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LEBANESE REPUBLIC

Head of State	Emile Lahoud (until November)
Head of government	Fouad Siniora
Death penalty	retentionist
Population	3.7 million
Life expectancy	71.5 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f)	27/17 per 1,000
Adult literacy	88.3 per cent

Political violence and instability dominated the year, with more than 40 people killed in bombings and other attacks and hundreds killed in months of fighting between the Lebanese Army and the Fatah al-Islam armed group in and around Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp. The tension and divisions in the country, still recovering from the devastating war between Israel and Hizbullah in 2006, virtually paralysed parliament and prevented the election of a new President.

Women faced discrimination in law and practice, and the state failed adequately to protect them against violence. Palestinian refugees continued to suffer discrimination and violations of their social and economic rights. Reports of torture and ill-treatment in detention increased. Courts continued to condemn people to death but there were no executions.

Nahr al-Bared

Intense fighting broke out in Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp on 20 May between Fatah al-Islam, an Islamist armed group that had recently moved into the camp, and Lebanese armed forces. According to reports, 168 Lebanese soldiers, 42 civilians and 220 Fatah al-Islam members were killed before the army gained control of the camp on 2 September.

During the clashes, both sides put civilians at risk. Fatah al-Islam established armed positions in the camp and withdrew to them after attacking an army base. The army carried out heavy and possibly indiscriminate artillery shelling of the camp. The camp was largely destroyed. It appeared that after the army took control there was widespread looting, burning and vandalism of vacated homes and property. In December, the Prime Minister wrote to Amnesty International to say that the army was investigating the reports, noting that one finding was that the army had burned some homes to rid them of a poison spread by Fatah al-Islam.

Most of some 30,000 Palestinian refugees displaced from Nahr al-Bared relocated to Beddaawi refugee camp. They were allowed to return to Nahr al-Bared from October but the majority remained displaced at the end of the year. The camp remained off-limits to the media and local human rights organizations.

- On 22 May, two civilians were killed and others injured when a UN convoy delivering relief supplies inside the camp was hit by at least one explosive device. The army reportedly denied responsibility. The same day, Naif Selah Selah and a pregnant woman, Maha Abu Radi, were shot dead and other passengers were injured as their bus fleeing the camp approached an army checkpoint. A boy aged 13 or 14 was taken from the bus by armed men, threatened with a knife and given electric shocks to make him “confess” to planning a suicide attack, before being released. There were no known independent investigations into the incidents.

Scores of Palestinians were threatened, humiliated and abused by soldiers, often after being stopped at army checkpoints. Abuses included being stripped, being forced to lie on the road, and being beaten, kicked, hit with rifle butts, insulted and humiliated. In several cases individuals were reportedly whipped, given electric shocks and sexually abused.

Some 200 people were arrested and remained detained on account of their suspected involvement with Fatah al-Islam. Tens of these were reportedly charged with terrorism offences that can carry the death penalty. There were reports that some detainees were tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

- On 29 June, three protesters were killed during a peaceful demonstration calling for refugees displaced from Nahr al-Bared to be allowed to return to their homes. Lebanese Army soldiers opened fire on the protesters and then reportedly failed to intervene when Lebanese civilians attacked the demonstrators.
- On 12 December, General François el-Hajj, the Lebanese Army’s chief of operations during the fighting in Nahr al-Bared, and a bodyguard, were killed in a car bomb attack in Ba’abda.

Killings

More than 40 people were killed in bombings and shootings by unknown assailants.

- Two members of parliament who supported Fouad Siniora’s government were assassinated in separate car bomb attacks in Beirut. Walid ‘Eido MP and nine others were killed on 13 June, and Antoine Ghanim MP and five others were killed on 19 September.
- On 24 June, six UN peacekeepers were killed in an explosion targeting their convoy near the southern town of Khiam.

Rafiq al-Hariri assassination

On 30 May the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1757 to establish the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to try those suspected of involvement in the February 2005 killing of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and 22 others and, if the court so decides, a number of other possibly related attacks committed since October 2004.

- Five senior security officials and four other individuals arrested between August and November 2005 in apparent connection with the investigation remained detained without charge.

On 28 November the UN International Independent Investigation Commission submitted its ninth report into the killing and 18 other attacks it is helping to investigate.

Torture and other ill-treatment

There were increased reports of torture and other ill-treatment, particularly of Palestinians, Sunni security suspects and individuals suspected of involvement with Fatah al-Islam. At least two men died in custody, possibly as a result of ill-treatment.

- Nine men on trial before the Military Court from 21 April alleged that they had been tortured while held incommunicado from March and April 2006 at the Ministry of Defence detention centre in Beirut. Ghassan al-Slaybi said he was given electric shocks, beaten with a stick and forced to participate in the torture of his detained son, Muhammad. Others said that they were subjected to falaqa (beating on the soles of the feet) and the ballanco (hanging by the wrists tied behind the back). Several of the men said they had signed false confessions under duress. The court reportedly refused their request for a medical examination.

On 20 February the Lebanese authorities and the ICRC signed a protocol giving the ICRC access to “all detainees in all places of detention”.

- On 19 August Fawzi al-Sa’di, a Palestinian suspected of involvement with Fatah al-Islam, died in Roumieh prison, reportedly because he was denied adequate medical care. No investigation was known to have been initiated.
- In a rare successful prosecution, a private in the Internal Security Forces was sentenced on 8 March by the Beirut Criminal Judge to 15 days’ detention for torturing an Egyptian worker in May 2004 at a Beirut police station. He had used the farraj (chicken) method, whereby the victim’s wrists are tied to the ankles and they are then hung from a bar placed behind the knees.

In February, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared the detention of Nehmet Na’im al-Haj, held since November 1998, to be arbitrary and noted that his “confession” was obtained by torture. In May, it declared the detention of Yusef Cha’ban to be arbitrary and noted that he had been convicted largely on the basis of a “confession” allegedly made under torture and denied any right of appeal to a higher judicial authority.

Death penalty

Four men were reportedly sentenced to death on 4 December for murder. At least 40 other prisoners remained on death row, but there were no executions.

Refugees

Several hundred thousand Palestinian refugees, most of whom have lived in Lebanon all their lives, continued to suffer from discriminatory restrictions affecting their economic and social rights, notably their access to employment, healthcare, social security, education and housing. Over half of Palestinian refugees live in decaying and chronically overcrowded camps or in informal gatherings that lack basic infrastructure.

Hundreds of some 50,000 Iraqi refugees were detained for not having valid visas or residence permits. The detainees faced indefinite detention or return to Iraq.

Discrimination and violence against women

Women continued to face widespread discrimination in public and private life. Neither the legal system nor the policies and practices of the state provided adequate protection from violence in the family. Discriminatory practices were permitted under personal status laws, nationality laws, and provisions of the Penal Code relating to violence in the family. Migrant domestic workers continued to receive inadequate protection from workplace exploitation and physical and psychological abuse, including sexual abuse.

At least six female migrant domestic workers reportedly died in suspicious circumstances. It was unclear what investigations were carried out into the deaths or any abuse that might have preceded them.

- On 25 January it was reported that Bereketi Amadi Kasa, aged 22 from Ethiopia, had fallen to her death while trying to flee her employers' home in al-Zalqaa, north of Beirut.

In August Shi'a cleric Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah issued a fatwa against "honour" killings, describing them as a repulsive act banned by Islamic law.

Aftermath of 2006 war

No participants from either side of the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah were brought to justice for serious violations of international humanitarian law.

At least seven civilians were killed and 32 civilians were injured in 2007 by hitherto unexploded cluster bomb units fired by Israeli armed forces during the 2006 war. Two other civilians were killed and nine other civilians were injured by other previously unexploded or unidentifiable military ordinance. Five people working with clearance teams were killed and 14 others were injured. The Israeli authorities continued to refuse to furnish the UN with comprehensive cluster bomb strike data.

The fate of two Israeli soldiers seized from northern Israel by Hizbullah militants in July 2006 remained unclear. Hizbullah continued to deny them access to the ICRC.

Impunity

No criminal investigations or prosecutions were initiated into mass human rights abuses that were committed with impunity during and after the 1975-1990 civil war. Abuses included killings of civilians; abductions and enforced disappearances of Palestinians, Lebanese and foreign nationals; and arbitrary detentions by various armed militias and Syrian and Israeli government forces. In 1992 the Lebanese government said that a total of 17,415 people had disappeared during the civil war.

Amnesty International visits/report

- Amnesty International delegates visited Lebanon in May/June and in October to research the Nahr al-Bared events and the situation of Palestinian refugees in the country.

- Exiled and suffering: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (MDE 18/010/2007)