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April 11, 2022

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing to you on behalf of Human Rights Watch ahead of the May 15 parliamentary elections to urge you to commit to taking concrete action on human rights priorities in Lebanon.

Human Rights Watch is an international non-governmental organization that monitors and advocates for human rights in more than 100 countries. We have been working in Lebanon since the 1990s.

In order to ensure that human rights issues and concerns receive the attention they deserve in the parliamentary election campaigns, we are submitting the following list of 10 human rights priorities to the main candidates and parties contesting the elections. The goal is to give each of the candidates and parties the opportunity to provide Lebanese voters with their views on human rights priorities in Lebanon and commit to taking concrete commitments on these issues. Please let us know which positions you will support. We hope that you will adopt these commitments as part of your own political platform and ensure that the next parliament and government implements these important recommendations. Lebanese voters deserve a substantive debate during the campaign about issues that affect them, particularly with respect to human rights. Now is the time to make a public commitment for reforms that will strengthen Lebanon's human rights record.

Prior to the elections, Human Rights Watch will issue a report on the human rights commitments that candidates and political parties have made. If you or your political party are willing to commit to some or all of the recommendations laid out below, please let us know by April 28 so that we can include them in our upcoming report.

Any questions and your response can be directed to my colleague Aya Majzoub, Lebanon Researcher, by email at xxxxxxx@hrw.org or by phone at +XXX XX XXX XXX.

Sincerely,

Lama Fakhri
Middle East and North Africa Director
Beirut Office Director
Human Rights Watch

Justice and Accountability

Impunity for grave human rights abuses is widely prevalent in Lebanon. No one has yet been held accountable for the catastrophic explosion in Beirut's port on August 4, 2020, which killed at least 219 people and destroyed half the city. Lebanese leaders have instead obstructed and delayed the ongoing domestic investigation, shielding high-level officials from accountability. Further, security forces who used excessive, and at times lethal, force against protesters since October 2019 have not been held accountable. Lebanese law enforcement and the judiciary have committed multiple failures, gross negligence, and procedural violations in the investigation of politically-sensitive murders over the past few years. The Lebanese judiciary has been plagued by political interference.

- Will you commit to supporting the domestic investigation into the Beirut Blast, including through supporting the lifting of immunity for parliamentarians implicated in the blast? Will you commit to supporting an independent international investigation into the blast that could contribute to domestic accountability proceedings?
- Will you publicly support accountability, including criminal sanctions, for abuses by security forces, including torture, ill-treatment, and the use of unlawful force against protesters?
- Will you commit to supporting a law on judicial independence that meets international standards?
- Will you commit to providing the National Human Rights Institute and the National Preventative Mechanism against Torture with the necessary financial and other resources to fulfill their mandate?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on justice and accountability.

Economic crisis and rights

Lebanon's economic crisis is caused by the Lebanese authorities' "deliberately inadequate policy responses," according to the World Bank. The UN estimates that around 80% of Lebanon's population now lives in poverty, eroding their ability to access basic rights, including food, water, healthcare, education, and electricity. Yet, the Lebanese authorities have provided inadequate support to families struggling to cope with the economic crisis, and they have failed to meet the pre-conditions necessary for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout, including passing the budget.

- Will you commit to developing a comprehensive and universal social safety net, respecting the right to social security for all including through reforming and expanding the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) to ensure universal coverage, including of informal workers, urgently implementing the ration card program, and providing social grants to those at risk, such as children, older people, and persons with disabilities?
- Will you commit to supporting a state budget and financial recovery plan that fairly distributes the losses in the financial sector and does not disproportionately place the burden on lower-income households and depositors?
- Will you commit to reforming the healthcare sector so it ensures the right to health for all residents in Lebanon regardless of nationality or socio-economic status, including through ensuring hospitals and state insurance schemes have the necessary resources?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on addressing the economic and financial crisis.

Electricity

40% of Lebanon's entire debt is the result of the accumulated cost of subsidizing Electricite du Liban (EDL). But despite the massive amounts of money injected into EDL, Lebanese residents are facing widespread blackouts lasting up to 22 hours per day. Hospitals, schools, and bakeries have struggled to operate amid these energy shortages. But even before the crisis, Lebanon's electricity sector failed to

provide adequate, affordable electricity for all, and it was harmful for residents' health and for the environment. The government has so far failed to provide sustainable solutions for the electricity sector.

- Will you commit to supporting an electricity reform plan that ensures all residents have access to affordable electricity, that reduces as much as possible Lebanon's reliance on fossil fuels by shifting to renewable sources?
- Will you commit to ratifying draft laws related to renewable energy currently being studied in parliament?
- Will you commit to regulating diesel generators, including by mandating the installation of meters and the adoption of stringent health and safety regulations?
- Will you commit to recognizing an enforceable right to electricity for all?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on the electricity sector.

Freedom of Expression

Human Rights Watch has documented a troubling pattern of arrests and prosecutions for criticizing Lebanese officials or government bodies. Criminal defamation laws and laws criminalizing criticism of public officials and symbols violate Lebanon's obligations under international law and stifle freedom of expression.

- Will you commit to repealing laws that criminalize defamation and criticism of state officials, government institutions, and national symbols?
- Will you commit to not supporting any law that would allow imprisonment for "speech crimes" and that would impose onerous restrictions on licensing new media outlets?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on freedom of expression.

Military Courts

Lebanon tries civilians, including children, in military courts, violating their due process rights and international law. Those who have stood trial in the military courts describe incommunicado detention, the use of confessions extracted under torture, decisions issued without an explanation, seemingly arbitrary sentences, and a limited ability to appeal.

- Will you commit to amending article 24 of the Code of Military Justice of 1968 to remove civilians and all children from military court jurisdiction?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on the military courts.

Women's Rights

Women face discrimination under 15 religion-based personal status laws, including inequality in access to divorce, child custody, and property rights. Lebanese women cannot pass on their nationality to their children and foreign husbands and are subject to discriminatory inheritance laws. Lebanon has no minimum age for marriage for all its citizens, and some religious courts allow girls younger than 15 to marry.

The 2014 Law on the Protection of Women and Family Members from Domestic Violence and 2020 amendments established important protections and reforms, but failed to criminalize marital rape. A lack of coordination in the government's response to sex trafficking puts women and girls at risk. Lebanon's 2020 Sexual Harassment Law criminalized sexual harassment, and provided protections for whistleblowers and victims from retaliation, however it falls well short of international standards including the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Violence and Harassment (C190). It failed to include measures to prevent harassment, labor law reforms, monitoring, and civil remedies, all of which are needed to address sexual harassment.

- Will you commit to passing an optional civil personal status code that would ensure equal rights for all Lebanese?
- Will you commit to amending Lebanon's nationality law to ensure that children of Lebanese women can obtain citizenship on an equal basis to children of Lebanese men? ?
- Will you commit to requiring government oversight of religious courts and authorities to ensure compliance with human rights obligations, and require that religious confessions submit their laws to parliament for review?
- Will you commit to passing a law to set the national minimum age for marriage at 18, with no exceptions?
- Will you commit to amending the domestic violence law to ensure that the legal definition of rape is comprehensive, with no exceptions for marital rape?

- Will you commit to removing obstacles to reporting human trafficking and providing support to survivors?
- Will you commit to addressing gaps on preventing and responding to sexual harassment at work including amending the law in line with international standards?
- Will you commit to ratifying the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Violence and Harassment?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on women's rights.

Migrant Domestic Workers

Lebanon's restrictive and exploitative kafala system traps tens of thousands of migrant domestic workers in potentially harmful situations by tying their legal status to their employer, enabling highly abusive conditions amounting at worst to modern-day slavery. They are also excluded from labor law protections. Lebanon is an outlier as it is now one of two major countries of destination for migrant domestic workers in the Middle East region that has no labor law protections for domestic workers. Incidents of abuse against migrant domestic workers have been exacerbated by the economic crisis and Covid-19 pandemic.

- Will you commit to amending article 7 of the Labor Law to remove the exclusion of domestic workers?
- Will you commit to dismantling the kafala system so that workers' visas are no longer tied to individual sponsors, and they can terminate their employment and change employers without sponsor consent, including through supporting a rights-respecting standard unified contract?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on migrant domestic workers.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Adultery is criminalized under Lebanon's penal code, and article 534 punishes "any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature" with up to one year in prison. In recent years, authorities have conducted raids to arrest people allegedly involved in same-sex conduct, some of whom were subjected to torture, including forced anal examinations. Transgender women in Lebanon face systemic violence

and discrimination in accessing basic services, including employment, health care, and housing. The economic crisis, compounded by Covid-19 lockdown measures, disproportionately affected lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

- Will you commit to abolishing article 534 of Lebanon's penal code and other provisions that criminalize consensual adult sexual relations?
- Will you commit to supporting a comprehensive anti-discrimination bill that prohibits discrimination on any grounds, including nationality, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and age, and gives victims of discrimination an effective remedy?
- Will you commit to introducing legislation that allows individuals to change their name and gender marker through a simple administrative procedure based on self-declaration?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Refugees

Lebanon hosts nearly 900,000 registered Syrian refugees, and the government estimates another 500,000 live in the country without registration. Only 20 percent of Syrian refugees have legal residency, making most of them vulnerable to harassment, arrest, detention, and deportation. Although the Lebanese government continues to publicly state its commitment to the principle of nonrefoulement, it has deported more than 6,000 Syrians in recent years.

The government continues to pursue policies designed to coerce Syrian refugees to leave, and the acute economic crisis and staggering inflation have made it exceedingly difficult for refugees to afford the most basic necessities; 90 percent of Syrian families in Lebanon live in extreme poverty, relying on increasing levels of debt to survive. Palestinians also face restrictions, including on their right to work.

- Will you support efforts to regularize Syrians legal status/legal residency in Lebanon until a time when conditions are safe in Syria and refugees can make a free, informed and voluntary decision to return to Syria? Will you publicly oppose all forced returns of Syrian refugees?

- Will you commit to abolishing legislative restrictions on hiring Palestinians, and commit to allowing Palestinians to access government health and education facilities?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on refugees.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Hundreds of people sustained a disability as a result of the Beirut Blast. But despite the passage of Law 196 in December 2020 that promised lifelong health coverage by the National Social Security Fund, this law has not been implemented and persons with disabilities have received minimal support from the government. Public and private schools often deny admission to children with disabilities despite Law 220/2000 prohibiting such discrimination. Most schools do not take reasonable steps to provide the few children with disabilities who manage to enroll with a quality education on an equal basis with other children.

- Will you commit to ensuring that Law 196 is implemented and that persons with disabilities have access to all the services they need?
- Will you commit to amending Law 220/2000 or pass new legislation that would require schools to take all necessary steps to include children with disabilities and ensure they have reasonable accommodations to access a quality education?

Please provide any additional details you would like to add regarding your policies on the rights of persons with disabilities.