hayek



Naoum Abirached

Nawal El Meouchi

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President Chucri Sader



Prof. Philip A. Salem, Houston

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Rachel Moukarzel

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Rasha Al Amir

Ray Haddad

Raymond Mitri

Rayya Najm

Reem bou Abdallah

Reem Rafeii

Reina Sfeir, Director of the Human Rights Legal Clinic, ULS

Richard Chalhoub

Richard Jreissati

Rima Malek

Rima Nasser

Rodolphe Attallah

Ronald Farra

Rony Mecattaf

Rosy Abla

Rosy Sabbagh

Ruwaida Rafeii

Ryan Obeid

Samar Bassil

Samia El Meouchi Debbané

Samir Asmar



Samir El Khoury

Samir Masaad

Sanaa Assaad

Sandra Daguer

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Charbel Hitti

Charbel Karam

Eli Khouzamy

Joe bou Saab

Joe Noun

Misal Hawwa

Najib Hitti

Ralph Mellehy



Ramy Kaaky

Sahar Fares