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LEBANON: UN EXPERTS DECRY INCIDENTS OF EXCESSIVE FORCE AGAINST PROTESTERS

GENEVA (26 November 2019) – Lebanon's security forces have reportedly used excessive force and failed to adequately protect protesters from violent attacks by others, despite the overwhelmingly peaceful nature of the past month's demonstrations across the country, according to UN human rights experts*.

"The State is responsible under international law to protect peaceful protesters and ensure a safe and enabling environment for people to exercise their freedom of expression and peaceful assembly," said the experts. "Even where roadblocks are used as a means of protest, which may in rare cases warrant dispersal of protesters, only the minimum use of force necessary should be used and only if less intrusive and discriminatory means of managing the situation have failed."

The experts held that although the overall response by security forces appears to have been largely proportionate and responsible, actions by the authorities raise several areas of concern.

"Lebanon's Internal Security Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces have reportedly used live ammunition, rubber bullets and large quantities of tear gas to disperse protesters, and have at times hit, kicked and beaten protesters with batons while making arrests. Some protesters are alleged to have been ill-treated while being taken to police stations and some have been released bearing marks of abuse."

On 12 November, a Lebanese soldier reportedly shot and killed a protester in Khalde in southern Beirut, after attempting to disperse protesters blocking a road by firing live warning shots.

Sympathisers of political groups have allegedly attacked protesters on multiple occasions, destroying their encampments and attacking them and journalists with rocks, metal rods, batons and sticks. Security forces have reportedly failed to intervene to protect peaceful protesters or arrest perpetrators on at least six occasions in Beirut, Bint Jbeil, Nabatieh and Tyre (Sour). They have also reportedly attempted to stop protesters and journalists from filming their actions, including by force, arrest, or confiscating equipment, the experts said.

The [Lebanese Red Cross](#) and [Lebanese Civil Defence](#) reported treating 1,790 people for protest-related injuries, including at least six members of the security forces, between 17 to 30 October.

The demonstrations have taken place against a backdrop of the failure by successive governments to pay serious attention to economic and social rights in the three decades since the Lebanese civil war. The result has been a crisis of affordable housing, daily electricity outages, a struggling public education system, widespread corruption, the collapse of the waste management system, environmental hazards, an insecure water supply, and widespread unemployment.

"After decades of neglect, the Government needs to take seriously the protesters' socioeconomic grievances," said the UN experts. "This is not only a matter of legal and institutional reforms such as the draft law on the independence of judges and lawyers, along with measures to curb corruption, embezzlement and illicit enrichment, but also of the recognition and fulfilment of essential economic and social rights."

The experts have written to the Lebanese authorities to register their concerns, and called on the Government to explain the measures it has taken to ensure the use of force is exercised in compliance with international law; investigate allegations of excessive use of force and ill-treatment of protesters; and identify the measures it has taken to address the root causes of protests and longstanding socioeconomic grievances.

ENDS

The UN experts: **Mr. Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on [extreme poverty and human rights](#); **Ms Agnes Callamard**, [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); **Mr. Michel Forst**, Special*

*Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; **Mr. David Kaye**, Special Rapporteur on the [promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); **Mr. Nils Melzer**, [Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#); **Mr. Clement Nyaletsossi Voule**, [Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and association](#); and **Ms. Meskerem Geset Techane**, [Chair of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#).*

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