

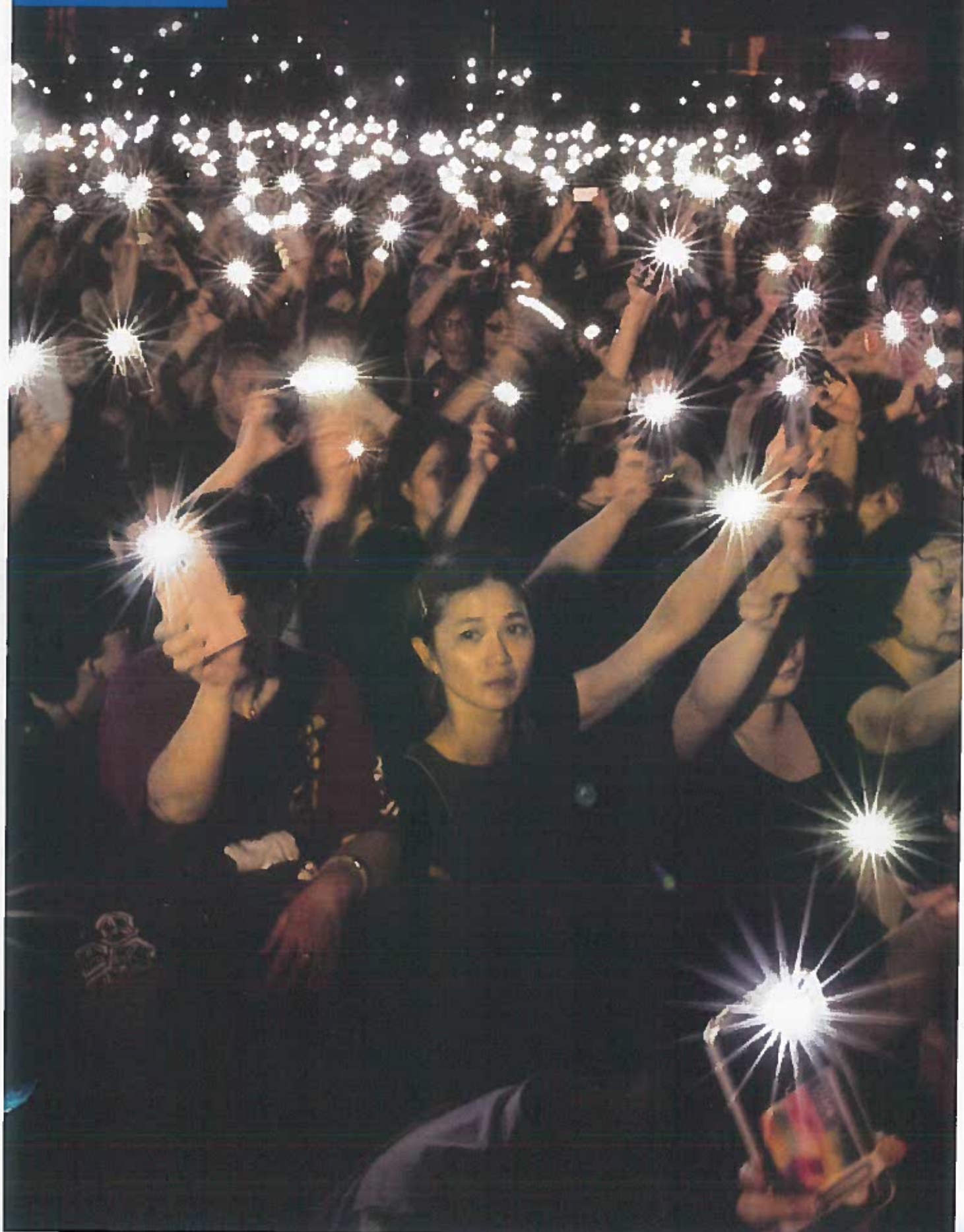
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HUMAN
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WORLD REPORT | 2020

EVENTS OF 2019



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Cover photo: *Protesters in Hong Kong, June 5, 2019.*

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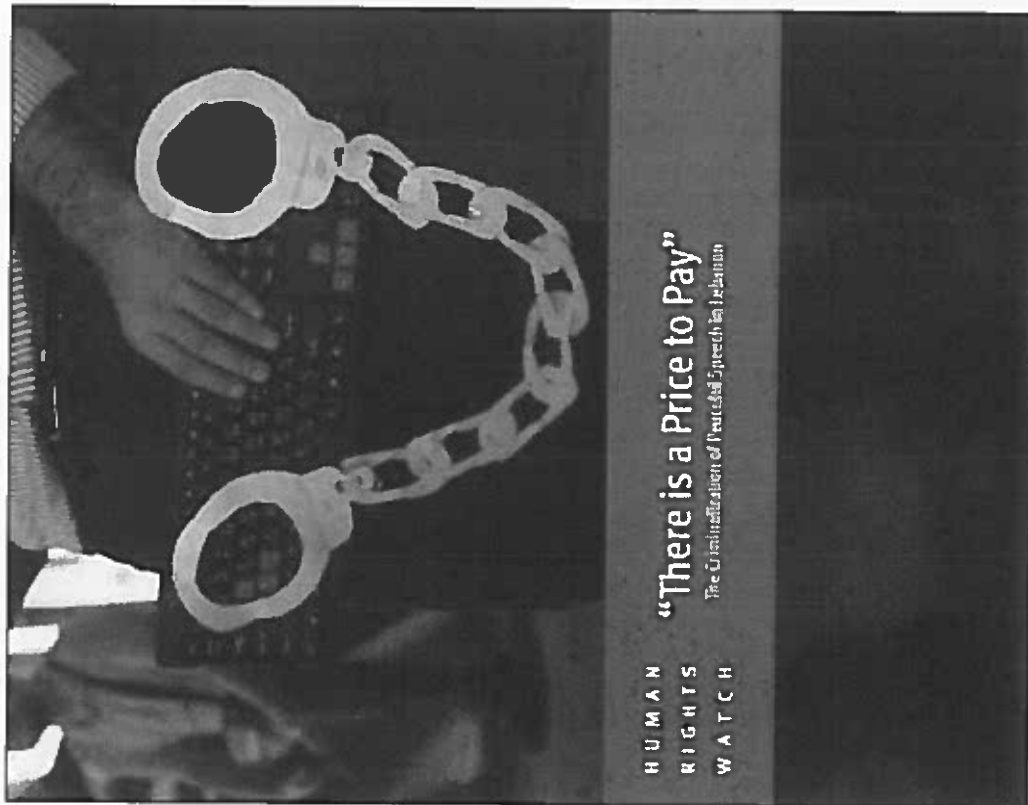
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Lebanon

The rights situation in Lebanon deteriorated in 2019, culminating in widespread anti-government protests that began on October 17. Security forces at times used excessive and unnecessary force against protesters and on several occasions failed to stop attacks on demonstrators.

Lebanese authorities have prosecuted individuals for peaceful speech, and security agencies interrogating these individuals have in some cases subjected them to abuse and detained them pretrial. Accountability for torture remains elusive, despite the passage of an anti-torture law.

Women still face discrimination under 15 separate religion-based personal status laws and both child marriage and marital rape remain legal. Unlike men, women cannot pass their citizenship to their children and foreign spouses.

Although Lebanon passed a law banning the open burning of waste, the practice is still widespread, endangering the health of residents.

There are approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon; 73 percent lack legal status. Authorities forcibly deported over 2,500 refugees.

Freedom of Assembly and Freedom of Expression

Anti-government protests began on October 17 prompted by the announcement of new taxes. The protests quickly devolved into anger against the entire political establishment, whom protesters blame for corruption and the country's dire economic situation. Prime Minister Saïd Hariri resigned on October 29 in response to the mass protests.

On October 18, security forces fired tear gas and rubber bullets at thousands of largely peaceful protesters in downtown Beirut. Security forces on several occasions failed to stop attacks on peaceful demonstrators and occasionally used excessive force to disperse protesters and clear roadblocks by beating protesters with batons and rifle butts.

In 2019, authorities continued to detain and charge individuals for speech critical of government officials, especially in relation to corruption allegations, and religious institutions. Lawyers also used defamation laws to file complaints

against individuals and publications expressing concern about the country's economic situation.

Security agencies, including the Internal Security Forces' cybercrimes bureau, have summoned activists for interrogation over peaceful speech, in some cases subjecting them to abuse, violating their privacy, detaining them pretrial, and compelling them to sign commitments to cease their criticisms.

Defaming or criticizing the Lebanese president or army is a criminal offense carrying penalties of up to two and three years in prison, respectively. The Lebanese penal code criminalizes libel and defamation, authorizing imprisonment of up to three months, and up to one year in the case of public officials.

Ill-Treatment and Torture

Despite parliament passing an anti-torture law in 2017, torture by security forces persists, judicial authorities continue to ignore the law's provisions, and accountability for torture remains elusive.

Judicial authorities failed to investigate torture allegations by Hassan al-Dika, arrested on drug-related charges, against members of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) prior to his death in custody on May 11.

Ziad Itani, a prominent actor falsely accused of spying for Israel, alleged that State Security officers tortured him in 2017. Despite his filing a lawsuit against his alleged torturers in November 2018, the judiciary has taken no substantive action on his case.

On March 7, Lebanon's Council of Ministers appointed the five members of the national preventative mechanism to monitor and investigate the use of torture, but it has still not allocated funding for the mechanism.

Military Courts

Lebanon continues to try civilians, including children, in military courts, in violation of their due process rights and international law.

On March 7, military courts sentenced two journalists to three months' imprisonment in absentia for allegedly insulting a security agency on Facebook. On ap-

peal in April, the military court declared a lack of jurisdiction and referred the case back to the military prosecutor.

Women's Rights

Women, who have played a leading role in the protests that began on October 17, continue to face discrimination under 15 distinct religion-based personal status laws. Discrimination includes inequality in access to divorce, child custody, and inheritance and property rights. Unlike men, Lebanese women also cannot pass on their nationality to foreign husbands and children.

Lebanon has no minimum age for marriage, and some religious courts allow girls younger than 15 to marry. Parliament failed to take up draft bills that would set the age of marriage at 18.

In 2017, Lebanon's parliament repealed article 522, which had allowed rapists to escape prosecution by marrying the victim, but left a loophole with regard to offences relating to sex with children aged 15-17 and sex with virgin girls with promises of marriage.

A 2014 Law on the Protection of Women and Family from Domestic Violence established important protection measures and introduced policing and court reforms but failed to criminalize all forms of domestic violence, including marital rape.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Article 534 of the penal code punishes "any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature" with up to one year in prison. In March, the top military prosecutor acquitted four military personnel accused of sodomy and ruled that homosexuality is not a crime. This follows a district court of appeals' similar groundbreaking ruling in July 2018, and four judgments from lower courts declining to convict gay and transgender people under article 534 since 2007.

General Security banned entry to at least six individuals after they participated in a gender and sexuality conference in September 2018, which it attempted to shut down.



Transgender women in Lebanon face systemic violence and discrimination in accessing basic services, including employment, health care, and housing.

Migrant Workers

An estimated 250,000 migrant domestic workers, primarily from Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Nepal, and Bangladesh, are excluded from labor law protections.

The *kafala* (sponsorship) system subjects them to restrictive immigration rules under which they cannot leave or change employers without permission of their employer, placing them at risk of exploitation and abuse.

Civil society organizations documented frequent complaints of non-payment or delayed payment of wages, forced confinement, refusal to provide time off, and verbal and physical abuse. Migrant domestic workers seeking accountability for abuse face legal obstacles and inadequate investigations.

On May 5, migrant domestic workers organized a protest in Beirut demanding better working conditions and the abolishment of the *kafala* system.

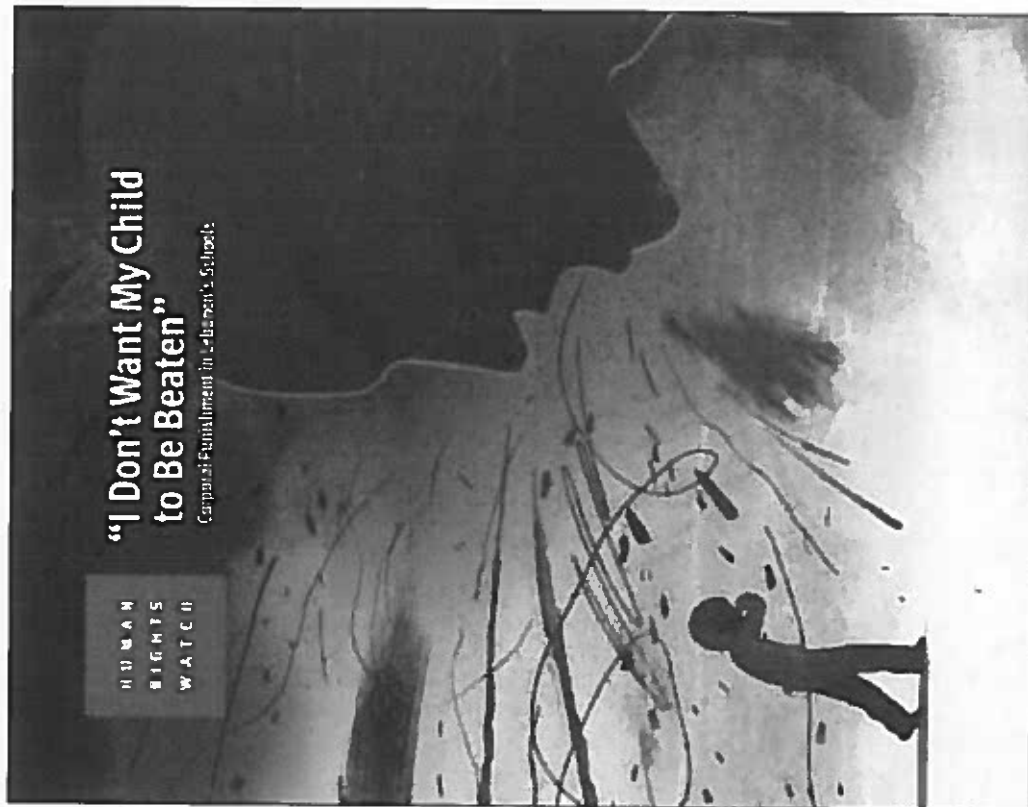
A former minister of labor created a committee to reform Lebanon's labor law and "break" the *kafala* system, but no reforms have been announced yet.

Refugees

Nearly 1 million Syrian refugees are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon. The government estimates the true number of Syrians in the country to be 1.5 million.

Lebanon's residency policy makes it difficult for Syrians to maintain legal status, heightening risks of exploitation and abuse and restricting refugees' access to work, education, and healthcare. Seventy-three percent of Syrians in Lebanon now lack legal residency and risk detention for unlawful presence in the country.

The Higher Defense Council took several decisions that increased pressure on Syrian refugees in Lebanon, including the deportation of Syrians who enter Lebanon illegally, the demolition of refugee shelters, and a crackdown on Syrians working without authorization. On August 26, General Security said it deported 2,731 Syrians since May 21, placing them at risk of arbitrary detention and



**"I Don't Want My Child
to Be Beaten"**

Carpeted Punishment in Lebanon's Schools

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torture. These coercive measures come amid xenophobic rhetoric from leading politicians calling for the return of Syrian refugees.

General Security estimates that over 170,000 Syrians returned to their country from Lebanon between December 2017 and March 2019. Syrians said they are returning because of harsh policies and deteriorating conditions in Lebanon, not because they think Syria is safe.

According to the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, there are approximately 174,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, where they continue to face restrictions, including on their right to work and own property. In addition, approximately 30,000 Palestinians from Syria have sought refuge in Lebanon.

Education

More than 300,000 school-age Syrian children were out of school during the 2017-2018 school year, largely due to parents' inability to pay for transport, child labor, school directors imposing arbitrary enrollment requirements, and lack of language support. As of mid-October 2019, Syrian students had not begun afternoon shifts at public schools. The Education Ministry blamed a shortfall in donor funding.

Children with disabilities are often denied admission to schools and for those who manage to enroll, most schools do not take reasonable steps to provide them with a quality education.

Although Lebanon has banned corporal punishment in schools, the ban is often disregarded, largely due to a lack of accountability for abusers.

Environment and Health

Despite the passage of a solid waste management law in 2018 banning the open burning of waste, municipalities still engage in the practice, posing health risks to residents, especially children and older persons. Open burning is more common in poor areas of the country.

On August 27, the cabinet endorsed the Environment Ministry's roadmap to create 25 sanitary landfills and three waste incinerators. However, the cabinet did

not agree on how to tackle Beirut's looming trash crisis as both major landfills reach capacity.

Legacy of Past Conflicts and Wars

An estimated 17,000 Lebanese were kidnapped or "disappeared" during the 1975-1990 civil war. On November 12, 2018, parliament passed a landmark law creating an independent national commission to investigate the fate of the disappeared.

On August 29, the Justice Ministry nominated 10 individuals to serve on the committee. Their nominations must be approved by Cabinet.

Key International Actors

Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia maintain a strong influence on Lebanese politics through local allies.

Tensions between Hezbollah and Israel increased following the crash of two Israeli drones in Beirut's southern suburbs on August 25.

The international community has given Lebanon extensive, albeit insufficient, support to help it cope with the Syrian refugee crisis and to bolster security amid spillover violence.

Lebanese armed forces and police receive assistance from a range of international donors, including the United States, European Union, United Kingdom, France, and Saudi Arabia.

Libya

Governance in Libya remained divided between two feuding entities: the internationally recognized and Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA); and their rivals in eastern Libya, the Interim Government, which is supported by the Libyan House of Representatives (HOR) and by the armed group known as the Libyan National Army (LNA).

Intermittent armed conflicts in most parts of the country since the end of the 2011 revolution that ousted Moammar Gaddafi have displaced more than 300,000 civilians.

Armed groups based in the west of the country and linked with the GNA fought off attempts by Gen. Khalifa Hifter, the LNA commander, and his allies in the west, to capture the capital Tripoli, beginning in April and continuing at times of writing. The violence, which included attacks on civilian homes and infrastructure, killed more than 200 civilians as of early November.

Armed groups, some of them affiliated with the GNA or the Interim Government, carried out extrajudicial executions and abducted, tortured, and disappeared people.

Migrants and asylum seekers continued to go to Libya, including many hoping to reach Europe. While in Libya, they faced arbitrary and abusive detention by the GNA Interior Ministry and abusive conditions in facilities controlled by smuggler and traffickers.

Political Transition and Constitution

Clashes among armed groups in western Libya in January, Hifter's assault on Tripoli in April, and intermittent fighting in the south deepened the political impasse and derailed the United Nations-brokered political process. Talks between the main conflict parties, Khalifa Hifter, and Fayez Serraj, GNA prime minister, collapsed when Hifter launched his offensive on Tripoli on April 4.

The High National Elections Commission was unable to organize a referendum on the draft constitution planned for January 2019 due to the prevailing insecurity, failure by the GNA to allocate funds to hold it, and the need for the House of