

Unofficial Translation of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces' Response to Human Rights Watch

The General Directorate of Internal Security Forces (ISF) respects freedom of expression, which is a sacred right and natural principle of human rights, stipulated in international conventions and domestic laws.

The Lebanese constitution states in paragraph C of its preamble that Lebanon is a "**parliamentary democratic** republic, based on respect for public freedoms, foremost of which is freedom of opinion and belief, social justice, and equality of rights and duties among all citizens without distinction or preference."

Article 8 of the constitution states that "personal liberty shall be safeguarded and **protected by law**. No one shall be arrested, imprisoned or detained except in accordance with the provisions of the law. No offense or punishment may be determined except by law."

Article 13 states that "the freedom to express opinions in speaking and writing, the freedom of printing, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom of association **are all guaranteed within the sphere of law.**"

Therefore, citizens, residents and anyone present on Lebanese soil become subject to arrest and legal prosecution when they perform an illegal or unauthorized act.

Moreover, the rights and freedoms stipulated in the Lebanese constitution should all be in accordance with the provisions of the law. Therefore, the exercise of any of these rights must be carried out through the laws that govern them or otherwise become an illegal act that exposes its perpetrators to prosecution.

The right to demonstrate, for example, is regulated by law according to Decree No. 1024 of March 29, 2006.

Riots are under the provisions of the penal code, according to which perpetrators are prosecuted.

Article 1 of Law 17/90 on the organization of the ISF states that it is "public armed forces whose jurisdiction covers all Lebanese territories and territorial waters and airspace. Their duties are determined as followed:

1 - In the field of administrative policing:

(A) Maintaining order and consolidating security.

(B) Providing public comfort.

(C) Protection of persons and property.

(D) Protection of freedoms under the law.

(E) Ensuring the application of laws and regulations entrusted to them.

2 - in the field of judicial control

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3 - In other areas:

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C - Guarding diplomatic missions in Lebanon.

Based on all the aforementioned, the ISF performs the tasks assigned to it in accordance with the constitution and law and takes the necessary measures it is commissioned to carry out within their legal jurisdiction to protect freedoms and security. It is not a repressive tool and does not depart from the will of the people, who are the source of authority and have mandated the ISF with these duties and granted it this jurisdiction. **Therefore, the ISF is not subject to suspicion, accountability, or accusation**, especially that it is one of the institutions that embrace the principles of transparency, reward, and punishment the most. This is made clear by the fact that the ISF are the first security institution in Lebanon, and the Middle East, to develop a code of conduct, which was launched at the Grand Serail under the auspices of his Excellency the Prime Minister as an expression of seriousness and commitment, and has published it in three languages on its website to be seen by whomever wants to [read] and rely on it as a reference when dealing with the ISF. Also, the ISF it has established social media accounts to enhance interaction with citizens and receive complaints before compliments. It should be noted that there is a system for complaints against ISF members, which is known to all. However, in most cases, the ISF takes the initiative to implement proper measures against its members once it has verified that they have committed any wrongdoing. These measures are made public in the media.

Concerning the sit-in near the US Embassy in Awkar against President Trump's decision, security forces were cooperating with the organizers of the sit-in. However, preparedness of some of the demonstrators to riot was clear when one of the organizers, using a loudspeaker, expressed his surprise and condemnation that there were masked people among the protesters. It turned out that they had Molotov cocktails and handed out onions to [other rioters] and to journalists to be used as protection if smoke bombs and tear gas were used.

Despite our reservations about how you asked your questions, which take the form of an interrogation, we would like to make it clear that members of the institution showed discipline, composure and great patience. For several hours, they tolerated the assaults of rioters, who set fire to garbage dumpsters. The fire reached power cables, which could have caused many casualties among protesters if it wasn't for the intervention of men of the security forces, who were able to switch off the power. Twenty four [ISF] members were injured as a result of stones and Molotov cocktails being thrown at them, and our equipment and vehicles as well as public and private properties were damaged, which violates the provisions of Article 17/90 of the aforementioned law, which literally stipulates: 1. "**Protection of persons [and] property**" – there was a great danger to the citizens in the area and ISF members, and the assault on property was clear to the public, especially after the municipality publicly objected in the media that public and private property was being attacked; 2. "**Protection of Freedoms under the Law**" – the ISF have it committed themselves to protecting freedoms, especially the freedom to demonstrate, but some of them were not disciplined and were seen carrying out clear riots indicating their violation of the law.

As a result, riot police were forced to disperse the rioters, who had taken refuge in the locations of journalists, who were in the middle of the confrontation during the hit-and-run operations. We asked them to stay away from the scene for their safety. Ten rioters were arrested, four of whom were released on Monday, and six were referred to the military judiciary in response to the latter's request, based on photographs and confessions that document their wrongdoing. The ISF affirms its respect for the rights of citizenry and the press to express their opinions, and will not hesitate to exercise its right to self-defense and legal jurisdiction to stop riots and arrest rioters and bring them before the competent judiciary. It also commends the actions of its members for the professionalism, discipline, patience and good conduct they have shown. On the other hand, no complaints have been filed against ISF members. However, after we obtained photos and footage from the media, we will take necessary measures against those of our members who violated the law. They were very few – these actions are very limited and individual – among hundreds of participants in the mission, who have achieved the utmost restraint and respect for security and order procedures that respect the principles of human rights.