



Lebanon

Joint Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review 51st Session of the UPR Working Group

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Submitted by:

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The **Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)** is an independent, non-profit CSO founded in April 2011. GCHR provides support and protection to human rights defenders (HRDs) in the MENA region to promote human rights, including the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression.

Maharat Foundation is a Beirut-based women-led freedom of expression organisation, founded in 2006, dedicated to campaigns grounded in research and strengthening connections between journalists, academics, and policy makers. It advances and enables freedom of expression, quality information debate and advocates for information integrity online and offline.

IFEX is the leading global network of over 100 member organisations that defend and promote the right to freedom of expression and information. IFEX was founded in 1992 and has been incorporated under the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act since 2014.

OMCT works with around 200 member organisations, which constitute its SOS-Torture Network, to end torture, fight impunity and protect human rights defenders worldwide. The SOS-Torture Network is the largest global group actively standing up to torture in more than 75 countries. Helping local voices be heard, the OMCT supports its field partners and directly assists victims. The international secretariat of the OMCT is based in Geneva, with offices in Brussels and Tunis.

Introduction

1. In this submission, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), Maharat Foundation, IFEX and OMCT examine the Government of Lebanon's compliance with its international human rights obligations to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for civil society. Specifically, we analyse Lebanon's fulfilment of the rights to information and expression, as well as the rights to the freedoms of association and peaceful assembly. We examine the situation of journalists and human rights defenders (HRDs) and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) since its previous UPR examination in January 2021. We assess Lebanon's implementation of recommendations received during the 3rd UPR cycle and provide a number of follow-up recommendations.
2. During the 3rd UPR cycle, the Government of Lebanon received 25 recommendations relating to civic space. 20 recommendations were accepted. One was "rejected" (from Israel), five were "noted", (mainly relating to the decriminalisation of defamation). An evaluation of a range of sources in subsequent sections of this submission demonstrates that the Government of Lebanon has not fully implemented recommendations relating to civic space. Implementation gaps were found with regard to the rights to freedom of expression and access to information, and there has been an acute lack of accountability for violations, in particular in relation to attacks on journalists.
3. We are deeply concerned by the targeting of civilians including journalists and medical human rights defenders during the Israeli attacks on Lebanon since the end of 2023, the clear violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and the notable lack of accountability for such attacks.
4. We are further concerned by a general lack of protection provided to journalists and other civil society commentators, including, in particular, women human rights defenders, the harassment and targeting of those seeking to exercise their right to freedom of expression, and the misuse of criminal law to target those expressing their opinion. We are also concerned by the failure to properly implement the 2017 Access to Information law, meaning government transparency is still lacking.
5. Civic space in Lebanon is currently classified as Obstructed by the CIVICUS Monitor, indicating the existence of civic space restrictions.
6. This submission examines Lebanon's implementation of previous UPR recommendations and compliance with international human rights standards on the following topics as follows:
 - Section 1 concerns freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information.
 - Section 2 concerns the protection of HRDs, including medical HRDs, civil society activists and journalists.
 - Section 3 concerns the situation of women human rights defenders (WHRDs).
 - Section 4 concerns freedom of assembly.
 - Section 5 concerns freedom of association.
 - Section 6 contains recommendations to address the concerns raised and advance implementation of recommendations under the 3rd cycle.

- Annex 1 outlines the implementation of 3rd cycle UPR recommendations related to civic space.

1. Freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information

7. Under the 3rd UPR cycle, the government received 17 recommendations relating to freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information. Five recommendations, including those relating to the decriminalisation of defamation and the need to try civilians in civilian courts rather than military courts were rejected. Examples of recommendations accepted include the following: “Guarantee freedom of expression and opinion online and offline (Ukraine)”; “Ensure that the new media law is amended in accordance with its international obligations (Switzerland)”; “Guarantee the freedom of expression and opinion and conduct investigations into attacks against journalists (Slovakia)”. However, as outlined below, the government has not taken effective measures to implement these recommendations. For example, the Media Law has not yet been published and there is still an outstanding and significant need for investigations into attacks against journalists.
8. Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of expression and opinion. Article 13 of Lebanon’s Constitution guarantees the right to “The freedom of opinion, expression through speech and writing, the freedom of the press”.¹ However, there are many challenges to the effective realisation of the right to freedom of expression, media freedom and the right to access information in Lebanon. Each issue will be addressed in turn below.

Freedom of Expression

9. A key threat to freedom of expression in Lebanon is the targeting of journalists and other online and offline commentators for expressing their political opinions or criticising political parties. Amnesty International reports that Lebanese authorities continued through 2024 to use criminal defamation laws to harass, intimidate and attack journalists and critics, citing the General Directorate of the Internal Security Forces. The Directorate disclosed that the Cybercrimes Bureau investigated 1,684 insult and defamation cases between January 2019 and March 2024, including 18 defamation cases between January and March 2024.² GCHR has expressed its concern that journalists in Lebanon have been victims of investigations and summonses leading to a “backlash in media circles and society at large”.³ It has observed that court summonses pose a threat to the right to freedom of the press and freedom of expression and that neither the Military Court nor the ordinary criminal courts should be trying journalists for issues relating to their exercise of the right to freedom of expression.
10. GCHR and Maharat Foundation have documented examples of the targeting of media workers for legitimate work that should be covered by the right to freedom of expression. The Maharat Foundation considers the examples below represent a dangerous indicator of the decline of freedom of expression in Lebanon and a legal precedent that contradicts international standards enshrined in the Lebanese Constitution. Maharat considers that many prison sentences are disproportionate, in

¹ <https://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/LebaneseSystem/Documents/Lebanese%20Constitution.pdf>

² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/lebanon/report-lebanon/>

³ <https://www.gc4hr.org/journalists-in-lebanon-freedoms-violated-by-security-summonses/>

particular in cases involving offensive language or inaccurate information about public figures.⁴

11. These include the following examples:

- a) Dima Sadek, journalist, reported in October 2024 that she received death threats due to the expression of her political opinion. In July 2023, Sadek had received a one-year prison sentence and a fine for criticising a political party. In relation to this criticism, she was accused of criminal defamation, libel and insult charges, as well as for “spreading false news” and “inciting sectarian and racist tensions”.⁵
- b) Alia Mansour, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of NOW Lebanon, was arrested by Lebanese State Security on 19 October 2024 for allegations relating to social media posts that were made in her name, using a fake account.⁶
- c) The Cybercrime and Intellectual Property Bureau summoned journalist Pascale Abou Nader on 20 June 2023 in connection with a libel and slander complaint filed against her.⁷ The same Bureau detained activist Tarek Abu Saleh after questioning him over a social media post in January 2022.⁸
- d) In March 2023, journalist Jean Kassir, managing editor of the news website “Megaphone”, was summoned by the General Directorate of State Security in relation to a particular article accusing Ghassan Oueidat, Prosecutor General of the Court of Cassation, of obstructing the investigation into the Beirut Port explosion.⁹
- e) On 31 March 2023, less than 48 hours after Kassir was summoned, the Cybercrimes Bureau summoned journalist Lara Bitar, editor-in-chief of the Public Source website, to appear for interrogation based on a complaint from the “Lebanese Forces” political party regarding an article she published eight months ago on toxic waste.¹⁰
- f) In September 2022, journalist Nidal Al-Sabaa was summoned by the Central Criminal Investigations Division following tweets criticising politicians.¹¹

12. The criminal prosecution of journalists for their work poses a direct threat to freedom of expression and the public’s right to information. Charges like “defaming the state” or “harming the economy” are increasingly being used as legal weapons against independent journalism. Maharat has said: “Supporting alternative and independent media in these critical times is not only a media necessity - it is a democratic and human rights imperative.”¹² Maharat considers that the State must support alternative media, as an important accountability mechanism.¹³

⁴ https://maharatfoundation.org/Statement_DimaSadek

⁵ https://maharatfoundation.org/Statement_DimaSadek; Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon’s war A report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, p.18. <https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Reports/21-11-2024/12099>

⁷ <https://www.gc4hr.org/journalists-in-lebanon-freedoms-violated-by-security-summonses/>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid; https://maharatfoundation.org/en/FoE_Statement542023

¹⁰ https://maharatfoundation.org/en/FoE_Statement542023

¹¹ <https://www.gc4hr.org/journalists-in-lebanon-freedoms-violated-by-security-summonses/>

¹² <https://maharatfoundation.org/en/SummoningMegaphoneAndDaraj-AThreatToDemocracy>

¹³ <https://maharatfoundation.org/en/SummoningMegaphoneAndDaraj-AThreatToDemocracy>

Media Freedom Law

13. Progress on a media law proposal that has been in the Parliament since 2010 has been made since Lebanon's last UPR. Maharat Foundation reports that the Parliamentary Sub-Committee of Justice and Administration was formed in January 2024 and convened 17 times throughout 2024 until the end of May 2025 to discuss feedback from civil society and government bodies. The Subcommittee included MPs from various political parties, the Minister of Information, and legal experts including Maharat's representatives. Significant progress was made in the draft in relation to decriminalising freedom of expression related cases and ensuring protection of journalist's sources.¹⁴
14. Major reform was proposed to decriminalise publication-related offenses, prohibit pre-trial detention in media cases, and establish civil liability mechanisms. Other articles provided for the regulation of media institutions, their establishment, ownership, licensing, and obligations and the formation of a new National Media Council tasked with safeguarding media freedoms and overseeing compliance.
15. The subcommittee has completed its work¹⁵ and is submitting this report on its proceedings to the Committee of Administration and Justice with the amended draft of the Media Law for review. It will have to pass to the General Assembly next for approval.

Right to Access Information

16. A key positive development regarding the right to access information has been progress on the Law on the Right of Access to Information.¹⁶ This law aims to ensure full and transparent access to information on the activities of public bodies for all stakeholders and aims to assist with civil society oversight of governance. The law guarantees the right of all persons to access and review documents and information, including public spending, held by public bodies. Such bodies are required to publish certain categories of information in the Official Gazette, and to respond to information requests from the public within 15 days.
17. However, according to the Maharat Foundation, implementation of the law is very weak and faces numerous challenges. Despite some positive examples of compliance,¹⁷ journalists told Maharat that public bodies rarely comply with the requirement to automatically publish certain information. This is due in part because

¹⁴ Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon's war A report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, pp.30 and 31.

<https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf>

¹⁵ [https://www.nna-](https://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA/771190/%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84)

[le.gov.lb/ar/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA/771190/%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84](https://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA/771190/%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84)

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¹⁶ Law on the Right of Access to Information: Journalists Describe the Reality, Maharat Foundation, Beirut 2025, p.1, <https://maharatfoundation.org/en/AccessstoInformationReport2025>

¹⁷ Law on the Right of Access to Information: Journalists Describe the Reality, Maharat Foundation, Beirut 2025, p.3, 4. <https://maharatfoundation.org/en/AccessstoInformationReport2025>. Examples given of compliance include publications by the Public Procurement Authority and the Government Emergency Committee.

of poor technology, in part because of a failure to appoint Information Officers, as required by the law, and, in part, because of a perceived reluctance by certain government bodies to comply with requests.¹⁸ The Foundation has documented numerous accounts of journalists being denied their requests to access governmental information with no reasons given for the denial.¹⁹ Use of the law is also hindered by a lack of awareness or training among journalists.²⁰ Maharat also notes that the National Anti-Corruption Commission, which is responsible for reviewing complaints about failures to comply with the law, faces significant operational challenges due to limited administrative capacity and resources.²¹ In short, while the existence of the law is promising, implementation has been slow, piecemeal and requires dedicated government commitment to implementation, as well as adequate resources.

2. Harassment, intimidation and attacks against human rights defenders, civil society activists and journalists

18. Under Lebanon's previous UPR examination, the government received nine recommendations on the protection of HRDs, journalists and civil society representatives. The government accepted all of these recommendations including "Take measures to foster a safe, respectful and enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders, free from persecution, intimidation and harassment (Latvia)"; "Ensure adequate investigation into all attacks against journalists, media professionals, bloggers and human rights defenders and ensure full implementation of the rule of law (Estonia)"; and "Take additional measures to further enhance the safety of journalists, and implement the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (Greece)". Despite accepting these recommendations, the government has not fully implemented them, as evidenced below.
19. Article 12 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders mandates states to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of HRDs. The ICCPR guarantees the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression. In spite of these protections, civil society actors in Lebanon including journalists and human rights defenders have been targeted for their work since Lebanon's last UPR. Of deepest concern is the failure to protect journalists and medical human rights defenders during the war over the past year and a half, which is in direct contravention of international human rights and international humanitarian law.
20. The Samir Kassir Foundation's Skeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom documents attacks, threats and targeting of journalists and other cultural actors. Since Lebanon's last UPR in January 2021, it has documented 326 incidents of journalists being targeted, harassed or attacked.²² Journalists have faced harassment and threats by a variety of actors, including by the supporters of particular political parties in

¹⁸ Law on the Right of Access to Information: Journalists Describe the Reality, Maharat Foundation, Beirut 2025, p.3 and p.17. <https://maharatfoundation.org/en/AccessstoInformationReport2025>

¹⁹ Law on the Right of Access to Information: Journalists Describe the Reality, Maharat Foundation, Beirut 2025, pp.4-16. <https://maharatfoundation.org/en/AccessstoInformationReport2025>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Law on the Right of Access to Information: Journalists Describe the Reality, Maharat Foundation, Beirut 2025, p. 17. <https://maharatfoundation.org/en/AccessstoInformationReport2025>

²² <https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/Violations-in-Numbers>

Lebanon.²³ Media crews, including international media crews, have also been subject to attacks from a range of actors.²⁴

21. The most violent attack was the murder of writer, publisher, and political activist Lokman Slim, who was found dead in his car on 04 February 2021, after being shot with four bullets in his head and one in the back. He was killed in the Addousiyyah area while returning from the town of Niha in southern Lebanon.²⁵

Targets in time of war

22. GCHR and Maharat Foundation have highlighted attacks against journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders in Lebanon since the outbreak of war in Lebanon in October 2023, contrary to international human rights and international humanitarian law.
23. A report published by GCHR with Maharat Foundation and IFEX in December 2024 states: “[f]rom the start of the war in Lebanon, Israel directly targeted, threatened and bombed journalists, killing and seriously injuring dozens, disregarding their international protections.”²⁶ Journalists reported that PRESS signs did not provide protection and many journalists restricted their movements for fear of being targeted.²⁷ Journalists and medics in Lebanon have also been at risk of chilling “Double Tap” strikes, where a missile attack is followed shortly after by another at the same locations, when medics and reporters have arrived to help.²⁸ Maharat Foundation has reported that at least a dozen journalists have been killed since October 2023.²⁹ These include the following:
 - a. On 25 October 2024, camera operator Ghassan Najjar and engineer Mohamed Reda of the Al-Mayadeen satellite news channel, and camera operator Wissam Qassem from Al-Manar TV were killed in Israeli air strikes.³⁰

²³ Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon’s war A report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, p.6.

<https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf> p.7

²⁴ Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon’s war A report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, pp.15 and 16.

<https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf>

²⁵<https://www.gc4hr.org/security-forces-use-excessive-violence-to-end-protests-in-tripoli-and-publisher-assassinated/>

²⁶ Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon’s war A report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, p.6.

<https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf>

²⁷ Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon’s war A report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, p.6.

<https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf>

²⁸ The Irish Times, ‘They are bombing them directly’: Medics in Lebanon increasingly worried about ‘double tap’ air strikes”, Sally Hayden, 14 October 2024

²⁹ Maharat Foundation, A War without Red Lines- Threats and Risks Facing Journalists in Lebanon

<https://maharatfoundation.org/en/AWarWithoutRedLines-ThreatsandRisksFacingJournalistsin-Lebanon>

³⁰ Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon’s war A report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, p.6.

<https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf>

- b. In September 2024, Al-Manar TV cameraman Kamel Karaki and Al-Mayadeen journalist Hadi Al-Sayed were killed by Israeli air strikes in Southern Lebanon.³¹
 - c. In November 2023, two journalists, Farah Omar and photojournalist Rabih Al-Maamari, were killed by Israeli army fire in southern Lebanon.³²
 - d. In October 2023, journalist Issam Abdullah was killed by an Israeli air strike.³³
24. Six other journalists were injured as they monitored the clashes in southern Lebanon. The journalists prominently displayed signs indicating that they were journalists, in addition to wearing helmets and press vests.³⁴
25. Lebanese laws do not provide journalists with specific protection from assaults, acts of violence, and threats encountered during their professional duties. This can be contrasted to protections granted to judges, judicial officers, lawyers, experts, witnesses, and public employees. Journalists should be given special status due to the nature of their work, which is vital for the public interest. Such a status should provide for additional protections in the law. This was a main finding in Maharat's report "A war without red lines: Threats and Risks Facing Journalists in Lebanon".³⁵
26. Journalists have called for accountability from national and international bodies. They have called on the Lebanese authorities to guarantee their protection and requested more support, including better access to the internet for access to information, training and protective equipment; as well as easier access to press cards.³⁶
27. Medic Human Rights Defenders in Lebanon have also been attacked. The World Health Organisation estimates that between October 2023 and November 2024, 47 percent of attacks on health care facilities in Lebanon resulted in at least one fatality, either of a patient or a health worker.³⁷ According to Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health, as of 15 November 2024, Israeli attacks had killed at least 208 health sector workers and injured 311 others across Lebanon in the previous year.³⁸ Medicine Sans Frontiers said in October 2024 that in the space of a two-

³¹ Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon's war, report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, p.6.
<https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf>

³² GCHR, Annual Report 2023, p.32.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ A war without red lines: Threats and Risks Facing Journalists in Lebanon, Maharat Foundation,
<https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2817/foe-report-eng-final.pdf>

³⁶ Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon's war A report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, p.21 and p.26,
<https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf>

³⁷ WHO, Lebanon: A Conflict Particularly Destructive to Health Care, November 2024,
<https://www.who.int/news/item/22-11-2024-lebanon--a-conflict-particularly-destructive-to-health-care>

³⁸ Al Jazeera, Mapping Israeli attacks on Lebanon's healthcare system, November 2024,
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/17/mapping-israeli-attacks-on-lebanons-healthcare-system>

week period 19 paramedics had been killed.³⁹ The Lebanese government must do more to protect the rights of all human rights defenders, both to protect them as they work and ensure accountability for unlawful attacks.

3. Specific Threats to Women Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Politicians

28. Since Lebanon's last UPR, CEDAW has highlighted particular challenges for women human rights defenders in Lebanon. CEDAW's 2022 Concluding Observations on Lebanon noted with concern "reports of harassment and excessive limitations on the right to freedom of expression for women human rights defenders and the shrinking space for civic space in the State party". CEDAW recommended that Lebanon should:

"Ensure that women human rights defenders and activists can freely carry out their advocacy for women's human rights and exercise their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association without harassment, surveillance or undue restrictions".⁴⁰

29. Lebanon has ratified the CEDAW, but continues to maintain reservations that limit its full application.⁴¹ In practice, women face widespread legal and societal discrimination as follows:

- a) **Shrinking Civic Space for WHRDs:** As noted by CEDAW in 2022,⁴² women human rights defenders, including those advocating for gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and legal reform, face harassment, social stigmatization, online threats, and surveillance.⁴³
- b) **Underrepresentation in Public Life:** Only 6.25% of Lebanon's current parliament members are women. Political participation by women remains severely limited due to social, structural and institutional barriers.⁴⁴
- c) **Violence against Women in Public Life:** Women politicians and journalists face threats, and gender-based violence.

30. According to a report by Maharat on the safety of women journalists,⁴⁵ 37.5% of women journalists surveyed personally experienced threats to their physical safety during their work. This is more than one out of every three women journalists who answered the survey. Half of them stated that they have been in situations at work where they did not feel safe. Covering protests emerges as a common situation

³⁹ The Irish Times, 'They are bombing them directly': Medics in Lebanon increasingly worried about 'double tap' air strikes", Sally Hayden, 14 October 2024.

⁴⁰ CEDAW Committee (2022). *Concluding Observations on the sixth periodic report of Lebanon* (CEDAW/C/LBN/CO/6).

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/LBN/CO/6&Lang=En

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom (2023). *Annual Monitoring Report*. <https://www.skeyesmedia.org>

⁴⁴ UN Women Lebanon (2022). Women in Politics – Factsheet post-2022 parliamentary elections. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/07/factsheet-women-in-politics-in-lebanon>

⁴⁵ <https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2558/holistic-safety-for-women-journalists-lebanon-eng.pdf> p 31

with a high risk of harassment and physical assault, in particular when providing live coverage of events as they happen.

31. Women reporters were at the forefront covering war zones after Israel started bombing Lebanon in October 2023, prompting many women journalists to head south to cover the conflict. As noted, journalists were directly targeted, including women journalists, with the killing of Al-Mayadeen reporter Farah Omar and the severe injury of Christina Assi, among many other journalists who were subjected to Israeli forces' attacks.⁴⁶
32. A report issued by Maharat and its partner Madanyat in 2022 entitled "Breaking the silence of violence of women in politics" showed that the widespread popular protest movement on 17 October 2019 was a catalyst for breaking the boundaries set by the patriarchal system between the private and public spheres and the gender roles assigned to women. More women engaged in politics, especially on social media, which is more accessible than traditional media. However, many women faced online threats and abuse. The report specifies the types of violence that WHRDs face in Lebanon including online, psychological, sexual, social (especially when they talk about sensitive issues), economic, physical, and legal threats.⁴⁷
33. According to Maharat Foundation's monitoring on Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP), a growing pattern of violence against women activists in the public sphere has appeared during critical times such as protests, elections, or wars. In Lebanon, women journalists work in an environment lacking a holistic protection system, suffering from legal gaps, a lack of accountability, and an absence of clear complaint mechanisms, whether in the public or digital sphere, which contributes to reinforcing a culture of impunity. The State must do more to protect women from VAWP to ensure women's rights to political participation in Lebanon is respected and protected.⁴⁸

4. Freedom of peaceful assembly

34. During Lebanon's examination under the 3rd UPR cycle, the government received five recommendations on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Among other recommendations, the government committed to "Safeguard the right to peaceful protest at all times (Germany)"; "Investigate all allegations of use of excessive force by security forces while handling protests and demonstrations (Austria)" and "Fight against harassment and intimidation of journalists, lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender and intersex persons and human rights defenders, and ensure strict respect for the right to peaceful protest (France)." All recommendations on protest, except the recommendation from Israel, were accepted but, as evidenced below, the government has not fully implemented them.

⁴⁶ Public Policies Supporting Women's Right to Protection From Cyber Violence: A Case Study of Women Field Reporters, <https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2900/eng-vawp-report-2025.pdf>

⁴⁷ <https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2231/me-too-politics-report-en.pdf>;
<https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2223/marsad-un-women-edited-versiondocx.pdf>

⁴⁸ [Media and Gender Monitoring of the 2022 Elections Violence Against Women in Politics](https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2561/vawp-final-report-eng.pdf);
<https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2561/vawp-final-report-eng.pdf>

35. Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Article 21 of the ICCPR also guarantees this right.
36. The right to freedom of assembly is generally respected in Lebanon. Demonstrators are able to gather without permits or coordination with security services but some protests have seen violence against protesters by authorities, political parties, militia groups and others. Some protesters have been summoned by judicial police. The Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression in Lebanon, of which Maharat is a member, reported that on 30 September 2023, a peaceful protest in downtown Beirut against increased violations of freedoms was violently attacked by dozens of young men on motorcycles, armed with sticks, who “surrounded the protesters and journalists, threatening, insulting, and physically assaulting them,” sending two people to hospital. Journalists were intentionally targeted and Internal Security Forces (ISF), did not protect them. The army had to intervene after three hours to evacuate protestors in security vehicles.⁴⁹
37. The Coalition called the assault “intentional and premeditated,”⁵⁰ as it was preceded by a campaign of incitement against the protest, vilification of its organisers and participants, led by public, religious, and political figures.” The Coalition noted a pattern of attacks in Beirut and Sour by civilian groups in August and September 2023, that were left unchecked by the authorities.
38. Non-citizens, LGBTQ+ communities, and other marginalised groups face greater restrictions on their freedom to assemble in practice. In 2022, the Interior Minister issued an order “to prevent LGBTQ+ Pride gatherings that “promote homosexuality,” despite rulings by the country’s top administrative court that such actions constituted an infringement on freedom of expression.⁵¹
39. The Feminist Platform in Lebanon (including Maharat) strongly condemned the Ministry of Interior’s unconstitutional and violent actions to shut down peaceful Pride events in June 2022, after he called them “immoral” and deployed armed security forces to enforce cancellations - an escalation that threatens individual freedoms and reflects a police-state approach. The platform also denounced the alliance of state and religious institutions in fuelling hate speech and intimidation against the LGBTQ+ community, pledging solidarity with those targeted and vowing to pursue accountability mechanisms locally and internationally.⁵²
40. GCHR has also documented journalists being attacked while attending and reporting on protests. For example, in May 2022, the crew of “Lebanon and the World” website was beaten by a Lebanese Army member while covering a protest.⁵³

⁴⁹ <https://english.legal-agenda.com/the-coalition-to-defend-freedom-of-expression-in-lebanon-demands-investigation-into-the-assault-on-the-freedoms-protest/>

⁵⁰ <https://twitter.com/AboBakeral3arab/status/1707469818922734079?s=20>

⁵¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2024>

⁵² <https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2276/lgbt-report.pdf>

⁵³ <https://www.gc4hr.org/journalists-in-lebanon-freedoms-violated-by-security-summonses/> For a full list of such targeting of journalists in 2022 see the Syndicate of Lebanese Press Editors published its 2022 Report on the State of Press Freedoms in Lebanon

41. On 01 February 2021, when a number of families of the victims of the Beirut Port explosion staged a sit-in in front of the house of the investigating judge Fadi Sawan, they were attacked by security forces.⁵⁴
42. Two protesters were killed during protests held in the city of Tripoli which started on 25 January 2021 against the heavy restrictions imposed due to the increase of Covid-19 cases. The protest area in Tripoli was surrounded by security services, including riot control teams and the strike force of the Information Branch and the army, which used excessive violence against protesters to prevent them from entering the government palace (the headquarters of the Northern Governorate) in the city. In addition to targeting protesters with rubber bullets and live ammunition, the security services used tear gas bombs and water cannons to disperse protesters. More than 220 demonstrators were wounded, and Omar Tiba and Oussama Ghemrawi were killed.⁵⁵
43. During these protests, the Tripoli municipality building was burned on the night of 29 January 2021, which led some top politicians to issue statements full of hatred, accusations of treason, and incitement. At least 17 people were arrested by the army intelligence who raided the homes of protesters, and violated their rights, including the rights guaranteed by Article 47 of the Criminal Procedures to have a lawyer present during the investigations and to contact their families, reported the Lawyers Committee to Defend the Protesters.⁵⁶
44. A number of protesters in the capital, Beirut, gathered in front of the homes of the members of parliament from Tripoli to object to the bloody events in that city. Five people were arrested by the security forces.⁵⁷

5. Freedom of association

45. During Lebanon's examination under the 3rd UPR cycle, the government received one recommendation on the right to freedom of association and creating an enabling environment for CSOs. The government committed to ensuring that it would: "[r]espect, protect and fulfil fully the right to freedom of expression and association, and take action to protect journalists and activists, and to fully enable non-governmental organisations and civil society to conduct their activities freely and safely (New Zealand)". However, as evidenced below, the government has not taken fully adequate measures to realise this recommendation.
46. Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution guarantees the right to the freedom of association.⁵⁸ Article 22 of the ICCPR guarantees freedom of association. Despite these commitments, the government has on some occasions failed to ensure a fully free environment for all members of civil society and some groups have been targeted.

⁵⁴<https://www.gc4hr.org/security-forces-use-excessive-violence-to-end-protests-in-tripoli-and-publisher-assassinated>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/lawyersprotestleb/>

⁵⁷ <https://www.gc4hr.org/security-forces-use-excessive-violence-to-end-protests-in-tripoli-and-publisher-assassinated/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/LebaneseSystem/Documents/Lebanese%20Constitution.pdf>

47. NGOs, for the most part, tend to operate freely in Lebanon. However, they must comply with the Law on Associations, as well as other relevant laws, and must register with the Interior Ministry. According to Freedom House, the Ministry may oblige NGOs to “undergo an approval process and can investigate a group’s founders and staff.” Also, NGOs may face “bureaucratic obstruction or intimidation by security services, depending on their mission or initiatives.”⁵⁹ Freedom House has observed that migrant activists have been targeted. It gives the example of Samuel Tesfaye, an Ethiopian-born migrant rights activist who had lived in Lebanon for 13 years, who was arrested in January 2023 “for allegedly violating arbitrary residency conditions.” He was deported in February 2023 and issued a three-year ban on returning to Lebanon.⁶⁰

6. Recommendations

GCHR, Maharat Foundation, IFEX and OMCT suggest the following recommendations for States to make to the Government of Lebanon in the 4th UPR Cycle. The Government of Lebanon should:

1. Create and maintain, in law and in practice, an enabling environment for all civil society actors, in accordance with the rights enshrined in the ICCPR, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Human Rights Council resolutions 22/6, 27/5 and 27/31, and Lebanon’s own Constitution.
2. At a minimum, guarantee the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression. This includes the right to operate free from unwarranted state interference, the right to communicate and cooperate, the right to seek and secure funding and the right to be protected from attacks, harassment and threats.

Freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information

3. Ensure the right to freedom of expression and media freedom by bringing all national legislation into line with international standards. In particular, take steps to finalise the new media law, in line with best practice international law and standards, and ensure all restrictions in law and practice on the right to freedom of expression are lifted.
4. Ensure that laws applied to the online sphere comply with the government’s commitment to guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information, including by ensuring free access to electronic media, and enabling journalists, bloggers, and other internet users to play a full and active role in promoting and protecting human rights including by holding public officials accountable and reporting on issues of public interest.
5. Adopt an effective framework for the protection of journalists from targeted attacks, persecution, intimidation and harassment, using international mechanisms and sources including UNESCO.
6. End the use of criminal defamation laws to harass, intimidate and attack journalists and critics and end the use of military courts to try civilians.

⁵⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2024>

⁶⁰ Ibid

7. Ensure the full implementation of the Access to Information Law and establish better mechanisms to facilitate public access, in line with international best practices. These measures should include:
 - a. Respond timely to requests for information (as per the access to information law).
 - b. Provide financial and technical support to public administrations to digitise public documents, establish and maintain updated websites and appoint information officers to all public bodies.
 - c. Launch and implement a national digital transformation plan, ensuring that measures to advance digital security comply with the rights to privacy and freedom of expression.
 - d. Activate the role of the Anti-Corruption Commission by providing it with the necessary human and technical resources, and launch awareness campaigns targeting citizens and journalists to encourage filing complaints when administrations fail to cooperate.
 - e. Develop a national public communication plan within the public administration, based on principles of transparency and dialogue with citizens and engage journalists and civil society in evaluating public communication performance of administrations.

Protection of human rights defenders and media workers

8. Take measures to foster a safe, respectful and enabling environment for civil society, including by protecting civil society from threats, harassment and human rights violations. Where violations occur, ensure accountability.
9. Provide civil society members, HRDs, including medical HRDs, and journalists with a safe and secure environment in which to carry out their work.
10. Conduct impartial, thorough and effective investigations into all cases of attacks, harassment and intimidation against civil society members, HRDs, including medical HRDs, and journalists and bring the perpetrators of such offences to justice.
11. Ensure that HRDs are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear or undue hindrance, obstruction, or legal and administrative harassment.
12. Guarantee the protection of journalists and media workers. Require employers to provide training and protective equipment; proper financial remuneration and psycho-social support to journalists.⁶¹
13. Publicly condemn at the highest levels of government instances of harassment and intimidation of CSOs and activists.
14. The Lebanese government should utilise all available domestic and international measures to document the crimes committed by Israel against civilians and journalists, and to advocate for holding the perpetrators accountable.

⁶¹ Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon's war A report by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights with the support of Maharat Foundation and IFEX, December 2024, p.21 and p.26, <https://www.gc4hr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Media-workers-under-fire-in-Lebanons-war-GCHR-Maharat-IFEX-report-2024-ENG.pdf>

Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders

15. Ensure that women human rights defenders and activists can freely carry out their advocacy for women's human rights and exercise their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association without harassment, surveillance, defamation campaigns, criminal prosecution or undue restrictions, including by providing legal, financial and psychosocial support for women human rights defenders.
16. Improve reporting and protection mechanisms for women who experience online violence and update the legal framework to ensure a digital environment free from gender-based violence.
17. Review and update the Lebanese Penal Code to keep pace with technological developments and cyber violence, such as online threats and blackmail.
18. Allocate the necessary human and financial resources to ensure the effective implementation of laws that protect women, such as the law against sexual harassment.
19. Develop and enhance proper training for the police and the judiciary to ensure the effective handling of cyber violence cases against women.
20. Provide the necessary resources to combat gender-based violence and conduct annual evaluations of gender-based violence risks and methods for mitigating them.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

21. Adopt best practices on the freedom of peaceful assembly, as put forward by the 2012 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, and by General Comment No. 37 adopted by the UN Human Rights Committee in 2020.
22. Immediately end and impartially investigate all instances of the targeted harassment of protesters from minority groups.
23. Investigate violence used against protesters by all actors, including security forces, and bring perpetrators to justice.
24. Review and, if necessary, update existing human rights training for police and security forces, with the assistance of independent CSOs, to foster the more consistent application of international human rights standards.

Access to UN Special Procedures mandate holders

25. The Government has extended a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedure mandate holders. A number of mandate holders have requested visits to Lebanon in the past number of years including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression. This visit request has been accepted. Lebanon should facilitate this visit as soon as possible.⁶² The Government should also prioritise an official visit by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

⁶² <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/ViewCountryVisits.aspx?visitType=all&country=LBN&Lang=en>

State engagement with civil society

26. Implement transparent and inclusive mechanisms of public consultations with CSOs on all issues mentioned above and enable the more effective involvement of civil society in the preparation of law and policy. Also, Include CSOs in the UPR process before finalising and submitting the national report.
27. Systematically consult with civil society on the implementation of UPR recommendations, including by holding periodical comprehensive consultations with a diverse range of civil society.
28. Incorporate the results of this UPR into its action plans for the promotion and protection of all human rights, taking into account the proposals of civil society, and present a midterm evaluation report to the Human Rights Council on its implementation.

Annex 1: Assessment of implementation of civic space recommendations under the 3rd cycle

Recommendation	Position	Assessment/Comments on level of implementation
<i>Theme: Freedom of opinion and expression & access to information</i>		
150.135 Ensure adequate investigation into all attacks against journalists, media professionals, bloggers and human rights defenders and ensure full implementation of the rule of law (Estonia); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not implemented Source: Sections 1 and 2
150.145 Continue thoroughly investigating reports of violence, harassment and intimidation of journalists, media professionals, bloggers, human rights defenders and activists, and take appropriate measures (Romania); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not implemented Source: Sections 1 and 2
150.150 Protect the right of media professionals to freedom of expression (Canada); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not implemented Source: Sections 1 and 2
150.153 Take additional measures to further enhance the safety of journalists, and implement the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (Greece); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not implemented Source: Sections 1 and 2
150.155 Uphold the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including by ending detention of people for expressing views critical of the government and ensuring security forces exercise restraint in response to protests (Australia); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not implemented fully Source: Sections 1, 2 and 3
150.157 Ensure unimpeded access for all people in Lebanon to both local and foreign media, including during protests (Latvia); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not implemented Source: Sections 1 and 2

<p>150.160 Promote and uphold the right to freedom of expression, including press freedom, and to ensure that legislation and State practice are brought into line with article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Netherlands);</p> <p>Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1</p>	Accepted	<p>Status: Not fully implemented</p> <p>Source: Sections 1 and 2</p>
<p>150.161 Respect, protect and fulfil fully the right to freedom of expression and association, and take action to protect journalists and activists, and to fully enable non-governmental organisations and civil society to conduct their activities freely and safely (New Zealand);</p> <p>Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1</p>	Accepted	<p>Status: Not implemented</p> <p>Source: Sections 1, 2, and 4</p>
<p>150.162 Ensure freedom of expression and assembly, and prevent violence against peaceful demonstrators (Norway);</p> <p>Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1</p>	Accepted	<p>Status: Not fully implemented</p> <p>Source: Sections 1 and 3</p>
<p>150.163 Take necessary steps to ensure the safety of journalists and peaceful protesters as a way of guaranteeing freedom of expression and assembly (Republic of Korea);</p> <p>Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1</p>	Accepted	<p>Status: Not implemented</p> <p>Source: Sections 1 and 2</p>
<p>150.164 Guarantee the freedom of expression and opinion and conduct investigations into attacks against journalists (Slovakia);</p> <p>Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1</p>	Accepted	<p>Status: Not implemented</p> <p>Source: Sections 1 and 2</p>
<p>150.165 Ensure that the new media law is amended in accordance with its international obligations (Switzerland);</p> <p>Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1</p>	Accepted	<p>Status: Not yet fully implemented, though progress has been made.</p> <p>Source: Section 1</p>
<p>150.166 Guarantee freedom of expression and opinion online and offline (Ukraine);</p> <p>Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1</p>	Accepted	<p>Status: Not implemented</p> <p>Source: Sections 1 and 2</p>

150.133 Ensure that civilians are tried in civilian courts and that authorities transparently investigate reports of the use of torture in security force facilities and allegations of excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators by security forces, and stop prosecuting protesters, journalists and bloggers under criminal anti-defamation laws for exercising the right to freedom of expression (United States of America); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Sections 1 and 3
150.46 Repeal the criminal defamation provisions of the Penal Code, and reform article 317 of the Code to limit criminalisation to incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Sections 1
150.151 Review the legislation on defamation and bring it into conformity with international standards (Estonia); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section
150.159 Lift all restrictions on freedom of expression (Luxembourg); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Sections 1
150.154 Decriminalise blasphemy, and fully decriminalise defamation, including insult and criticism of public officials (Ireland); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 1
THEME Right to peaceful assembly		
150.78 Fight against harassment and intimidation of journalists, lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender and intersex persons and human rights defenders, and ensure strict respect for the right to peaceful protest (France); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 3

150.142 Investigate all allegations of use of excessive force by security forces while handling protests and demonstrations (Austria); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not fully implemented Source: Section 3
150.147 Conduct an investigation into the excessive use of force during demonstrations in 2019 and hold accountable those responsible for the 04 August explosion (Slovakia); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not fully implemented Source: Section 3
150.152 Safeguard the right to peaceful protest at all times (Germany); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not fully implemented Source: Section 3
150.156 Promote and protect the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, including media freedom (Latvia); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not fully implemented Source: Sections 1 and 3
151.1 Adopt all necessary steps to ensure the safety of peaceful protests and provide an environment void of fear, intimidation and violence (Israel); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5 - Para.151	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Sections 2 and 3
THEME Other		
150.158 Take measures to foster a safe, respectful and enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders, free from persecution, intimidation and harassment (Latvia); Source of Position: A/HRC/47/5/Add.1	Accepted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 2