

RENMUN VI

Finding Solace in Solidarity



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CHAIR REPORT

Human Rights Council

Chair Introduction

Greetings delegates and welcome to RENMUN 2021! We are Yoonjung and Audrey, your chairs for the Human Rights Council! This committee offers all delegates the opportunity to discuss present-day issues around the world with other like-minded students. We look forward to witnessing 2 days of intense and productive debates. During the conference, we hope to see thoughtful ideas, creative resolutions, well-crafted speeches, and amendments as delegates uphold the collaborative environment of MUN. We wish you all the best of luck preparing for this conference. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to either of us - Yoonjung Choi (230579@hkis.edu.hk) or Audrey Yuen (hkyouthopps@gmail.com).

Best wishes,
Yoonjung Choi and Audrey Yuen

Addressing the Humanitarian Crisis in Lebanon

Lebanon is a country in the Middle East with a coastline on the Mediterranean Sea; population 5,900,000 (estimated 2015); official language, Arabic; capital, Beirut.

Beirut, one of the oldest cities in the world, was historically destroyed and rebuilt seven times, affirming the resilience and self-reliance of its people. Lebanon has suffered from decades of political corruption, sectarian fragmentation and protracted conflicts that resulted in health, economic and social struggles. Moreover, Lebanon was overburdened with more than one million refugees, increasing its population size by nearly 30%, to become home to the world's largest refugee per capita ratio. Over the past year alone, Beirut has witnessed a civil revolution, the COVID-19 pandemic, its worst economic crisis in decades, and most recently one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history.

Key Terms

Term	Definition
Humanitarian crisis	an event or series of events that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security, or wellbeing of a community or other large group of people, usually over a wide area
Refugee	someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. (The 1951 Refugee Convention)
Resettlement	transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement

Background Information

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), “Lebanon hosts the largest number of displaced people per capita in the world; one in five people in the country is a refugee. The large majority are Syrians, but Lebanon also hosts a large Palestinian refugee population, including Palestinian refugees from Syria. The influx of Syrian refugees has put much pressure on the Lebanese economy. Many refugees live below the poverty line and are in need of humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs. Female-headed households face additional challenges in meeting their basic needs. Challenging social and economic conditions have been associated with an increase in violence against women and children, while harmful practices such as child marriage also continue to be a concern. The impact of the crisis in Lebanon has also contributed to growing tensions between refugees and host communities. The Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), led by the Lebanese government in collaboration with the UN, international and local NGOs, guides the humanitarian response. Line Ministries lead each of ten sectors with the support of a UN coordinating agency: within the health sector, UNFPA leads the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) working group as well as the Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) task force; under the protection sector, UNFPA is leading the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) task force.”

World Vision, a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families, and communities to overcome poverty and injustice, reported the following regarding the recent Beirut explosion.

“An explosion that rocked the port of Beirut, Lebanon, on August 4, killed at least 160 people and injured about 6,000. It created a shock wave that severely damaged roads and buildings, shattering glass for miles.

In the densely populated city of more than 2 million people, about 300,000 were immediately displaced. Families have been forced to seek temporary shelter with relatives and friends or in schools or other civic buildings. According to local assessments, as many as 500,000 people may need assistance with immediate needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.”

Potential Clashes

The Lebanese population is increasingly desperate as a result of the explosion as well as the other recent economic and political insults; as such, there is increasing competition for humanitarian aid and funding. Humanitarian organizations in Lebanon rapidly diverted efforts to support all those affected by the explosion. Though some may have received increased funding, valuable resources (both human and financial) could be diverted away from the already underfunded projects which support refugees, migrants, and vulnerable host communities. This could have secondary consequences on projects focused on health, psychosocial programs, protection, nutrition, shelter, and employment. The politicization of aid and rampant corruption within the Lebanese system will undermine trust and funding efforts from outside government donors and aid agencies. Added to this is a banking crisis that prevents people from withdrawing much-needed funds particularly in US dollars. There is also the potential for a reduction in remittances from Lebanese expatriates which account for 12.5% of Lebanon's GDP.

The effects of politics or fears of corruption could undermine funding efforts both from governments and institutions as well as private donors. After the explosion, the Lebanese Cabinet declared a two-week state of emergency which extended powers to the army with the potential to crack down on protestors or those who criticize the government. Lebanon's parliament subsequently approved this measure raising concerns about the use of curfews, media censorship, banning of mass gatherings, and the trials of civilians in military courts.

Government rhetoric in Lebanon had also increasingly turned towards the return of refugees to Syria with concerns regarding forced returns. The Ministry of Social Affairs has already outlined plans for the mass return of Syrians in liaison with the Syrian government with forced returns reported by Human Rights Watch since April 2019. In addition to the deportation of Syrians, since early 2019 the Lebanese government has adopted a policy of there has been the demolition of refugee shelters, and a crackdown on Syrians working without permits. (HRW, 2020) Although this is illegal under international law, there is potential for Lebanese politicians to reinforce the narrative against refugees at this time of political turmoil. The repatriation of Syrian or Palestinian refugees from Syria who had fled Syria's protracted conflict and who may be wanted by the Syrian government could result in arbitrary arrest, forced disappearances, torture, forced conscription, or extortion. These coercive measures exist on a background of

increasingly negative xenophobic rhetoric and policies by Lebanese politicians towards Syrian refugees, which have only increased following the onset of the economic crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, and now the Beirut blast. This leaves Syrian refugees in Lebanon even more vulnerable.

Key Stakeholders

Children

Urgent action and increased support are vital to ensure that all children affected by the Beirut Explosions can access education when the new school year starts later this month, UNICEF said today, one month after two massive explosions tore through the city. At least 163 public and private schools were damaged by the explosions – impacting over 70,000 students and 7,600 teachers. In addition, 20 TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) schools were damaged, impacting approximately 7,300 students.

Ensuring children have access to education is a key priority for UNICEF. Education not only provides children with opportunities for the future, but it can also provide children and their parents with a sense of normalcy, return a feeling of hope for the future and provide a safe space for children who are experiencing trauma. An estimated 600,000 children live within a 20-kilometer radius of the blast and could be suffering negative short-term and long-term psychological impacts.

Based on initial assessments of schools within a 20-kilometer radius of the blast by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education thus far, approximately 80 percent of schools have sustained light to moderate damage and 20 percent have sustained heavy damage. Resources are being rapidly mobilized to begin rehabilitation and get light to moderately damaged schools back in operation as soon as October together with UNESCO and other partners.

Women and Girls

Life remains uncertain for thousands of women and girls in Beirut. Among the displaced are an estimated 84,000 women and girls of reproductive age. The blast and its aftermath come atop the COVID-19 pandemic and an economic crisis. Job losses have curtailed family spending, even as disease prevention is

becoming more urgent than ever. Too often, the needs of women and girls are the first to go unmet.

The explosion reduced both the availability of and access to reproductive health services for pregnant and lactating women, with 40 percent reporting a need for healthcare in support of infants and mothers (Lebanese Red Cross (LRC)-led Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA)).

Furthermore, displacement and overcrowding increase both the risk of the spread of COVID-19 and the vulnerability of children and women to GBV including sexual violence.

Refugees

The port explosion in Beirut, Lebanon on 4th August 2020 has had devastating impacts on a population that was already facing a humanitarian crisis, socio-political turmoil after a severe economic downturn as well the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the most affected are vulnerable refugees and migrants (particularly those who are unregistered or undocumented) living in Lebanon, many of whom were already living in poverty, with high unemployment, limited access to formal employment opportunities, inadequate shelter and food, and limited access to healthcare services. The proportion of refugees living in extreme poverty had already increased to 75%, with many destitute. There are an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees (of whom 880,414 are registered with the UNHCR, 23.5% of whom are registered in Beirut), over 475,000 Palestinian refugees (including around 45,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria) and over 250,000 migrant workers in Lebanon, many of whom are migrant domestic workers. With 1 in 4 people in Lebanon considered refugees, Lebanon has the highest refugee ratio per capita anywhere in the world and Syrian refugees in Lebanon already faced numerous challenges with regards to shelter, employment, education, and healthcare before this explosion.

It is estimated that at least 43 of the more than 200 who died in the blast were Syrian and 124 other Syrians have been injured including 20 with serious injuries. However, these figures may be higher due to the large proportion of unregistered Syrians in Lebanon, many of whom were living and working in the port area. According to UNHCR, the number of refugees within 2.5 km of the blast was 14,600,

those within 5.0 km were 125,600. The immediate impacts of the blast on physical and psychosocial health are likely to be exacerbated by the secondary impacts of the blast including destroyed accommodation and loss of livelihoods, a shattered economy, and poor healthcare access. For the large proportion of refugees who are currently unregistered, longer-term consequences are yet to be realized however they may include increased socio-political tensions with further scapegoating of refugees or calls for forced return to Syria. There have also been concerns raised around burying Syrians who died in Lebanon or returning them to Syria

Possible Solutions

Below are some recommendations by ALEF – Act for Human Rights, a Lebanese non-profit, non-partisan human rights watchdog organization that works on documenting, and promoting human rights violations and values in Lebanon.

To the UNHCR

1. Continue and fast forward efforts to review the status of existing Syrian refugees to ensure in line with UNHCR practice and standards and in coordination with the Lebanese authorities
2. Engage in discussions with and assist the Lebanese authorities to draft a national policy on the Syrian refugee crisis
3. Assist the Lebanese authorities in conducting human rights and refugee law training of local municipal officials as well as border officers
4. Continue and intensify advocacy efforts towards states to increase the number of places for Syrian refugees globally on resettlement, humanitarian admission, or other forms of admission.

To the International Community

1. On the basis of the recognition of the huge impact the Syrian refugee crisis has on Lebanon and the responsibility of other members of the international community, provide adequate resources to Lebanon in order to address the needs of the Syrian refugees, including through granting

development aid to support Lebanese infrastructures affected by the mass influx and therefore tackle the growing concern in the local population.

2. Intensify efforts to increase the number of places for Syrian refugees globally on resettlement, humanitarian admission, or other forms of admission, in particular through the activation of the temporary protection EU Directive and agreeing that some of the Syrian refugees are temporarily admitted in EU member States;
3. Provide more support to self-reliance activities for Syrian refugees in order to ensure that they are less dependent on assistance and subsidies.

Past Actions

UNFPA

During the reporting period, UNFPA distributed 10,146 dignity kits to women and girls in affected areas. The kits contain sanitary pads, soap, towels, toothbrushes, and toothpaste and undergo a disinfection process prior to distribution in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infections. UNFPA also added reusable face masks. During the distribution of the dignity kits, women and girls also receive information on services regarding sexual reproductive health, GBV, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), and awareness-raising activities.

UNICEF

UNICEF is working with its partners in areas affected by the explosions to support the rehabilitation of damaged schools and the replacement of furniture and equipment, promote school safety guidelines, train teachers in psychosocial support, and coordinate the distribution of educational supplies and early childhood development kits to teachers and caregivers. UNICEF is also looking for innovative solutions for remote learning with increased connectivity and access to electronic devices.

As of September 4, 2020, UNICEF's response to meet other urgent needs of affected children has included so far:

- UNICEF has delivered 18 shipments of critical humanitarian supplies, totaling 67 tons, in addition to local procurement of emergency supplies.
- UNICEF and partners have re-connected over 155 buildings to the public water system and installed more than 870 water tanks in damaged households.
- 2,400 people assisted with temporary access to safe water for drinking and water for domestic use.
- Distributed 4,485 hygiene kits and 462 baby kits to affected families.
- 1,406 children, parents, and caregivers provided with psychosocial support.
- Three children without parental or family care provided with appropriate alternative care arrangements.
- 308 children under 5 receiving essential nutrition supplements.
- Provision of two new solar fridges to be installed in Rafic Hariri Hospital and support of the maintenance requirements of two cold rooms in the hospital for vaccine storage.
- Assessment of the needs, for physical rehabilitation of 23 damaged health facilities.
- Collaborated with MEHE to support the rapid assessment of damaged public schools and TVET institutions
- More than 430,000 fabric masks distributed to the affected population by UNICEF and partners;
- Provision of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to primary healthcare centers and dispensaries and providing immunization services.
- PPE order includes more than 3.5 million medical masks, 8,070 face shields, 124,810 gowns, 11,145 goggles, 7,646 thermometers, and 2.6 million pairs of gloves.
- More than 1,900 youth mobilized in response including cleaning, minor rehabilitation of households, and preparation and distribution of meals for vulnerable families.

Guiding Questions

1. What are the most urgent needs of the people in Lebanon currently?
2. Acknowledging the protracted nature of displacement of Syrian refugees currently on Lebanese territory, both with regards to the duration of the displacement and the lack of viable durable solutions, how could a new, comprehensive refugee policy be developed to ensure the protection of Syrian refugees in Lebanon for the full duration of their presence in the country?
3. How can national and local authorities in Lebanon, with support from donors, ensure rule of law at the national and local levels is respected and applied equitably and consistently to all people residing in its territory, in line with national and international legal obligations?
4. Taking into account the complexity of legal frameworks in relation to the different nationalities present in Lebanon, how can the Government of Lebanon ensure the administrative and judicial systems are able to uphold the rights of all people present in Lebanese territory, including those not holding Lebanese citizenship?
5. Would the Government of Lebanon and donors be open to humanitarian programming designed to reduce aid dependency over time and provide for a form of assistance that allows for some degree of self-reliance?
6. What could forms of legal mobility (legal movements between Lebanon and Syria) look like for the Government of Lebanon to be able to take into account concerns for the security of its territory, while at the same time allowing refugees to maintain some relation with their home country, which could in future make the return more sustainable?

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