

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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General Joseph Aoun
Commander-in-Chief
Lebanese Armed Forces
Beirut, Lebanon

August 18, 2020

Dear General Aoun,

I am writing on behalf of Human Rights Watch regarding the role of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) during the Beirut protests that took place on August 8, 2020.

Human Rights Watch is an impartial, nongovernmental organization that reports on human rights conditions in some 90 countries, including Lebanon. We have been on the ground monitoring the security response to the protests since they began on October 17, and we have published our findings and shared our recommendations with various government officials, including former Interior Minister Raya al-Hassan, Major General Imad Othman, and members of the LAF, including Brigadier General Khalil Yahya and Colonel Ziad Rizkallah.

We give relevant authorities the opportunity to provide information and respond to questions originating from our research that is reflected in the reports that we publish. We are currently conducting research on the LAF's compliance with international human rights standards during the August 8 protests in Beirut.

We respectfully request the answers to the following questions by August 20:

1. Did the army fire live ammunition during protests in downtown Beirut on August 8? If so, did they fire at or towards protesters, such as in the air or on the ground?

Videos shared on social media and verified by Human Rights Watch show that at least one member of the army fired a semi-automatic rifle in the direction of protesters on El Amir Bachir street at around 7:30 pm. He was reprimanded by his superior and sent out of formation. Has an investigation been conducted into this individual's conduct, and will he be held accountable?

2. Videos shared on social media and verified by Human Rights Watch show unidentified men in civilian clothing firing rifles and a handgun towards protesters. They were surrounded by members of the army who did nothing to stop them. Can you identify who these men

were? Why did members of the army not stop them?

3. What is the army's policies and regulations on the use of shotgun-fired metal pellets—such as “birdshot” or other loads—against protestors? Does it consider this the use of lethal force?
4. Members of the army and at least one Military Intelligence official physically assaulted and/or beat protestors, journalists, doctors, and a Human Rights Watch researcher at the Ring intersection in Beirut between 8:45 and 9:30 pm. Was there an order to disperse protestors around that time? Are the members who engaged in the excessive use of force being held accountable?
5. How many members of the army were injured during protests on August 8? What caused these injuries? What are the types of injuries? How many are in critical condition?
6. Has the army opened an investigation into allegations of excessive and unlawful use of force on August 8? If so, who is leading these investigations, when are they expected to be completed, and will the results be announced publicly?

Thank you in advance for considering our request. Any questions and your response can be directed to my colleague Aya Majzoub, Lebanon Researcher, by email at majzoua@hrw.org or by phone on 81-854 473.

Sincerely,

Michael Page
Deputy Middle East Director
Human Rights Watch