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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2013]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human Rights in Lebanon

The human rights situation in Lebanon is rapidly deteriorating due to internal strife fueled by the spillover of the Syrian crisis. Moreover, the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Mikati, the dismantlement of his government at the end of the March 2013 and the Parliament's decision to renew its own mandate in May 2013 have further entrenched Lebanon in a political deadlock with negative impacts for the state of human rights in the country.

Acts of violence and terrorism arising from sectarian and political tensions are not new to Lebanon, and civilians bear the brunt of violent clashes that have left hundreds dead in recent months throughout the country. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) calls on the Lebanese government to take all necessary measures to protect residents from the recurrence of such acts by deploying more trained security forces in the affected areas, rather than waiting until clashes start to dispatch these forces. Violence committed in recent years reveals a trend to target specific areas by some armed political groups aiming to intimidate and terrorize Lebanon's residents. The consistent failure of the Lebanese government to take adequate measures to protect against and deter constant shelling and targeting of civilians constitutes a violation to the obligations of the state of Lebanon under international law.

In the northern town of Tripoli, fierce clashes between the two neighborhoods of Bab Al Tabbeneh and Jabal Mohsen, two rival neighborhoods which have been at odds since the Lebanese Civil War and which have witnessed renewed tensions since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, have left over thirty people dead and over two hundred people wounded. Clashes in Tripoli between these two rival factions continued since 2011 for political and sectarian reasons: while Jabal Mohsen, mostly inhabited by Alawites, strongly supports Bashar Al Assad, Bab Al Tabbaneh, a Sunni neighborhood, has pledged allegiance to factions of the Syrian opposition. Light arms, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades have been used throughout the ongoing conflict, hitting civilians and causing damage to property. Fighting between supporters and opponents of the current Syrian government has also reached other parts of Tripoli. Indeed, clashes in Tripoli's souks in June 2013 between Salafists supporting Syrian rebels and the Syrian National Socialist Party, loyal to Bashar Al-Assad, have led to a deployment of the Lebanese Army on Tripoli's main streets.¹ Army units launched a crackdown on Jabal Mohsen and Bab Al Tabbeneh gunmen at the beginning of June, removing barricades and sandbags from the neighborhoods.² However, this constant stream of violence has led to a growing weapons trade in the city, with civilians and families arming themselves and settling local disputes through the use of force, which has the effect of further heightening the insecurity in Tripoli. While the government continues to declare that it will firmly deal with the situation, the presence of the army and police has so far proven unable to contain flare-ups of violence and to restore lasting calm and security to the city.

In June 2013 in the southern town of Saida, in the neighborhood of Abra, clashes took place between supporters of Salafist leader Ahmad Assir and the Resistance Brigades, a pro-Hezbollah group, leaving 17 Lebanese soldiers and two civilians dead, over 50 civilians wounded, and several dozen gunmen killed.³ The Lebanese Army stormed Ahmad Assir's residential complex following an attack on the institution by Assir's supporters. The

¹ <http://www.moim.gov.lb/UI/news/news1195.html>, <http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/ar>

² <http://www.moim.gov.lb/UI/news/news1193.html>

³ <http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/ar/>

operation led to sixty-five gunmen, including several non-Lebanese nationals, either surrendering or being captured by army units.⁴ Reports from residents who had to flee the Saida suburb of Abra indicate that some supporters of Ahmad Assir used civilians as human shields by hiding in residential buildings and thus endangering civilians' lives, in contravention of international humanitarian and human rights law. However, despite the army's intervention, the security situation in Saida remains volatile, with sectarian attacks being carried out by certain groups and occasional flare-ups of violence during sit-ins supporting different armed groups threatening the lives and safety of townspeople.

Terrorist acts in the Beirut suburb of Dahyieh, which is portrayed as being a stronghold of Hezbollah and which indeed houses several offices of the party, have claimed the lives of 24 civilians and wounded around 400. In May 2013, two rockets launched from hills overlooking Beirut struck the neighbourhood, injuring four Syrian workers. On July 9, 2013, a car bomb exploded while the car was parked in the lot of the Islamic Co-op in the residential area of Bir El Abed in South Beirut, wounding at least 53 people.⁵ This terrorist act was claimed by a little-known Syrian rebel group, calling itself the 'Special Forces 313 Brigade'. The attack seems to have come in retaliation against Hezbollah's involvement in Syria in support of Bashar Al-Assad. On August 15, 2013, another bomb went off between the neighborhoods of Roueiss and Bir El Abed, killing 24⁶ people and injuring over 336⁷. This attack was claimed by yet another unknown Syrian group by the name of Aisha Umm al-Mouemeneen.⁸ The blast occurred next to the Sayyed al-Shuhada complex, where Hezbollah often holds mass rallies. Investigations are currently ongoing in Lebanon, although no arrests have been made so far. Hezbollah's involvement in Syria and the subsequent bombings that followed have also furthered Lebanese internal tensions and divides as several Lebanese political actors have accused Hezbollah of dragging Lebanon into the Syrian conflict, thus putting the country at risk of increased violence.⁹

Lebanon must immediately adopt a clear and coherent strategy to seize weapons from gunmen and armed non-state actors and to ensure the fair and independent prosecution of all those responsible for the shooting and shelling of civilians. In this context, the Lebanese army should abide by international standards and completely refrain from committing acts of torture and ill-treatment in custody.

Recent reports have documented cases of torture and ill-treatment perpetrated by the Lebanese military in the aftermath of the June clashes in Saida¹⁰ and Sidoun¹¹. These practices, if not immediately stopped and investigated, could help fuel the conflict in Lebanon.

⁴ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jun-24/221395-fierce-clashes-rock-south-lebanon-city-for-second-day.ashx#ixzz2cbgZAlg2>

⁵ <http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=2&cid=14&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=101039>

⁶ <http://english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=24064&cid=385#.UhYIH5LDB-c>

⁷ <http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=2&cid=14&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=106357>

⁸ <http://english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=24064&cid=385#.UhYIH5LDB-c>

⁹ <http://www.lebanese-forces.com/2013/08/22/hezbollah-gamble/>,
<http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?eid=107017&cid=23&fromval=1&frid=23&seccatid=14&s1=1>

¹⁰ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/17/lebanon-investigate-army-beatings-death-custody>

¹¹ <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/lebanon-death-custody-and-torture-claims-must-be-investigated-2013-07-09>

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, around 1,000,000¹² Syrians are currently in Lebanon, among them around 700,000 refugees, housed for the most part with private households or in schools and makeshift tents. As the increased flow of Syrian refugees adds pressure to the already difficult economic, political, and social situation in Lebanon, Syrian refugees face increasing discrimination. Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, thus leaving refugees in legal limbo and increasing their vulnerability. Moreover, discriminatory policies such as curfews specifically target Syrians. Indeed, municipal authorities in small villages and towns such as Boutchai, Bhamdoun and Kfardeblian have enacted decrees requiring foreigners to stay indoors after a certain time in the evenings until the morning. Even though the Lebanese Minister of Interior has deemed that the curfews to have no legal basis, such policies remain in place.¹³ Syrians are also being accused of causing strife; for instance, Syrians were recently accused of siding with Salafists during the latest clashes in Saida.¹⁴ Lebanese human rights defenders are advocating for the cancellation of these curfews, arguing that they do nothing but promote further distrust and insecurity.¹⁵

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies therefore urges the Human Rights Council to:

- Urge Lebanon to fulfill its responsibility to protect the human rights of all people residing on its territory, including by carrying out its duty to disarm all armed groups acting on its territories;
- Condemn the terrorist acts perpetrated against civilians and civilian targets;
- Urge Lebanon to investigate and prosecute those responsible for acts of torture in Lebanese prisons;
- Express concern over the discriminatory treatment targeted at Syrian refugees;
- Encourage Lebanon to sign and ratify the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees;
- Urge the international community to increase aid and support to Syrian refugees in Lebanon and to Lebanon in order to allow the country to better handle the influx of refugees.

¹² <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122> (This government estimate includes Syrian workers and their families and other Syrians of means who have not registered with UNHCR)

¹³ <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/05/28/averting-crisis-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon/g6wd>

¹⁴ <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2013/07/syrian-refugees>

¹⁵ <http://www.voiceofsyria.com/slider/syrian-refugees-face-every-discrimination-in-lebanon/> 'Human rights activists like Farah Kobeissi have been vocally condemning such discriminatory laws aiming at refugees whose lives are at risk. Kobeissi, a specialist at the Lebanese Observatory for the Rights of Workers and Employees, says: "Unfortunately, the Lebanese municipalities' decision contribute to lack of trust and enhance insecurity."