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Letter dated 1 August 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

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 Co-Chairs' summary note of the visit to Lebanon by members of the Informal Expert Group, from 28 to 30 June (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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Annex to the letter dated 1 August 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Report on the visit to Lebanon by members of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, 28–30 June 2022

Summary by the Co-Chairs

I. Background/programme

1. From 28 to 30 June 2022, members¹ of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security conducted a visit to Lebanon. It was the first field visit by the Group since its establishment in 2016. The objectives of the visit, as outlined in the terms of reference (see enclosure), were to highlight and better understand the situation of women and girls in Lebanon, to consider the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and gender mainstreaming by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), to familiarize the Council membership with the tangible implications on the ground of language on women and peace and security in mandates and to reflect on any gaps.

2. The programme was facilitated and supported by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). It included meetings with the leadership and the Gender Unit of UNIFIL, the leadership of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, UN-Women, the Gender Department of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the municipal authorities in Tyre, civil society organizations, women peacebuilders and women Members of Parliament. The group visited Beirut, a reception centre of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the north and the UNIFIL headquarters in the south. The members also visited a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East camp for Palestinian refugees in Beirut. Security briefings and duty of care were provided by the Department of Safety and Security.

II. Main points raised during the meetings

Lebanese State institutions²

3. Women make up 5 per cent of the Lebanese Armed Forces; however, over the past four years, the Lebanese Armed Forces have made concerted efforts to increase the participation of women in the force, with women accounting for 50 per cent of cadets recruited in 2018. The personal commitment of high-level leadership within the Lebanese Armed Forces has been a factor in this. This cohort of cadets is due to graduate in 2022 and will be the first women to serve in combat units and combat support roles, including in infantry and artillery. This increase in women's

¹ The participants were Brazil, India, Ireland (Co-Chair of the Informal Expert Group), Mexico (Co-Chair of the Informal Expert Group), Norway, United Kingdom (penholder on women and peace and security) and United Arab Emirates.

² Information based on discussions with the Lebanese Armed Forces, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and three women Members of Parliament.

participation has the potential to bring strategic change within the security forces in the decades to come, as they gain experience on the front lines in leadership and decision-making positions. The Lebanese Armed Forces reported that the participation of women in the armed forces was relatively accepted within Lebanese culture, but that they had traditionally been assigned to medical or administrative areas. Many of those recruited reportedly came from border towns, where there was a strong desire to help one's community. Both the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL find that the presence of women defence-force personnel can help to de-escalate a tense situation and foster an atmosphere of dialogue.

4. Following the launch in 2019 of the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, the Lebanese Armed Forces established a Gender Department with the primary objective of ensuring that gender was mainstreamed across all operations of the armed forces. Still in its early phase of development, the Department will be responsible for gender training and the establishment of a mechanism for preventing and reporting gender-based violence. The Department has developed plans for a new physical office, with a nursery with capacity for 50 children. A memorandum of understanding between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL on gender is currently under consideration.

5. The economic crisis has had a major impact on the operational capacity of State institutions, including the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The salaries of State employees have reportedly devalued to the point that the cost of simply travelling to work can make it unviable. Many families are relying on remittances. Food insecurity, fuel shortages and regular interruptions to electricity supply are also major issues affecting the country. The Beirut port explosion significantly accelerated the economic crisis, with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the impact of the war in Ukraine having a multiplying effect. This has hampered progress in the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security, including the further development of the Gender Department of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Women's political participation³

6. In the elections held in May 2022, 15 per cent of candidates were women; only eight women were elected to parliament, a marginal increase from the previous six Members of Parliament. Although this included some "newcomers", supported by students and youth, the system remains dominated by the traditional political and patriarchal elite. The confessional system is widely blamed for the low level of women's participation, along with challenges such as sexism, negative social norms, stereotypes, the high cost of political financing and political violence. The socioeconomic crisis and the erosion of sectors such as health and education have had a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including their ability to engage in political participation. For example, girls and youths are reportedly dropping out of school and marrying early to relieve financial pressure on their families.

7. Women-led civil society organizations and elected Members of Parliament have been pushing to introduce a gender quota for parliament. However a formal proposal was rejected last year by the Government. Women's economic empowerment, access to education, investment in youth and concrete steps to encourage political participation at the local level were identified as essential for making progress.

³ Information based on discussions with civil society organizations and women Members of Parliament.

8. Women in politics and women voters have experienced threats and harassment, including from within their own families, communities and political parties. No law to prevent or address violence against women in politics has yet been adopted.

Discrimination and gender-based violence⁴

9. Discriminatory laws, including the nationality law and the personal status laws, are barriers to women's and girls' empowerment and protection, undermining the enjoyment of their human rights. Marginalized women and girls, such as children born to Lebanese mothers who are married to foreign fathers, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community, migrant workers and refugees, are particularly vulnerable.

10. Sexual and gender-based violence, in particular domestic violence, has reportedly increased since COVID-19-related restrictions came into force and, more recently, with the current economic crisis. In the difficult economic context, women and children have, in some cases, found it easier than men to find casual and precarious work, owing to the fact that they can be more easily exploited. The situation in which women have become the main breadwinners has resulted in a shift in power dynamics within families and an increase in vulnerability and sexual and gender-based violence, both within and outside the household. At the same time, with their husbands staying at home, women have found it difficult to report cases of domestic violence. Some reported feeling hesitant to seek support from their friends or close relatives owing to restrictive cultural norms or the fear that they would not be believed.

11. The limited capacity of the State to provide adequate protection and access to justice was raised with the Group and has increased the concerns regarding the vulnerability of women and girls.⁵ Civil society organizations are providing some basic services for victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, listening to their concerns and responding in confidentiality. Discrepancies across religious codes, for example in relation to the age of marriage, divorce and child custody rights, have also affected the vulnerability of women and limited their agency when it comes to leaving abusive relationships. The increase in child and early marriage and teenage pregnancy rates, in particular among refugee populations, is a serious concern. Access to sexual and reproductive health services has also been a challenge.

Women peacebuilders⁶

12. The United Nations is supporting several projects in Lebanon to empower and train women peacebuilders in mediation skills and conflict prevention and resolution. Women participants in two different projects, one in the north of the country and one in the south, reported that the programme had helped them to realize their rights and build friendships and networks across communities, thereby diminishing the fear of attacks, preventing violence, fostering dialogue and tolerance and de-escalating tensions. For example, one group reported using WhatsApp to communicate incidences of violence, using the application as an early warning system for mothers to prohibit their sons from participating. The reaction from their communities had been mixed, with many reports of resistance from within families, particularly from their husbands. One woman reported facing death threats for being active in her community and for calling for the disarmament of children.

⁴ Information based on discussions with civil society organizations, women peacebuilders and survivors of domestic violence.

⁵ View expressed by civil society organizations.

⁶ Information based on discussions with women peacebuilders in the north and women participating in UNIFIL-facilitated training to become mediators in the south.

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

13. In UNIFIL, women currently make up 7 per cent of the military force and up to 30 per cent of civilian personnel. The Ghanaian battalion has the largest proportion of women, with 16 per cent, and has offered to send more women peacekeepers should the facilities be adapted accordingly. The Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations has been instrumental in this regard. More efforts are still required to adapt accommodation and infrastructure and for troop-contributing countries to send women peacekeepers to UNIFIL.

14. The mandate of UNIFIL has included explicit reference to gender considerations since 2018, although the Gender Unit has been operating to mainstream gender across all operations of UNIFIL since 2010. The Unit has established a Gender Task Force throughout the mission, comprising gender focal points from each battalion. The focal points monitor gender issues, support the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, provide training and awareness-raising and facilitate coordination and engagement with women in the community.

15. Women peacekeepers of UNIFIL are also included in community outreach interventions and patrol activities, since their presence has been reported to contribute to reducing tensions and enhancing dialogue. In 2014, the Gender Unit launched a female assessment and analysis support team, an all-female patrol that works to enhance women's participation and promote the meaningful involvement of women in the community. Some of the main challenges that have been identified in that regard are related to the rotation of peacekeepers (some countries operate short deployments of four or six months), changes in leadership, language barriers, the persistent low percentage of women in peacekeeping.

16. In 2019, the Gender Unit of UNIFIL supported the National Commission for Lebanese Women in the development of the national action plan on women and peace and security, as part of the steering committee. The Unit is now assisting with its implementation, including in the following three areas: (a) working with safe spaces in social development centres to support survivors of sexual and gender-based violence; (b) training women in mediation and conflict management; and (c) supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces to increase the recruitment of women and enhance their participation in decision-making positions. The Unit also co-chairs a working group on gender, comprising more than 128 civil society organizations, with women leaders in the community.

17. The Lebanese State⁷ viewed the presence of UNIFIL in Lebanon as very positive. The cooperation and support it provided to the Lebanese Armed Forces was appreciated, with particular emphasis given to the support of the Lebanese Armed Forces Gender Department and the addition of the request made by the Security Council, contained in paragraph 11 of its resolution [2591 \(2021\)](#), for UNIFIL to provide non-lethal material, including fuel, to the Lebanese Armed Forces. The local community⁸ largely viewed the presence of UNIFIL as positive, helped by quick-impact projects, which have been key to confidence-building with the community. However some hostilities have been experienced, including from Green without Borders, as have attempts to restrict the movement of troops.

18. UNIFIL has a zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and a strategy regarding risk assessment and misconduct. One female UNIFIL officer reported that there were cases of sexual harassment that had not yet been fully investigated. The policy on sexual exploitation and abuse has also been

⁷ View expressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁸ View expressed by the Civil Division of UNIFIL and members of the working group on gender (local women leaders).

communicated within the community; however, no external reports have been received. In a culture in which sexual relations outside of marriage is considered unacceptable and can lead to honour killings, UNIFIL has worked strategically with an intercultural and gender-responsive approach to raise awareness of sexual and gender-based violence among women in the community.

III. Recommendations expressed during the meetings by the various stakeholders

19. The following recommendations were made to the United Nations and the international community:

- (a) Insist that any negotiations with the International Monetary Fund include gender considerations;
- (b) Mainstream gender across all United Nations planning and budgeting;
- (c) Support a victim/survivor-centred approach to sexual and gender-based violence, including access to justice and essential services such as sexual and reproductive health and psychosocial support;
- (d) Consider the Lebanese Armed Forces as a potential partner for the Elsie Initiative;
- (e) Include more specific language in the UNIFIL mandate with regard to gender and women's civil society organizations, such as a reference to the strategic dialogue between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces, the peace and security committee of the national action plan on women and peace and security and training for women in mediation and conflict prevention and resolution;⁹
- (f) Request UNIFIL to further gather disaggregated data and gender statistics, not only on internal matters but also in relation to their external engagement with the community;
- (g) Upgrade UNIFIL accommodation to ensure that it is suitable for female officers and peacekeepers;
- (h) Encourage troop-contributing countries to increase efforts to recruit more women and consider providing gender-sensitive body armour and equipment in peacekeeping.

20. The following recommendations were made to the Lebanese Government:

- (a) Promote women's full, equal and meaningful participation and introduce a gender quota into the parliamentary electoral law and the municipal law;
- (b) Develop a national strategy to empower women in politics;
- (c) Criminalize violence against women in politics;
- (d) Include gender considerations in any negotiations and macroeconomic reforms with the International Monetary Fund;
- (e) Increase the national budgetary allocation to gender affairs, including for the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security;
- (f) Prioritize the empowerment of youth, who are central to sustainable peace;

⁹ Suggestion made by the Gender Unit of UNIFIL.

(g) Reform any laws that are discriminatory and consider adopting a unified civil personal status law.

Enclosure

Terms of reference

Overview

The Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security was established with the primary objective of improving the flow of information and gender analysis to the Security Council on women and peace and security and to ensure more consistent oversight of implementation efforts. The guidelines for the Informal Expert Group (S/2016/1106) provide a list of “expected outcomes” of the Group, including a field visit at the expert level. Although the idea was considered previously, it had not been taken forward, partly owing to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. It would therefore be a first field visit by the Group since its establishment.

When considering options for the 2022 field visit, the Co-Chairs held consultations with UN-Women, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, gender advisers and missions on the ground. Consideration was given to several situations, with particular attention paid to upcoming mandate renewals, the security and political situation, logistical feasibility and the perceived value to the mission of a visit by the Group.

Given the work that UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon are implementing under the women and peace and security agenda, as well as the recent elections and the upcoming mandate renewal for UNIFIL at the end of August, Lebanon was identified as a beneficial and timely option for a visit by the Group.

Objectives

1. To highlight and better understand the situation of women and girls in Lebanon, including in relation to:
 - (a) The recent elections and women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in public and political life;
 - (b) The role of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation efforts;
 - (c) The security situation, the different conflict dynamics and the related challenges faced by women and girls, including political violence against women candidates and sexual and gender-based violence;
 - (d) The financial and economic situation, including the ability of women to access economic opportunities and the disproportionate impact of the current crisis on them;
 - (e) The situation of women refugees and other women in situations of vulnerability and from marginalized groups;
 - (f) The role of civil society in progressing gender equality and the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security.
2. To consider the implementation of all pillars of the women and peace and security agenda and gender mainstreaming by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and UNIFIL.

3. To familiarize the Security Council membership with the tangible implications on the ground of language on women and peace and security in mandates and to reflect on any gaps.

The objectives will be achieved by meeting with:

- Lebanese Government representatives responsible for the national action plan on women and peace and security and civil society representatives who are part of the steering committee
- UNIFIL leadership and senior gender advisers
- UNIFIL Gender Task Force
- Leadership of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
- UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund and representatives of other relevant United Nations funds and programmes
- Women's civil society organizations, women-led organizations, women peacebuilders, women human rights defenders and women journalists
- Women political leaders, including new Members of Parliament
- Other relevant civil society representatives
- National Commission for Lebanese Women
- Gender Department of the Lebanese Armed Forces

Timing

The total time commitment is tentatively scheduled for the period from the evening of 26 June to 1 July, with working meetings from 28 to 30 June inclusive (three days).

Participation

The full membership of the Informal Expert Group is invited to participate at the expert level, with the Co-Chairs invited to consider participation at the deputy permanent representative level.

Cost

Each mission is expected to source its own funding to cover the costs.