



## SECURITY COUNCIL INFORMAL EXPERT GROUP ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

LEBANON

May 25th 2021

### **Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015):**

*OP 5. Recognizes the ongoing need for greater integration of resolution 1325 (2000) in its own work in alignment with resolution 2122 (2013), including the need to address challenges linked to the **provision of specific information and recommendations on the gender dimensions of situations on the Council's agenda, to inform and help strengthen the Council's decisions, and therefore in addition to elements set out in resolution 2122 (2013), and in accordance with established practice and procedure: (a) Expresses its intention to convene meetings of relevant Security Council experts as part of an Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security to facilitate a more systematic approach to Women, Peace and Security within its own work and enable greater oversight and coordination of implementation efforts.***

### **Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019):**

*OP 4. Recognizes the work of the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security, as expressed in resolution 2242, and expresses its intention to consider its information, analysis, and recommendations, acknowledging UN Women's important role in this regard, and emphasizes that sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations and all other aspects of the Women, Peace and Security agenda should continue to be addressed in this forum.*

### **Security Council Resolution 2493 (2019):**

*OP. 7. Takes note of the work of the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security as expressed in resolution 2242 (2015) to facilitate a more systematic approach to Women, Peace and Security within its own work and enable greater oversight and coordination of implementation efforts; and acknowledges UN Women's important role in this regard.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>1</sup>

### **Considerations for upcoming decisions of the Security Council**

In the upcoming negotiations on the mandate of UNIFIL, the Security Council should retain all existing references to women, peace and security in both the preamble and operational paragraphs of resolution 2539 (2020) including the request to UNIFIL to continue to support the implementation of the action plan on Women and Peace and Security. In addition, the Security Council could consider the following additions:

*Request UNIFIL to support, engage and consult with a wide range of diverse women's civil society organizations and women-led organizations and community groups in all areas of its work.*

*Request UNIFIL to support security and military agencies in Lebanon to increase the number of women in their ranks, including in decision-making positions.*

Beyond the UNIFIL mandate and in any upcoming resolutions or presidential statements on Lebanon, as well as in Council deliberations and consultations, the Council could also consider encouraging the Lebanese authorities to repeal legislation discriminating against women, adopt a unified personal status law, and strengthen the participation of women as voters and candidates in the parliamentary and

<sup>1</sup> This background note, including the recommendations at the end of this document, is prepared by UN Women as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, in consultation with other UN entities.

municipal elections in 2022, as well as all conflict prevention efforts, and urge the UN to support the government in these matters.

#### **Other recommendations for the IEG and the Security Council**

In addition, the IEG co-chairs and other Council Members should:

- Invite women from civil society to brief in upcoming meetings on Lebanon.
- Support the Government of Lebanon in strengthening the participation of women in peace, security, and political processes, including the parliamentary and municipal elections in 2022, and advocate for women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, and social cohesion, building on the role played by women in the protests and in mediation at the local level.
- Support the implementation and resourcing of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, with a specific focus on its pillars related to peacebuilding and reconciliation.
- Advocate for gender-inclusive recovery in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing financial and economic crisis, including sustainable funding for women's civil society organizations.
- Support the institutional frameworks and capacity for GBV prevention and response, including measures to end child marriage, and advocate for protective policies that safeguard the rights of women and girls and enhance protection for women human rights defenders and peacebuilders.
- Advocate for the government to lift its reservations to CEDAW and ratify its Optional Protocol.

### **Introduction**

This is the first time that the Security Council's Informal Expert Group will discuss the situation in Lebanon. Lebanon has been in the midst of an acute political and economic crisis, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the explosion of the Beirut port. The country hosts a significant presence of the international community, including a peacekeeping mission, a special political mission, regional organizations, and humanitarian aid agencies. It is also the country with the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. In spite of endemic gender inequality, women have recently played a prominent role in protests and political movements, and have shown to be crucial actors in local peacebuilding and mediation.

### **Developments in the Security Council**

**Resolution 2539 (2020)**, adopted on 28 August 2020, extended the mandate of the **United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)** until 31 August 2021. It retained the provisions on women, peace and security of the previous mandate, including requesting UNIFIL to take fully into account gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate and to assist the Lebanese authorities in ensuring the full, effective, and meaningful participation, involvement and representation of women at all levels of decision-making in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. In addition, the resolution requested UNIFIL to support the implementation of the action plan on Women and Peace and Security, including to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). It is only since Resolution 2433 (2018) that the UNIFIL mandate includes provisions on women, peace and security issues beyond sexual exploitation and abuse. **Relevant excerpts of resolution 2539 (2020) are included in the annex below.**

In a **press statement** issued on 8 February 2019, the Security Council welcomed the formation of a National Unity Government in Lebanon and specifically welcomed the nomination of four women in the new Government including as Interior Minister for the first time in Lebanon's history, and encouraged the Lebanese authorities to further pursue efforts in ensuring the full and effective participation of women in

Lebanese politics. This government was replaced by a new cabinet formed in early 2020, with six women instead of four, as explained below.

No woman from Lebanese civil society has ever briefed the Council in a country-specific meeting on Lebanon.

### **Women's participation in public life**

**Lebanese women were at the forefront of the 2019 protests** and constituted at least half of the protesters, according to estimates by UN Women. Among them were many women human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, and economists. They led and reshaped political organizing, planned rallies and marches, published articles, and staffed roadblocks. While the primary focus of the protests was on political and economic reform, women called for gender equality in many other areas, including equal nationality rights, a unified civil personal status law instead of the religious personal status laws, increased political representation, legal protection against sexual harassment and violence against women, abolishing the Kafala sponsorship system for migrant workers, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, including for LGBTIQ+ people. In response to the protests, the President of Lebanon and several political parties committed to passing a unified personal status law as an entry point to a civic state and an end to the confessional political system. Women contributed to the nonviolent nature of the protests and led cross-sectarian peace actions, such as marches and small-scale negotiations during periods of tension and violence. The protests opened new spaces for conversations about women's rights and the feminist agenda, and generated greater social acceptance of women's political participation and engagement.

For the first time in the history of Lebanon there are 6 women among the 20 members (30 percent) of the now caretaker **Government** established on 21 January 2020, including the first woman as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, as well as the first woman Minister of Justice. Only 18 percent of the Government's Inter-Ministerial Committee on COVID-19 are women. In the **2018 parliamentary elections**, the number of women running for office increased sharply from 12 in 2009 to 113, with women representing 11 percent of all candidates that registered to run in the election. However, in the end, only 4.7 percent of the elected members of parliament were women -one of the lowest rates in the MENA region and the world-, and one woman member of parliament resigned after the 2020 Beirut explosion. At the **local level**, women constitute less than 5.4 percent of municipal council members, although there was an increase of 100 elected members in the 2017 elections compared to 2010. While there is a quota system for political parties in Lebanon's 18 recognized religious denominations, the new electoral law passed in June 2017 does not include a quota for women's representation in parliament, despite lobbying by women's groups, the international community, and several political parties. Key barriers for women's political participation include male-dominated political parties, high costs of political financing, social norms and gender stereotypes, and violence against women in politics.

In contrast to women's low representation in legislative and executive bodies, **women's representation in the judiciary and in the diplomatic corps** is high with 49.3 percent of judges and 64 percent of diplomats being women. Women represent 20 percent of the National Human Rights Commission.

Women make up a minimal percentage of the approximately 128,000 **security personnel** serving in Lebanon: 3.6 percent of the Internal Security Forces (ISF), 4.7 percent of the General Security personnel, and 5 percent of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). The LAF have eight women serving as generals spread across administrative and medical units as well as 17 women serving as colonels. In 2019, and for the first time in Lebanon's history, two women combat pilots joined the LAF. The current recruitment freeze on state personnel impacts the possibility of recruiting more women. However, the security units can ensure more adequate use of existing resources and some units in the army have already started this process.

In September 2019, Lebanon adopted a **National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security** (NAP). The NAP covers the period 2019 to 2022 and entails five strategic priorities: 1) increasing the participation of women in decision-making at all levels; 2) engaging women in conflict prevention including raising awareness on human rights and tolerance; 3) preventing SGBV and protecting women and girls from it through strong coordination mechanisms between different national institutions; 4) integrating women's needs and perspectives in all relief and recovery efforts; and 5) amending, adopting and implementing laws and policies that will serve to advance the above priorities. The National Commission for Lebanese Women leads the implementation of the NAP and is supported by five Specialized National Coordination Committees. As **the country's only agreed framework on matters of peace and security** it has contributed to key demonstrable results, including a significant increase of women into the 2020 intake class of LAF military cadets who constituted 42 percent of the candidates, as well as the Cabinet decision to form the national commission for the missing and forcibly disappeared which includes 40 percent women among its members.

The Mediterranean Women Mediators Network opened up a national antenna in Lebanon, and women are reportedly very involved in local peacebuilding and **conflict resolution**, but very inadequately represented in national or regional mediation efforts or in political talks about government formation. On their own initiative, a group of women, representing all political parties in Lebanon, meets every month to work together on issues of peace and security in Lebanon and break Lebanon's current political impasse.

### **Human rights issues, including violence against women and access to justice**

**Domestic violence** is widespread in Lebanon. More Lebanese women reported increased tensions and violence compared to Lebanese men due to the economic situation, and cases of domestic violence have increased sharply since **COVID-19 mitigation measures** have been put in place. Data from the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) indicates that the most reported types of GBV in 2020 were physical assault (38 percent) and psychological/emotional abuse (33 percent) which are both linked to incidents of intimate partner violence and domestic violence. In the first months of the lockdown in 2020, the ISF recorded a 56 percent increase in reported domestic violence incidents and a 184 percent increase in cyberbullying crimes targeting women. National gender-based violence (GBV) service providers reported receiving four times as many calls in May 2020 as in March 2020, with a 40 percent increase in new callers. A UN Women and UNFPA study found that 46 percent of women respondents are afraid of being attacked outside the home and one third feel unsafe within their own homes. Of those living in camps and informal settlements, 49 percent feared being attacked outside their home. More than a third of respondents agreed that women should tolerate domestic violence to keep their family together. Even before the crisis, women in Lebanon suffered from high rates of GBV, with 31 percent of women reporting having experienced intimate partner violence and 60 percent reporting having experienced sexual harassment at one point in their lives.

**Migrant workers**, and especially migrant domestic workers, who were already largely defenseless before the crisis, are exposed to a heightened risk of violence and abuse. Women are particularly affected: from March to June 2020, 94 percent of migrants who sought mental health support from Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) were female and 42 percent of them were survivors of physical and/or sexual violence. For the majority, the abuse was perpetrated by their employer under the Kafala system, which is a sponsorship system that ties migrant workers' residency to an employer. The standard unified labor contract issued by the Lebanese Ministry of Labor on 8 September 2020 was a first step in a series of measures needed to abolish the Kafala sponsorship system, but implementation of this new labor contract was subsequently suspended by Lebanon's State Shura Council, the country's top administrative court.

**Access to legal services for SGBV survivors is challenging** due to the length of procedures, lack of trust in protection measures, inherited social norms, a victim-blaming culture, mobility restrictions, economic

dependency, lack of documentation and sponsorship for non-Lebanese, and fear of losing custody of children. Access to justice is even more limited for Syrian and other refugee women and girls, as well as migrant and stateless women and girls. While refugees in Lebanon have the legal right to access justice for incidents of SGBV, fear of repercussions by the Lebanese authorities and discriminatory treatment, lack of requisite legal documents, especially valid legal residency, inability to afford a legal counsel or attend court, and social pressure from their community contribute to refugee women utilising informal justice mechanisms instead of a formal legal recourse. These informal justice mechanisms reinforce existing discrimination and structural injustices against women as they are male-dominated and unaccountable to Lebanese or international law and most actors are untrained in SGBV or human rights. Syrian refugee women with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity confront additional barriers.

The UN and international and national NGOs form part of the **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Network** which was established to support the collective approach to prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in Lebanon. In 2020, the Humanitarian Country Team endorsed Standard Operation procedures to establish safe and ethical procedures for the handling of complaints of sexual exploitation of abuse among UN agencies, NGOs and civil society organizations operating in response to the Beirut Port explosions, and to strengthen access to safe and confidential reporting for affected communities.

Over the past years, Lebanon has undertaken several **legal reforms strengthening women's protection**, but human rights organizations say that they do not go far enough. In 2014, the parliament passed a domestic violence law establishing protection of women and family members from domestic violence. However, human rights advocates criticized the law for defining domestic violence narrowly and for failing to specifically criminalize marital rape. In 2020, the domestic violence law was amended to expand the definition of domestic violence which now includes psychological and economic abuse. One of the most critical amendments was allowing the inclusion of minor children in protection orders regardless of their age of custody which is defined by each religious denomination. Furthermore, in 2017, Lebanon's parliament repealed article 522 of the penal code which had allowed perpetrators of rape to avoid prosecution by marrying the victim. Human rights organizations point to a loophole left with regards to offences relating to sex with children aged 15-17 and sex with "virgin" girls with promises of marriage. In December 2020, the parliament passed a law criminalizing sexual harassment in public and in the workplace. In addition to punishing the perpetrators, the law affords protection to the victims and any witnesses testifying against the accused and creates a specialized fund offering support and rehabilitation to victims and raising awareness about sexual harassment. It also explicitly gives victims the right to seek compensation. However, human rights advocates criticize that the law neglected prevention aspects, labor law reforms and the mandatory requirements for employers to prevent and respond to sexual harassment.

Despite these important reforms, **several discriminatory laws are still in force** such as the nationality law which discriminates against Lebanese women married to foreigners by not granting them the right to pass their citizenship to their children and spouses on an equal basis with men as well as the religious personal status laws that discriminate against women in issues relating to divorce, inheritance and custody of children. Furthermore, Article 534 of the Penal Code discriminates against LGBTIQ+ people by criminalizing homosexual intercourse, although there have been cases in which judges have refused to enforce the law. Lebanon has also not yet issued and enforced a national law that prevents and prohibits child marriage in line with international and regional human rights standards, including by establishing a consistent legal minimum age of marriage of 18 for girls and boys, with no exceptions including parental consent or court's authorization.

Lebanon ratified the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** in 1997 but has maintained several reservations including those related to the nationality law

under article 9.2 and marriage and family life under article 16. The Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which allows individuals or groups to take complaints to the CEDAW Committee, has not yet been ratified.

### **Humanitarian issues and women's socio-economic situation**

Fifty-eight women were among the 191 persons that died in the **explosion in Beirut on 4 August 2020** which wounded at least 6,500 and left 300,000 people displaced. According to a World Vision assessment, 60 percent of injured household members were women and according to UNFPA estimates around 3,900 women were pregnant at the time of the explosion. Women with increased vulnerabilities are a sizable portion of the affected population, with 51 percent identifying as women-headed households, and 8 percent as elderly women living alone. Furthermore, the explosion severely hit an area in which a large portion of the LGBTIQ+ community resided, adding to the pre-existing challenges that LGBTIQ+ people face when trying to find accommodation due to discrimination. Migrant workers were also particularly affected by the blast, because of one of the most impact areas, Karantina, is home to poor Lebanese communities, migrant workers from multiple countries and ethnicities, and more recently Syrian refugees. The explosion led to an increased risk of GBV exacerbated by factors such as multiple families living in crowded settings, a lack of public streetlights, and household stress. With support from UN Women, 44 women's rights activists and organizations issued a charter demanding that the humanitarian response to the explosion in Beirut be gender-sensitive and inclusive of women and prioritize the needs of vulnerable groups, especially women-headed households, older persons, refugees, and migrant domestic workers.

Lebanon hosts an estimated 1.5 million **Syrian refugees and over 400,000 Palestine refugees and has the most refugees per capita in the world**. Half of all Syrian refugee women and 19 percent of households are women-headed. Rates of legal residency are lower for Syrian women (18 percent) than for men (23 percent) as is the rate of paid labour with 12 percent for women versus 65 percent for men. UNFPA reported an alarming rise in **child marriage** among the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon, noting that some estimates show child marriage rates to be four times higher among Syrian refugees today than among Syrians prior to the Syria crisis in 2011. In 2020, 26 percent of girls aged 15-19 were married, engaged, separated, divorced, or widowed. The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting Syrian refugee women and girls particularly hard. Findings from a survey conducted by CARE found that 85 percent of surveyed women were eating smaller portions, compared to only 57 percent of men. As for Palestinian refugees, socioeconomic factors, including living in overcrowded dwellings, lack of privacy and high levels of poverty, the limited control exercised by Lebanese authorities in Palestine refugee camps and general insecure environment and violence contribute to a high prevalence of violence against women and children among the Palestinian refugee community in general. However, fear of retaliation or escalation of violence, as well as shame and stigma experienced by survivors, lack of confidentiality, and limited availability of protective services in the camps lead to high levels of underreporting, especially of domestic violence and sexual exploitation.

Available data shows a **reduction in women's access to reproductive health services** in 2020 due to the multi-layered crisis facing the country that decreased the ability of people to seek health care. According to the maternal mortality surveillance system of the Ministry of Public Health, there are 17 cases of maternal deaths reported in 2021 so far, out of which 16 are COVID-19 related. If this trend continues, maternal deaths would double the rates of 2018 and 2019 in Lebanon. Women with disabilities were subject to increased discrimination during the outbreak of COVID-19, as national policies adopted to mitigate the impact of the pandemic did not take into consideration their needs, and cases of discrimination accessing health care and vaccination services were reported.

**Gender inequality** is endemic in all aspects of life in Lebanon. In the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, Lebanon ranked 145 out of 153 countries. With 25.6 percent, Lebanon has one of the lowest rates of **women's labour market participation**, compared to men's labour force participation set at around 70

percent. The economic crisis compounded by the **COVID-19 lockdown and the Beirut explosion** has further deepened gender inequalities and a UN Women study estimates that these challenges **will result in a 14-19 percent further reduction in women's employment**. Women bear the burden of unpaid care and household chores, which is a major barrier for their advancement in public life and to compete in the labor market. This burden has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic with the increased pressure on women to do homeschooling and care for sick family members in addition to the household chores. The labour code prohibits women from employment in certain occupations and excludes protections for workers in the informal sector, including those engaged in agricultural work or in family enterprise – the majority of whom are women. In addition, social security legislation does not extend equal benefits to the spouses and children of married women workers unless the husband is unemployed or has a disability. With 80 percent of registered nurses being women, women are playing a major role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is negatively affecting **girls' education**: According to UNICEF, girls (49.5 percent) reported twice as much difficulty in online learning modality compared to boys (23.5 percent) as well as significantly less access to devices that enable their connectivity. School retention will be exceptionally challenging for girls when face to face learning modalities will resume, leading to school dropout and additional increase in child marriage. Adolescent girls and girls with disabilities are particularly affected by the multiple crisis in Lebanon due to the additional vulnerabilities and challenges they face to access services, resources and education.

## **ANNEX: Relevant language in resolution 2539 (2020)**

*Welcoming* Lebanon's first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, and encouraging the Government of Lebanon to fully implement it, with the support of UNIFIL and women's civil society groups, as soon as possible and to ensure the full, effective, and meaningful participation of women at all levels of decision-making in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security,

*Also recalling* resolution 2242 (2015) and its request of the Secretary-General to initiate, in collaboration with Member States, a revised strategy, within existing resources, to double the number of women in military and police contingents of UN peacekeeping operations,

OP 24. *Welcomes* the efforts being undertaken by UNIFIL to implement the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and to ensure full compliance of its personnel with the United Nations code of conduct, requests the Secretary-General to continue to take necessary measures to ensure full compliance of all personnel, civilian and uniformed, in UNIFIL with the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and to keep the Security Council fully informed about the Mission's progress in this regard, stresses the need to prevent such exploitation and abuse and to improve how allegations are addressed in line with its resolution 2272 (2016), and urges troop-contributing countries to continue taking appropriate preventative action, including vetting of all personnel, pre-deployment and in-mission awareness training, and to take appropriate steps to ensure full accountability in cases of such conduct involving their personnel, including through timely investigations of allegations, as appropriate, and to hold perpetrators accountable and repatriate units when there is credible evidence of widespread or systemic sexual exploitation and abuse by those units;

OP 25. *Welcomes* the initiatives undertaken by the Secretary-General to standardize a culture of performance in UN peacekeeping (...) and requests the Secretary-General and the troop-contributing countries to seek to increase the number of women in UNIFIL, as well as to ensure the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of operations;

OP 26. *Requests* UNIFIL to take fully into account gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate and to assist the Lebanese authorities in ensuring the full, effective and meaningful participation, involvement and representation of women at all levels of decision-making in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, as well as to support the implementation of the action plan on Women and Peace and Security, including to prevent and respond to sexual and gender based violence, further requests enhanced reporting by UNIFIL to the Security Council on this issue;