

Freedom of Expression and Media


During Lebanon Protests 1 January - 14 February 2020

Second Report




مهارات
Maharat

Photo: Nabil Ismail



With the ongoing revolution in Lebanon, consecutive attacks, arrests, and prosecutions have been documented against journalists and activists during January till mid February 2020.

Maharat monitored the increasing oppressive measures taken by security forces to repress the protesters and inhibit the journalists from doing their work. The oppressive acts reached its peak between the 15th and the 18th of January where live ammunition was used for the first time. Media was banned from covering the demonstration in front of AL-Helou barrack after 59 protesters were arrested. Journalists and photographers were attacked directly by security forces to hinder the documentation of violations against protesters. Journalists were also attacked during live coverage by civilians affiliated with political parties. The cybercrime bureau resumed its activities in January 2020, where intensified summons took place against activists and journalists for expressing their opinion or doing their professional work. A decreased protection of economic rights of journalists was also noted after some media institutions announced their inability to pay full monthly salaries, in addition to the shutdown of other media institutions. Details are listed below.



Part one- Attacks on Journalists and Media Freedom:

The attacks on journalists increased starting mid-January 2020 during their field coverage of what was going on in Lebanon. Journalists, photographers, and technical support teams were attacked. Some journalists were banned from covering and were detained by security forces, in addition to attacks, harassments, and breaking of equipment. The documented cases are as follows:

1- Attacks on journalists by security forces:

- On January 14th, some journalists were attacked by security forces while covering the demonstrations in front of the central bank. The security forces tried to ban Al-Jadeed reporter Ramez el Kadi from covering the arrests and attempting to get the names of the detainees, and from covering the cruelty of security forces against the protesters after their arrest.
- On January 15th, reporters, photographers, and journalists were physically attacked and insulted by the security forces while covering the violent attacks on protestors in front of Al-Helou barrack calling to release the detainees that were arrested the previous day near the central bank. The main attacks on journalists:

- Detaining Al-Arabi Al Jadeed photographer Hussien Baidoun and beating him despite introducing himself as a journalist, and there was an attempt to take away his camera. He was pressured to delete the photos that he took but he refused and was released afterwards.
- Arresting the French photographer at "Executive Magazine", Greg Demarque and releasing him the next morning.
- Beating Reuters' photographer Issam Abdallah and crashing his camera, he was then taken to the hospital for treatment.
- Beating AL-Jadeed reporter Hassan Rifai and the photographer Samir Aloukda in front of Al-Helou barrack by security forces.
- Attacking and insulting the photographers Hasan Chaaban and Marwan Tahath, who were threatened to be beaten and arrested while trying to object on the violent attacks on journalists in front of Al-Helou barrack.
- Injuring the photographer Nabil Ismail and smashing his motorcycle.
- Beating the MTV photographer Joseph Noula who was taken to the hospital.
- Arresting the director Bashir Bou Zeid, editor of "November 17" magazine that was launched on the revolution eve.
- Attacking AL-Jadeed reporter Ramez al Kadi and the photographer Khaled Naimi in Kornish al Mazraa.

- Beating the photographer Saadeh Saadeh after showing his Press card by the Lebanese army while covering in Furn el Chebbak.
- On January 18th 2020, the Lebanese army banned MTV reporter Ranin Edris from covering the attack on one of the protesters in down town and she was insulted along the photographer.

2- Direct targeting of journalists with rubber bullets

The security forces also targeted journalists with rubber bullets while covering the confrontations between the protestors and security forces in Down Town Beirut:

- On January 19th 2020, Al-Jazeera reporter Ihab Aloukdi was shot with a bullet in his foot, and Al-Jadeed photographer Mohamed Samra was shot in a bullet in his hand where he was taken to the American University Medical Center for treatment.
- On February 11th 2020, the photographer jad Gharib was shot with a rubber bullet in his mouth while covering the confrontations between the protesters and the security forces near Annahar building in Down Town.

3- Random injuries among journalists

Journalists and photographers were randomly injured while covering the confrontations between the protesters and the security forces.

- On January 15th Al-Jadeed photographer Khaled Naimi was hit in the foot with a tear gas grenade
- On the 17th of January, Al-Jadeed reporter Adam Shamseddine was hit with a stone on his head while covering the protests in Hamra.
- On the 18th and 19th of January 2020, many journalists were injured in

Down Town Beirut:

- o Annahar photographer Marwan Assaf suffocated from tear gas inhalation thrown by security forces on the protesters; he was taken to St Georges Hospital for treatment.
- o LBCI team was hit with fireworks, and the security forces hit Al-Jadeed team by stones with other journalists near Azariyeh Parking.
- o Al-Jadeed photographer Ali Khalifeh, LBCI photographer Pierre Youssef, and France Press photographer Anwar Amrou were hit on the face while stone throwing confrontation between the protesters and the security forces.

4- Attacks on Journalists by protesters and other groups:

- On January 12th OTV reporter Lara Al Hashem was harassed in an attempt to ban the photographer from covering the road blocking on Ring Bridge by the protesters.
- On January 27th the protesters attacked OTV team that included the reporter Georges Abboud and the photographer. The protesters insulted them, and threw eggs and water bottles on them while covering the protests in Down Town Beirut.
- On February 11th some protesters in Down Town Beirut attacked the OTV team while covering the demonstrations against the confidence vote for the new government, where the reporter Rima Hamdan was insulted and the photographer Maroun Nemer was beaten, his eye was injured, and his camera was broken. The OTV team and the reporter lara el Hashem were attacked while covering the confrontations between the protesters and the security forces on Fouad Chehab Bridge.
- On January 14th, some journalists covering the demonstrations near the central bank were attacked by the protesters:
 - o Al-Jadeed team including the reporter Hassan Rifai and the photographer Zakaria Khatib were beaten by a group of masked

men where the photographer Zakaria was injured and was taken to the hospital for treatment.

- The MTV reporter Joyce Akiki and the photographer were attacked by some masked protesters and they were banned from coverage
- The LBCI photographer Pierre Youssef was attacked by one of the protesters who had a sharp tool in hand and he stole his microphone.
- On January 23rd 2020, the MTV team including the reporter Nakhle Oudaimeh and the photographer Fernando Hwayek were beaten and their car was broken, and Hwayek's phone was stolen by a party- supporters group in Jlala in Bekaa.
- On February 2nd, the MTV team including the reporter Joyce Akiki and the photographer Christian Abi Nader were attacked near the American Embassy in Awkar while covering the demonstration refusing the "Deal of the Century"
- On February 12th the economic journalist Mohamed Zbib was beaten by unknown group in parking lot in Hamra after his participation in a seminar at Hive B where he was invited by the AUB secular club to lecture about the current economic situation.

- On February 14th 2020, some Future Movement supporters attacked Al-Jadeed reporter Ghadi bou Moussa and the photographer Salam Younis in Down Town Beirut while covering the assassination memorial of the former prime minister Rafic Hariri.

Part Two: Summons of Journalists and Activists

Journalists are still being prosecuted for posting statements or comments while doing their work, or while expressing their opinion on social platform, about issues related to corruption, waste of public fund, the current economic and financial situation, and holding the corrupted people accountable, the corrupted authorities that became rich on the expense of the Lebanese people who are rebelling since October 17th. The activists were oppressed and were summoned with charges that have no legal basis like participating in the protests, or providing meals and allowances for protesters.

- On January 3rd the cybercrime bureau summoned again the cinema producer and activist Rabih El Amin after his interview on Al-Jadeed in front of the cybercrime bureau when he was released the first time.
- On January 7th 2020 the cybercrime bureau summoned the journalist and activist Nidale Ayoub based on a lawsuit filed by the journalist Hussein Mourtada for “defamation, insulting the divine soul, insulting

the President of the Republic and undermining the prestige of the state” because of a Facebook post where she said that “God is great, but the revolution is greater”. Some protesters gathered in front of the bureau in support of Ayoub.

- On January 13th 2020, Al-Jadeed and the journalist Riad Kobaisi were prosecuted by the public prosecutor based on the lawsuit filed by the director general of customs Badri Daher on the 11th of September for defamation and violating the print law; after reportage broadcasted during Al-Jadeed news bulletin.
- On January 31st 2020, the director of Marsad Online Gaby Ayoub was summoned by the cybercrime bureau based on a lawsuit filed by the lawyer of Cedrus Bank, for publishing news related to the bank.
- On February 3rd, the MP Wael Abou Faour member of progressive socialist party sued the lawyer Wassef al Harakeh for defamation and fake news where Lawyer Wassef Al-Harake accused the former minister of public health, Wael Abou Faour, of sending cancer medications to As-Suwayda in Syria during his time in the office, which led to a shortage and lack of medications for Lebanese citizens.
- On February 4th 2020, the activist Linda Borghol in charge of “the revolution’s kitchen” was summoned by the investigation bureau in Tripoly.

- On February 5th 2020, the activist Tony Khoury was summoned to Jouniyeh Detachment for participating in the protests in Jal Dib and Zouk.
- On February 5th 2020, the cybercrime bureau summoned the journalist Moussa Assi based on 2 lawsuits filed by the Supreme Islamic Shia Council and Mrs. Randa Berri for defamation. Both plaintiffs sued him in March 2019 after one month of his Facebook post criticizing corruption.
- On February 11th 2020, the free patriotic movement sued the journalist Dima Sadek and the activist Gino Raidy for penal code crime articles 317, 385, and 582 for publishing a video that contains fake news about the free patriotic movement that includes inciting sectarian and strife, slander, and defamation. The two lawsuits were registered under the numbers 965/m and 966/m and they were transferred to the central criminal investigation department for investigation.
- On February 13th 2020, members of state security investigated with the activist Firas Bou hatoum after 2 days of his summon for insulting the presidency in his Facebook posts

Part 3- Violating Freedom of Demonstration and Peaceful Assembly


The Lebanese constitution guarantees freedom of opinion and expression, demonstration, and peaceful assembly within the limits established by law.

The security forces used excessive violence against the protesters in Beirut and the regions, in addition to arbitrary arrests that resulted in illegal detentions of freedom and torture. According to the report of the volunteer lawyers committee, the number of arrested people who took part in the revolution was 906 and 553 injured since the beginning of the revolution on the 17th of October 2019 until mid-February 2020.

The following cases were monitored and documented:

Excessive use of Violence by security forces against protesters:


- On January 15th 2020, 35 people were injured during the protests in front of Al-Helou barracks in Kornish el Mazraa, where the riot police intentionally used violence for the second consecutive day against the protesters, and attacked journalists in an attempt to ban them from covering the violations.
- On January 27th many confrontations took place between the protesters and the security forces while demonstrating against the parliamentary session to approve the national budget. The Lebanese



Red Cross posted on Twitter transferring 8 injured protesters to the hospital, in addition to 19 injured that were treated on spot.

- On February 11th 2020, according to the statistics of the Red Cross, more than 300 protesters were injured by security forces during the demonstrations against the confidence vote for the new government next to the parliament.

Arbitrary Detention of protesters and some were tortured:


- On January 14 2020, the security forces arrested 59 protesters during the demonstration in front of the central bank, the demonstrations included violent confrontations between the protesters and the riot police.
 - On January 15th the number of arrested protesters reached 59 as follows: 59 detained at Al-Helou barrack, 5 in Ras Beirut, and 5 released from other barracks. A video that went viral on social media showed the mistreatment and torture of detainees by the security forces at Al- Helou Barrack.
 - On February 11th 2020, the riot police arrested the activist Mohamed Bazih in front of the parliament during the confidence vote for the new parliament.
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Violence by civil and party- affiliated groups against protesters

- On January 20th, unknown group attacked the activist Zain Nasreddin and broke his phone in front of his house in Hermel, after he was threatened many time through Facebook because of his posts on social media supporting the revolution and criticizing political figures.
- On January 24th 2020, protesters were beaten in sticks and knives from Amal Movement supporters in front of the parliament. The phone of those who were filming the attacks were stolen and more that 15 protesters were injured.
- On February 5th 2020, a group attacked the activist Firas Hatoum in front of his house in Der Koubel, because of a Facebook post about 2 cases on people supported by a certain political party.

Part 4- Status of media Institutions

- On February 2nd 2020, Radio One announced stopping all of its programs and closing the radio station after 37 years of service, because of the current situation as per a social media post they published.
- On February 3rd 2020, the Daily Star announced canceling its printed version while keeping its electronic website and social media platforms. This decision came because of the economic crisis in the country. This



was announced through their website, where they talked about losses in Ads revenues that resulted from the digital changes in the media sector and increased in last quarter of 2019.

- Deducting the salaries of workers in media institutions while keeping the same amount of work, and the revolution forced more work hours on journalists because of the constant live field coverage.

[To review the previous report \(October- December 2019\)](#)