

LIBANON (32)

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LEBANON

Lebanon is a parliamentary republic in which the President is by tradition a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies a Shi'a Muslim. The Parliament consists of 128 deputies, equally divided between Christian and Muslim representatives. The judiciary is generally independent, but is subject to political pressure.

Non-Lebanese military forces control much of the country. These include about 25,000 Syrian troops, a contingent of Israeli army regulars and an Israeli-supported militia in the south, and several armed Palestinian factions. All undermine the authority of the central Government and prevent the application of law in the patchwork of areas not under the Government's control. In 1991 the governments of Syria and Lebanon concluded a security agreement that provided a framework for security cooperation between their armed forces. However, Syrian military intelligence units in Lebanon conduct their activities independently of the agreement.

In 1989 the Arab league brokered a peace settlement at Taif, Saudi Arabia, to end the civil war in Lebanon. According to the Taif Accord, Syrian troops were to be redeployed from their positions in Lebanon's coastal population areas to the Bika' Valley, with full withdrawal contingent upon fulfillment of other aspects of the Taif Accord and subsequent agreement by both the Lebanese and Syrian governments. Although the Syrian Government has refused to carry out this withdrawal from the coastal areas, strong Syrian influence over Lebanese politics and decisionmakers makes Lebanese officials unwilling to press for a complete withdrawal. The relationship with Syria does not reflect the will of most Lebanese citizens.

Israel exerts control in and near its self-proclaimed "security zone" in south Lebanon through its surrogate, the South Lebanese Army (SLA), and the presence of about 1,000 Israeli regular troops. The Iranian-backed Shi'a Muslim faction Hizballah, with the tacit support of the Government and, to a lesser extent, Palestinian guerrillas continue to be locked in a cycle of attack and counterattack with Israeli and SLA troops typically. Palestinian groups operate autonomously in refugee camps throughout the country. During the year, the Government continued to consolidate its authority in the parts of the country under its control, and took tentative steps to extend its authority to the Bika' Valley and Beirut's southern suburbs. However, it did not attempt to reassert state control over the Palestinian refugee camps, nor to disarm Hizballah and the SLA or dislodge Israel from the south.

The security forces comprise the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which may arrest and detain suspects on national security grounds; the Internal Security Forces (ISF), which enforce laws, conduct searches and arrests, and refer cases to the judiciary; and the State Security Apparatus and the Surete Generale, both of which collect information on groups that may jeopardize state security. The Surete Generale is also responsible for the issuance of passports and residency permits and for censoring foreign periodicals and movies that treat national security issues. The security forces committed serious human rights abuses.

Before the 1975-90 hostilities, Lebanon was an important regional financial and commercial center. There is a market-based economy in which the majority of the work force is employed in the services sector, e.g.,

banking and commerce. There is a small industrial sector, based largely on clothing manufacture and food processing. The gross national product is estimated to be approximately \$5,000 per capita. A reconstruction effort, begun in 1992, is moving forward. Lebanon receives substantial remittances from abroad that offset its trade deficit and results in a balance of payments surplus.

Since the end of hostilities, the Government has taken some limited steps to improve human rights conditions and serious problems remain in several areas. Members of the security forces used excessive force and tortured some detainees. Prison conditions remained poor. Government abuses also included the arbitrary arrest and detention of persons who opposed government policies. Long delays in trials are a problem. The Government infringed on citizens' privacy rights. The Government also partially limited press freedom, particularly by implementing the 1996 media law to restrict radio and television broadcasting in a discriminatory manner. Journalists practice self-censorship. The Government imposes limits on freedom of movement. The Government continued to restrict freedom of assembly and ban demonstrations. The right of citizens to change their government remains limited by shortcomings in the electoral system. Although the 1996 parliamentary elections represented a step forward, the electoral process was flawed, as the elections were not prepared or carried out impartially. The Government decision to postpone municipal elections until April 1999 (a decision subsequently overturned by the Constitutional Council) infringed on citizens' ability to change their government at the local level. In December the Parliament passed a law calling for municipal elections in mid-1998. Discrimination against women and Palestinians, and violence against women are problems.

Although the overall level of armed conflict has declined in recent years, life and property, especially in the south, are still threatened by artillery and aerial attacks by the various contending forces. These forces continue to commit abuses, including killings, terrorist bombings, and abductions.

The SLA maintains a separate and arbitrary system of justice in the Israeli-controlled zone, which is independent of Lebanese central authority. During the year, SLA officials arbitrarily arrested, mistreated, and detained persons, and expelled several local residents from their homes in the zone. Palestinian groups in refugee camps maintain a separate, arbitrary system of justice for other Palestinians. Members of the various Palestinian groups that control the camps tortured and detained their Palestinian rivals.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

During the year, political killings declined as the Government further consolidated its authority over the country. However, there continued to be reports of extrajudicial killings. In January a suspect reportedly died while being interrogated by government agents; the suspect's family members asserted that he was beaten to death (see Section 1.c.). Also in January, 3 Palestinians, including Jihad Ayyub of Yasir Arafat's Fatah movement, were killed by unidentified gunmen in the Ayn al-Hilwe refugee camp. On August 23, Khalil Mussawi, an Amal movement official in the village of Arzun (south Lebanon), was killed by unknown persons in central Beirut when an explosive detonated as he opened the trunk of his car.

In January the Judicial Council found Ahmad al-Kassem, Khalid Mohammad Hamed, and Munir Salah Abud guilty of the 1995 assassination of a Sunni cleric, Sheikh Nizar Al-Halabi. The death sentence has carried out on March 24, after President Elias Hrawi refused an appeal for clemency. The other 14 individuals involved in the case sentenced to prison terms ranging from 10 to 20 years, or were acquitted and released. In May the Judicial Council found former Lebanese Forces commander Samir Ja'Ja' guilty of attempting to kill then-Minister of Defense Michel Al-Murr in 1991. Ja'Ja' has sentenced to death, but the sentence has

commuted to life at hard labor. During January the Government deported three Iraqi diplomat suspects in the 1994 killing in Beirut of an Iraqi dissident.

In December the Government indicted three persons suspected of causing the 1996 death of Akram Arbeed. The suspects allegedly beat Arbeed while he was accompanying a candidate in the 1996 parliamentary elections. There were no developments in the 1994 death of Tareq Hassaniyeh, who was allegedly beaten to death by authorities in the Bayt Al-Din prison, nor in the 1994 death of Fawzi Al-Racy, who died while in the custody of the Ministry of Defense.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances. The Government still has taken no judicial action against groups known to be responsible for the kidnappings of thousands of people during the unrest between 1975 and 1990.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading

Treatment or Punishment

There continued to be credible reports that security forces used torture on some detainees. On January 4, a suspect reportedly died while being interrogated by the Drug Enforcement Authority. The Government claimed that the suspect threw himself from the window, but the family of the deceased asserted that he was beaten to death. In May unknown armed men severely beat a journalist who distributed leaflets critical of the Lebanese army (see Section 2.1.). No charges had been brought by year's end.

A 1996 court case against three policemen accused of causing paralysis in a prisoner in their custody is still pending.

Abuses also occurred in areas outside the State's authority, especially in the Palestinian refugee camps. There were credible reports that members of the various Palestinian groups that control the camps detained and tortured their Palestinian rivals.

Prison conditions are poor and do not meet minimum international standards. There are only 18 operating prisons with a total capacity of 2,000 inmates. However, prisons are overcrowded, with a total population of nearly 5,000. Inmates also lack heat and adequate toilet and shower facilities. The prison system is regulated by law. However, the Government has not budgeted funds to rehabilitate the prison system.

In addition to regular prisons, the Surete Generale, which mans border posts, operates a detention facility. Hundreds of foreigners, mostly Egyptians and Sri Lankans, are detained there pending deportation. They reportedly are held in small, poorly ventilated cells. Credible reports indicate that guards raped some of the Sri Lankan women during their detention.

The Government does not permit prison visits by human rights monitors.

Hizballah detains and reportedly mistreats SLA members and suspected agents at unknown locations. The South Lebanon Army operates its own detention facility, Al-Khiam prison, and there are frequent allegations of mistreatment of detainees. Both groups occasionally release prisoners. The SLA, for example, released some prisoners in April and July. An ICRC-brokered exchange of one SLA prisoner for four Hizballah prisoners took place in April.

Hizballah does not permit prison visits by human rights monitors. The SLA does not permit prison visits by human rights monitors, although it has on occasion allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit detainees at Al-Khiam, for the purpose of delivering letters, medicine, and food from detainees' families. These visits have been suspended since September.

d.

Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Government uses arbitrary arrest and detention. The law requires security forces to obtain warrants of arrest before making arrests. However, military prosecutors, who are responsible for cases involving the military, as well as those involving espionage, treason, weapons possession, and draft evasion, make arrests without warrants. They reportedly issue blank warrants of arrest to be completed after the suspect has been arrested. Arresting officers are required to refer a suspect to a prosecutor within 24 hours of arrest, but frequently do not do so.

The law requires the authorities to release suspects after 48 hours of arrest if no formal charges are brought against them. Some prosecutors flout this requirement and detain suspects for long periods in pretrial confinement without a court order. The law authorizes judges to remand suspects to incommunicado detention for 10 days with a possible extension for an additional 10 days. Bail is only available to those accused of petty crimes, not those accused of felonies. Defendants have the right to legal counsel, but there is no public defender's office. The Bar Association has an office to assist those who cannot afford a lawyer.

Security forces continued the practice of arbitrary arrest, detaining mainly the opponents of the Government. In January security forces arrested the financial manager of a hotel in Beirut, a Jordanian national, releasing him after 23 days of captivity. No charges were brought against him.

In February military police arrested a journalist who was covering elections at a Lebanese university. The journalist was accused of taking pictures of army personnel inside the university. He was released after the army took the camera and destroyed the film.

In April security forces arrested several members of a labor union who were gathered in the labor union office in Sidon to conduct elections of the labor union representatives. Twenty-six persons were arrested, including journalists covering the elections. All of those arrested were released within a few hours.

Human rights groups credibly report that detained persons are sometimes transferred to Syrian custody and imprisoned in Syria. The number of such persons cannot be determined accurately, but President Hrawi in a televised interview last year stated that 210 Lebanese were in Syrian custody.

The authorities often detain for short periods and without charges political opponents of the Syrian and Lebanese governments.

Local militias and non-Lebanese forces continued to conduct arbitrary arrests in areas outside central government control. The SLA detains an estimated 150 Lebanese citizens and an undetermined number of Palestinians at Al-Khiam prison in the south.

In June Hizballah's security apparatus detained three UNIFIL servicemen in the southern suburbs of Beirut who were taking photographs of flags. The three were released after 10 hours. The Government did not take any punitive action against Hizballah. An SLA member kidnaped in 1996 was released during a prisoner exchange in October 1996.

Syrian forces reportedly detain persons.

In July the Israeli navy detained five fishermen off the coast of Tyre in south Lebanon. On July 3, Israeli forces detained a journalist, reportedly on suspicion of collaboration with Hizballah. The journalist has released on August 7. Israel holds several Lebanese citizens, including Sheikh Abed al-Karim Obaid and Mustafa Dirani, figures associated with the Islamic Resistance.

Palestinian refugees are subject to arrest, detention, and harassment by the state security forces, Syrian forces, various militias, and rival Palestinians.

Exile as a form of punishment is not regularly practiced, although in 1991 the Government pardoned former army commander General Michel 'Awn and two of his aides on the condition that they depart the country and remain in exile for 5 years. 'Awn was accused of usurping power. The 5-year period ended in August 1996 but 'Awn remains in France.

e. **Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The judiciary is generally impartial and independent. However, influential politicians and Syrian intelligence officers sometimes intervene to protect their supporters from prosecution.

The judicial system is composed of the regular civilian courts, the Military Court, which tries cases involving military personnel and military-related issues, the Judicial Council, which tries national security offenses, and the tribunals of the various confessions, i.e., religious affiliations, which adjudicate disputes including marriage, inheritance, and personal status.

The Judicial Council is a permanent tribunal of five senior judges that adjudicates threats to national security. On the recommendation of the Minister of Justice, the Cabinet decides whether to try a case before this tribunal.

The Ministry of Justice appoints judges according to a formula based on the confessional, i.e., the religious affiliation, of the prospective judge. The shortage of judges has impeded efforts to adjudicate cases backlogged during the years of internal conflicts. Trial delays are also caused by the Government's inability to conduct investigations in areas outside its control. Defendants have the right to examine evidence against them. The testimony of a woman is equal to that of a man.

Hizballah applies Islamic law in areas under its control. Palestinian groups in refugee camps operate an autonomous and arbitrary system of justice. The SLA maintains a separate and arbitrary system of justice.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. **Arbitrary Interference With Privacy, Family,
Home, or Correspondence**

While the authorities generally show little interest in controlling the personal lives of citizens, they readily interfere with the privacy of persons regarded as foes of the Government. Laws require that prosecutors obtain warrants before entering houses except when the army is in hot pursuit of an armed attacker.

The Government uses informer networks and monitors telephones to gather information on its adversaries. The army Intelligence Service monitors the movements and activities of members of opposition groups (see Section 2.b.). In May cabinet ministers conceded for the first time that telephone calls were being tapped. The Prime Minister publicly stated that he is among those whose telephones are tapped. The Speaker of Parliament alleged that cellular calls are also tapped and that more than one wing of the security services was involved. The Speaker formed a parliamentary commission to investigate the subject.

Militias and non-Lebanese forces operating outside areas of central government authority have frequently violated rights of privacy. Various factions also use informer networks and monitor telephones to obtain information on their adversaries.

On March 28, the SLA expelled a woman from the village of Hasbayya.

In August Israeli forces expelled a Lebanese woman and her five children from their home in Qleia village.

g.

Use of Excessive Force and Violations of

Humanitarian Law In Internal Conflicts

An undetermined number of civilians continued to be killed in south Lebanon, as Hizballah, Palestinian guerrillas, and to a much lesser extent the Lebanese army on the one hand, and Israeli forces and the SLA on the other, engaged in recurring cycles of violence. Hizballah attacked SLA and Israeli troops deployed on Lebanese soil. Hizballah (and possibly armed Palestinian groups) also launched rocket attacks against northern Israel. Israeli forces conducted repeated air strikes and artillery barrages on Hizballah, Lebanese army and Palestinian targets inside Lebanon.

There were numerous incidents in the cycle of attack and reprisals. On August 18, a roadside bomb exploded near Kfar Houne in an SLA-controlled area, killing two teenage relatives of an SLA commander. The SLA retaliated by shelling the city of Sidon, killing six civilians and injuring dozens of others. The Lebanese army responded by shelling the SLA positions, and Hizballah later fired Katyusha rockets into northern Israel.

On November 23, mortar attacks by Lebanese guerrillas killed nine Lebanese civilians in the city of Beit Liff in the Israeli security zone. Following its investigation the attack, the Israeli-Lebanon Monitoring Group (ILMG) determined that "armed elements" were responsible for the attack.

In February the Israeli air force raided Baalbek and hit the building of Hizballah's "Voice of the Oppressed" radio station. In August Israeli jets destroyed an electrical pylon south of Beirut. In September 12 Israeli commandos were killed by an explosion and subsequent firefight with Lebanese army, Hizballah, and Amal forces during a nighttime incursion by Israel into the central coastal region. Later the same month Israel fired on Lebanese army personnel carriers, killing 6 soldiers.

The ILMG continued to deal with alleged violations of the understanding between Israel and Hizballah not to target civilians or launch attacks from civilian-populated areas.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a.

Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of the press, but the Government partially limits this right in practice, particularly by intimidating journalists and broadcasters into practicing self-censorship. The Government imposes direct censorship on satellite broadcasts originating in Lebanon.

Lebanon has a long history of freedom of opinion, speech, and the press. Although there were repeated attempts to restrict these freedoms during the year, daily criticism of government policies and leaders continued. Dozens of newspapers are published throughout the country, financed by various Lebanese and foreign groups. While the press is normally independent, press content often reflects the opinions of these financial backers.

The Government has several tools at its disposal to control freedom of expression. The Surete Generale is authorized to approve all foreign magazines and non-periodical works including plays, books, and films before they are distributed in the market. The law prohibits attacks on the dignity of the Head of State or foreign leaders. The Government may prosecute offending journalists and publications in the Publications Court, a special court empowered to try such matters.

Moreover, the 1991 security agreement between Lebanon and Syria contains a provision that effectively prohibits the publication of any information deemed harmful to the security of either state. In view of the risk of prosecution, Lebanese journalists censor themselves on matters related to Syria.

During the year, the Government severely attacked press freedoms by filing charges against several newspapers. In April a weekly (Haramun) was charged with defaming the President and publishing materials deemed disturbing to the nation's standards. In June two newspapers (Al-Diyar and Al-Kifah Al-Arabi) were charged with defaming the Prime Minister, and with publishing a cartoon that harmed the judiciary. In April the Publications Court sentenced the editor in chief of the daily Al-Kifah Al-Arabi to pay a fine of \$30,000 for publishing an article deemed insulting to the King of Saudi Arabia. Another court fined two journalists at the Nida' Al-Watan daily and the newspaper's administration \$10,000 for defamation, and ordered them to pay compensation to state-run television Tele-Liban. The two journalists had accused Tele-Liban and its chairman of embezzlement.

In May journalist Pierre Attalah was indicted by a military investigating judge for having distributed leaflets that harmed the Lebanese army's reputation. The same day he was severely beaten by unknown armed elements, Attallah later flew to France to seek political asylum. A court hearing on the case is ongoing.

In implementing the 1994 Media Law, the Government closed down many of the myriad television and radio stations that had sprung up during the civil war, granting licenses to those stations owned by or closely associated with powerful government officials. In July, facing mounting protests, it granted licenses to several additional radio and television stations, including a Hizballah-run television station, that had been operating without a license. The decision raised the total number of licensed television and radio stations to 25.

In February the Surete Generale suspended for 2 weeks the staging of a play. The play was subsequently authorized, after the author made changes in the dialogue.

Between August and September, the censorship authority of the Government's Surete Generale blocked television transmission of three different items. One of the items, a music video called "We've Got to Change the System," was subsequently allowed to be broadcast, but two taped interviews with former political figures remained banned.

Lebanon has a strong tradition of academic freedom and a flourishing private educational system born of inadequate public schools and a preference for sectarian affiliation. Students exercise the right to form campus associations and the Government usually does not interfere with students groups.

b.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Although the Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, the Government restricts this right. Any group wishing to organize a rally must obtain the prior approval of the Interior Ministry, which does not render decisions uniformly. In 1997 the Government again banned all rallies, but various political factions, such as Amal, Hizballah, 'Awnists, and supporters of the Prime Minister held rallies without obtaining government permission.

In August the Government interfered with a rally in support of early municipal elections by closing down the meeting place and sending a large number of security forces to the alternate rally site. However, it did not break up the rally, which was attended by several parliamentary deputies.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association. The Government generally respects this right; however, there were exceptions during the year.

In general the Government does not interfere with the establishment of private organizations. The law requires that persons forming organizations notify the Interior Ministry, which should then issue a "receipt"

acknowledging that proper notification was given. In practice the "receipt" has evolved into a permit, which can be withheld at the whim of the Ministry. The Bar Association in April criticized the current practice but did not provide examples of groups that had been denied a permit this year.

The Ministry of Interior also scrutinizes requests to establish political movements or parties, and to some extent monitors their activities. The army Intelligence Service monitors the movement and activities of members of opposition groups.

Neither Syria nor Israel allows groups openly hostile to them to operate in areas under their control.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign

Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respects them in practice. However, there are some limitations. Travel to Israel is prohibited by law, but frequently occurs via Israeli-occupied territory in southern Lebanon. All males between 18 and 21 years of age are subject to compulsory military service and are required to register at a recruitment office and obtain a travel authorization document before leaving the country. Husbands may block foreign travel by their wives and minor children.

Lebanese Armed Forces and Syrian troops maintain checkpoints in areas under their control. In south Lebanon, the Lebanese army, the Israeli army, and the SLA maintain tight restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and out of Israel's self-declared security zone.

There are no legal restrictions on the right of all citizens to return. Many emigres, however, are reluctant to return for a variety of political, economic, and social reasons. After years of internal conflict, the recent expansion of governmental authority has removed barriers that previously hindered domestic travel. The Government has encouraged the return to their homes of over 600,000 persons displaced during the civil war. Although some people have begun to reclaim homes abandoned or damaged during the war, the vast majority of displaced persons have not attempted to reclaim and rehabilitate their property. The resettlement process is slowed by tight budgetary constraints, shattered infrastructure, the lack of schools and economic opportunities, and the fear that physical security is still incomplete in some parts of the country.

Most non-Lebanese refugees are Palestinians. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) reported that the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon registered with UNRWA was 352,668. This figure, while it includes only the families of refugees who arrived in 1948, is also presumed to include many thousands who currently reside outside the country. Most experts estimate the actual number now in Lebanon to be fewer than 300,000.

The Government issues laissez-passers (travel documents) to Palestinian refugees to enable them to travel and work abroad. However, after the Government of Libya announced in September 1995 its intention to expel Palestinians working in that country, the Lebanese government moved to prohibit the return of Palestinians living abroad unless they obtain an entry visa. The Government maintained that the visa requirement is necessary to ensure the validity of Lebanese laissez-passers, as a large number of those documents were forged during the years of strife. The effect has been to discourage foreign travel by Palestinians resident in Lebanon.

The Government seeks to prevent the entry of asylum seekers and undocumented refugees. There have been no known asylum requests since 1975. There are legal provisions for granting asylum or refugee status in

accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government cooperates with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UNRWA.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution states that citizens have the right to change their government in periodic free and fair elections. However, lack of government control of parts of the country, defects in the electoral process, and strong Syrian influence over Lebanese politics and decision-makers significantly restrict this right. The 1996 parliamentary elections represented a step forward, but the electoral process was flawed by serious shortcomings, as the elections were not prepared or carried out impartially. Government officials acknowledged some of the electoral shortcomings and pledged to correct them in future elections. Several losing candidates submitted challenges to the Constitutional Council which, in four separate cases, ruled that the election results were invalid. The Government conducted by-elections for those seats on June 29.

According to the Constitution, elections for the Parliament must be held every 4 years. The Parliament, in turn, elects the President every 6 years. The President and Parliament nominate the Prime Minister, who with the President chooses the Cabinet. According to the unwritten "National Pact of 1943," the President is Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament a Shi'a Muslim. Until 1990 seats in Parliament were divided on a 6 to 5 ratio of Christians to Muslims. Positions in the Government were allocated on a similar basis between Christians and Muslims. Under the National Reconciliation Agreement reached in Taif, Saudi Arabia in 1989, Members of Parliament agreed to alter the national pact to create a 50-50 balance between Christian and Muslim members of parliament. The Taif Accord also increased the number of seats in parliament and transferred some powers from the President to the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Citizens' ability to change their government on a local level was undermined by a decision taken by Parliament in July to extend the term in office of municipal officials to April 30, 1999. Municipal elections have not been held since 1963. Many serving officials are elderly or have been appointed by the central Government. The decision to extend municipal terms was challenged by 14 parliamentarians, and the Constitutional Council ruled on September 13 that the extension was invalid. The Government responded to the ruling by declaring existing municipal officials short term "caretakers." The Parliament in December passed a law calling for municipal elections in mid-1998.

Women have the right to vote and there are no legal barriers to their participation in politics, although there are significant cultural barriers. No women hold cabinet positions. Three women were elected to Parliament in 1996.

Palestinian refugees have no political rights. An estimated 17 Palestinian factions operate in Lebanon, generally organized around prominent individuals. Most Palestinians live in refugee camps controlled by one or more factions. The leaders of the refugees are not elected, nor are there any democratically organized institutions in the camps.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Several human rights groups operate freely without overt government restriction, including the Lebanese Association for Human Rights, the Foundation for Human and Humanitarian Rights-Lebanon, and the National Association for the Rights of the Disabled. Some of these groups have sought to publicize the detention in Syria of hundreds of Lebanese citizens. The Government has made no public comment on the issue. The number of such persons cannot be determined accurately, but on November 24, 1996 President Hrawi stated

that 210 Lebanese were in Syrian custody. Some human rights groups have reported harassment and intimidation by government, Syrian, and militia forces.

In general the Government is unwilling to discuss human rights problems with foreign governmental or non-governmental organizations. However, it has facilitated visits to the country of Amnesty International teams to report on Israeli activities in south Lebanon.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution calls for "social justice and equality of duties and rights among all citizens without prejudice or favoritism." In practice, aspects of the law and traditional mores discriminate against women. Religious discrimination is built into the electoral system. In February the Parliament approved a law giving preference to disabled persons for employment in government positions. Discrimination based on the other listed factors is illegal, and is not widespread.

Women

The press reports cases of rape with increasing frequency; what is reported is thought to be only a fraction of the actual number. There are no authoritative statistics on the extent of spousal abuse. Most experts agree that the problem affects a significant portion of the female population. In general battered or abused women do not talk about their suffering for fear of bringing shame upon their own families or accusations of misbehavior upon themselves. Doctors and social workers believe that most abused women do not seek medical help. The Government has no separate program to provide medical assistance to battered women. It does provide legal assistance to victims of crimes who cannot afford it regardless of the gender of the victim. The Lebanese Association for Combating Violence Against Women, founded in 1994, has been active in lobbying to improve the socio-economic condition of women and to reduce violence against women. In September it announced it was seeking funding to build a shelter for abused women.

The legal system is discriminatory in its handling of "crimes of honor." According to the Penal Code, a man who kills his wife or other female relative may receive a reduced sentence if he demonstrates that he committed the crime in response to an illegitimate sexual relationship conducted by the victim. Since 1991, however, the Government has begun to increase sentences on violent crimes in general and to seek punishment for men who commit "crimes of honor."

Women have employment opportunities in government, medicine, law, academia, the arts, and to a lesser degree, in business. However, social pressure against women pursuing careers is strong in some parts of society. Males sometimes exercise considerable control over female relatives, restricting their activities outside the home or their contact with friends and relatives. Women may own property but often cede effective control of it to male relatives for cultural reasons. In 1994 the Parliament removed a legal stipulation that a woman must obtain her husband's approval to open a business or engage in a trade. Husbands may block foreign travel by their wives (see Section 2.d.).

Only men may confer citizenship on their spouses and children. Accordingly, children born to Lebanese mothers and foreign fathers are not eligible for Lebanese citizenship. In late 1995, the Parliament approved a law allowing Lebanese widows to confer citizenship on their minor children.

Religious groups have their own family and personal status laws administered by religious courts. Each group differs in its treatment of marriage, family property rights, and inheritance. Many of these laws discriminate against women. For example, Sunni inheritance law gives a son twice the share of a daughter. Although Muslim men may divorce easily, Muslim women may do so only with the concurrence of their husbands.

Children

The plight of children is a growing concern, but the Government has not allocated funds to protect them. Education is not compulsory, and many children take jobs at a young age to help support their families. In lower income families, boys generally get more education, while girls usually remain at home to do housework.

An undetermined number of children are neglected, abused, exploited, and even sold to adoption agents. There are hundreds of abandoned children in the streets nationwide, some of whom survive by begging, others by working at low wages. According to a UNICEF study, 60 percent of working children are below 13 years of age and 75 percent of them earn wages below two-thirds of the minimum wage. Juvenile delinquency is on the rise; many delinquents wait in ordinary prisons for trial and remain there after sentencing. Although their number is very small, there is no adequate place to hold delinquent girls, and they are currently held in the women's prison in Ba'abda. Limited financial resources have hindered efforts to build adequate facilities to rehabilitate delinquents. However, the Higher Relief Committee allotted some financial resources to the association for the protection of juveniles to lease a two-story building in Ba'asir in order to accommodate 50 juvenile delinquents.

There are neither child welfare programs nor government institutions to oversee the implementation of children's programs. The Committee for Children's Rights, formed in 1993 by prominent politicians and private citizens, has been lobbying for legislation to improve the condition of children. The Ministry of Health requires the establishment of health records for every child up to 18 years of age.

People With Disabilities

Over 100,000 people sustained disabilities during the civil war. Care of the disabled is generally a function performed by families. Most efforts to secure education, independence, health, and shelter for the disabled are made by some 100 private organizations for the disabled. In general, these organizations are poorly funded.

Lebanon's heavily damaged cities make no accommodation for the disabled. Building codes have no requirements for ease of access, though the Government in its rebuilding projects has constructed sidewalks in some parts of Beirut allowing access for disabled. The private "Solidere" project for the reconstruction of downtown Beirut has self-imposed requirements for disabled access. This project is widely considered a model for future construction efforts around the country.

Religious Minorities

Discrimination based on religion is built into the system of government (see Section 3). The Amended Constitution of 1990 embraces the principle of abolishing religious affiliation as a criterion for filling all government positions, but few practical steps have been taken to accomplish this. One notable exception is the Lebanese Armed Forces, which through universal conscription and an emphasis on professionalism has significantly reduced the role of confessionalism (or religious sectarianism) in that organization. Each religious affiliation has its own courts for family law matters, such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

According to the United Nations, an estimated 350,000 Palestinian refugees are registered in Lebanon (see Section 2.d.). Most Palestinian refugees live in overpopulated camps that have suffered repeated heavy damage as a result of fighting. The Government has instructed relief workers to suspend reconstruction work in the camps, and refugees fear that in the future the Government may reduce the size of the camps or eliminate them completely.

d.

Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The 1946 Labor Code stipulates that workers between the ages of 8 and 16 may not work more than 7 hours a day, with 1 hour for rest provided after 4 hours. They are also prohibited from working between the hours of 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. There is a general prohibition against "jobs out of proportion with worker's age." The Code also prohibits certain types of mechanical work for children between the ages 8 and 13, and other types for those between the ages 13 and 16. The Labor Ministry is tasked with enforcing these requirements, but the civil war left it with few resources and a demoralized and sometimes corrupt staff. The Ministry does not rigorously apply the law. Forced and bonded child labor is not prohibited and sometimes occurs (see Section 6.c.).

e.

Acceptable Conditions of Work

The Government sets a legal minimum wage, currently about \$200 (300,000 Lebanese pounds) per month. The law is not enforced effectively in the private sector. In theory the courts could be called upon to enforce it, but in practice they are not. The minimum wage is insufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Trade unions actively try to ensure the payment of minimum wages in both the public sector and the large-scale private sector, such as education and transport.

The Labor Law prescribes a standard 6-day workweek of 48 hours, with a 24-hour rest period per week. In practice workers in the industrial sector work an average of 35 hours a week, and workers in other sectors work an average of 30 hours a week. The law includes specific occupational health and safety regulations. Labor regulations call on employers to take adequate precautions for employee safety. Enforcement, the responsibility of the Labor Ministry, is uneven. Labor organizers report that workers do not have the right to remove themselves from hazardous conditions without jeopardizing their continued employment.

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