

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 2 July 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Ireland and Mexico, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Lebanon (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom
to the United Nations



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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Lebanon held on 25 May 2021

On 25 May 2021, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council convened a meeting on the situation in Lebanon. The members received a briefing from the Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Najat Rochdi, and the Deputy Head of Mission for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Jack Christofides, accompanied by colleagues from the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

Questions from Security Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions about ways to support the participation of women in the forthcoming elections and leverage the women and peace and security agenda to build confidence in the political dialogue, and about the work of the United Nations to provide assistance for refugee women and girls and support the health, education and economic empowerment and development of women. Other questions were focused on suggestions for language on women and peace and security for the renewal of the UNIFIL mandate, incentives for troop-contributing countries to increase the proportion of women personnel in UNIFIL and measures put in place to protect women from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Main points raised in the meeting

- Since December 2016, when the Security Council started to invite women from civil society to provide briefings in country-specific meetings, there has never been a woman from Lebanon invited to such a meeting.
- Women in Lebanon were prominent in leading the protests in 2019 and are at the forefront of all current peacemaking initiatives. Women politicians, women front-line responders and women peacebuilders are building platforms for dialogue, working to depoliticize and deescalate tensions and also call for reconciliation and reform, including a unified personal status law to replace religious personal status laws that contain discriminatory provisions.
- The confessional system in Lebanon is based on a complex set of personal status laws that bind citizens to their confessional leaders and structures and contribute to gender inequalities and the perpetuation of negative social norms and gender stereotypes. They result in unequal civil status for women and diminish their social and economic rights, including in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance and custody.
- Lebanese women have carved out important spaces for themselves across the political arena, the security forces, the business sector, the media and academia. Still, Lebanon has one of the lowest rates of participation for women in formal politics. Women make up only 4.6 per cent of parliamentarians, and under 5 per cent of all security institution personnel. No woman has ever been invited to a formal political dialogue process in Lebanon.

- A group of women, representing all political parties and emerging political groups and movements in Lebanon, is meeting every month to break the country's current political impasse. These meetings are a forum for participating women to exchange ideas and build consensus on a range of issues, and they contribute to raising the profile of these women within their own parties. There are currently two tracks, one that includes representatives of political parties in parliament and one with representatives of newly emerging parties.
- In the most recent parliamentary elections, held in 2018, women candidates faced various challenges to winning seats, including issues related to financing, their portrayal in the media and violence against women in politics. The United Nations is monitoring hate speech and working with political parties and the media on the portrayal of women candidates. The national action plan on women and peace and security sets out specific measures related to elections, including a 30 per cent quota for the participation of women in national and local elections. The International Support Group for Lebanon plays an important role in streamlining messaging on various issues of concern, including elections, as well as on the formation of the Government, ending impunity and investigations into the Beirut port explosion.
- In September 2019, Lebanon adopted its first national action plan on women and peace and security, with the support of the United Nations, including UN-Women. UNIFIL was a member of the steering committee that drafted the plan, which sets out, inter alia, actions to increase the participation of women in decision-making at all levels, including in the security and defence sectors. The plan also seeks to strengthen their participation in conflict prevention, countering violent extremism and the promotion of social cohesion. UNIFIL supports the National Commission for Lebanese Women, which is in charge of implementing the plan. The plan has contributed to tangible results, including a significant increase in the number of female military cadets of the Lebanese Armed Forces – nearly half of the cadets recruited for the class of 2020 – as well as the decision by the Cabinet to form the National Commission for Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons, which has been a key demand of the women's rights movement since 1990.
- Data from national institutions and civil society organizations indicate that the multilayered crises in Lebanon have led to a significant increase in gender-based violence across the country, in particular among Syrian refugees and migrant workers.
- Some 20 per cent of refugee households, and in some areas even 26 per cent, are female-headed, and the socioeconomic situation of such families is dire. The percentage increases as men are sent back to the Syrian Arab Republic and leave their families behind. Only 18 per cent of refugee women have legal status. The lack of legal status is an obstacle to access to services such as vaccination or protection from violence. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is an additional burden for refugee women who have to take care of the remote education of their children in camps. Child marriage is on the rise among the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon, with one quarter of Syrian refugee girls aged between 14 and 19 married. Because of discriminatory provisions in the nationality law of Lebanon, children of Lebanese women married to Syrian men or other foreigners are not granted Lebanese nationality.
- Ranked at 132 out of a total of 156 countries, Lebanon has one of the highest overall gender gaps in the world, according to the World Economic Forum, and one of the lowest rates of labour market participation for women. Whereas prior to the current crisis fewer than one third of women were participating in the

labour market, UN-Women estimates that a further 14 to 19 per cent have left the workforce over the past year.

- Only 7 per cent of UNIFIL uniformed personnel are women while 31 per cent of its civilian staff are female. The mission is working on improving accommodation and facilities for women officers to increase the number of women serving at UNIFIL. The mission ensures that its delegations at meetings with interlocutors at the local and national levels are gender-balanced, as a way of encouraging its counterparts to aim for the same representation. Several of the mission's quick-impact projects, such as the development of a municipal nursery and livelihood training for women, have targeted women beneficiaries. Gender task forces have been formed at UNIFIL headquarters and in the mission sectors. In addition, a senior gender focal point is responsible for integrating a gender perspective into peacekeepers' day-to-day tasks in the sectors, and there is a gender focal point in each battalion and each unit at UNIFIL.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group:¹

(a) In the forthcoming consultations on the mandate of UNIFIL, the Security Council should retain all existing references to women and peace and security in both the preambular and operational paragraphs of its resolution 2539 (2020), including in the request for UNIFIL to continue to support implementation of the action plan on women and peace and security. Furthermore, the Council could consider the following additions:

- (i) 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;
- (ii) Request UNIFIL to support security and military agencies in Lebanon to increase the number of women in their ranks, including in decision-making positions;

(b) In any other forthcoming 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 municipal elections in 2022, as well as all conflict prevention efforts, and urge the United Nations to support the Government in these matters.

In addition, the Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group and other Council members should:

- (a) Invite women from civil society to give briefings in forthcoming meetings on Lebanon;
- (b) 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 the participation of women in conflict

¹ These recommendations are suggestions by United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting; they are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

prevention and resolution, mediation and social cohesion, building on the role played by women in the protests and in mediation at the local level;

(c) Support the implementation and resourcing of the national action plan on women and peace and security, with a specific focus on its pillars related to peacebuilding and reconciliation;

(d) Advocate 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;

(e) Support the institutional frameworks and capacity for preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including measures to end child marriage, and advocate protective policies that safeguard the rights of women and girls and enhance protection for women human rights defenders and peacebuilders.

(f) Advocate for the Government to lift its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and ratify the Optional Protocol thereto.

The Co-Chairs thanked the Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon, the Deputy Head of Mission for UNIFIL and all participants and committed themselves to following up on the important issues raised at the meeting.
