



Beirut, 22 July 2022

## Lebanon's breakdown: impacts on women and women's political participation

In Lebanon, the confessional system has proven extremely vulnerable to external influence, which has bred and exacerbated local conflict and violence. Thirty years after the Taëf agreement, which officially finished the civil war (1975-1989), peace is not achieved, and neither social nor ecological justice are in place. The road towards the active participation of Lebanese women in political decision-making is still long and very difficult. In 2015, the CEDAW Committee expressed concerns about "the gross underrepresentation of women in public and political life (...) and the absence of minimum quota for women's representation."<sup>1</sup> In March 2022 the Committee reiterated its concerns that at the very low representation of women in the parliament and in ministries and municipal councils, as well as in leadership positions within political parties and at the decision-making level in the civil service, and recommended, among other measures, that Lebanon "urgently adopt the draft laws introducing a minimum quota for the inclusion of women as candidates on political parties' electoral lists for parliamentary and municipal elections, as well as sanctions for non-compliance."<sup>2</sup>

With the government's adoption of Lebanon's first National Action Plan (NAP) on UN Security Council resolution 1325 on 12 September 2019,<sup>3</sup> it committed Lebanon to engaging women in political dialogues and in peacebuilding efforts, as well as promoting their participation and representation in local and national governance structures.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/CO/4-5, 24 November 2015, paragraphs 31 and 32.

<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/6, 1 March 2022, paragraphs 22 (a) and 29.

<sup>3</sup> See, press release by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL), "Lebanon government adopts National action plan on resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security", available at: <https://unscol.unmissions.org/lebanon-government-adopts-national-action-plan-resolution-1325-women-peace-and-security#:~:text=%28NCLW%2C%20United%20Nations%29%20-%20The%20Government%20of%20Lebanon,the%20attainment%20of%20the%202030%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/lebanon-2/>

Lebanese women have been actively mobilising and organising to enter the electoral race since they first gained the right to vote and run for Parliament by a law adopted in 1953. Yet almost 70 years later, Lebanon's laws make up a major hurdle for women in politics seeking out a parliamentary seat, as the electoral system has been based on confessional representation since 1943, and politics are based on sectarian power-sharing structures. Several other compounded obstacles also stand in their way, namely the dominant patriarchal mentality, capitalism and cronyism that are deeply rooted in the confessional system, and hence, the inevitable failure of political- sectarian parties to encourage women to run for public leadership roles. The latest electoral law is bluntly regressive. It stops women from taking up political decision-making roles<sup>5</sup> in the Lebanese state (executive, legislative and local authorities). While they exploit women's work in the background, the majority of political parties do not take any measures to support and motivate women to work on the frontlines of politics.

Most recently, between 2019 and 2021, Lebanon experienced a series of political protests, in which **women played a key role, calling to an end the social, political, ecological and economic inequalities that are the remnants of the civil war.**<sup>6</sup> Lebanese women are determined to continue fighting for fairer political representation.

We are alarmed that, as a result of the latest parliament elections in May 2022, women hold only 6.25 per cent of parliamentary seats. Women's representation in local governance does not exceed 6 per cent. But, despite these low numbers, we celebrate a historic breakthrough: for the first time in Lebanese history, four women accessed political roles as parliament members independent of the formal political parties. This breakthrough proves that participation in popular movements can guarantee seats in parliament to women (and men) and affirms that women from outside the political system have the right to full political participation without the endorsement of existing political power structures.

However, we note with alarm that intimidation of female candidates was observed by the European Union's Election Observation (EU EOM) team.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, women candidates face numerous obstacles hindering them from accessing their full and equal political rights, including

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<sup>5</sup> In 2017, Lebanon adopted a proportional electoral system across 15 major constituencies. A voter would choose one list and may then give their preferential vote to a candidate from that list, for a seat in the voter's minor constituency. The system did not set a quota for women in the House of Representatives, nor did it adopt measures to boost the participation of women in public leadership roles. Despite being a "proportional" law, the existence of a preferential vote pushes citizens to vote for their traditional (and historically, male) sectarian leaders. The law, then, is unfair to women.

<sup>6</sup> Since October 2019, the Lebanese financial and economic crisis has ranked in the top 10, possibly top three, of the most severe crisis episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century. Lebanon is identified by the World Bank as a Fragility, Conflict & Violence (FCV) State. With its history of a prolonged civil war and multiple conflicts, there is growing wariness of potential triggers of social unrest. One of the many examples of the State's corruption is the devastating explosion in the port of Beirut, on 4 August 2020 that killed at least 200 people and injured about 5,000 others.

<sup>7</sup> European Union Election Observation Mission LEBANON 2022 Final Report. Available at: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU%20EOM%20Lebanon%202022%20Final%20Report%20English.pdf>.

financial and fundraising challenges, their portrayal in the media, and violence, harassment and discrimination.

The EU EOM team also noted the very low number of women elected to Parliament, adding that “Reforms are needed to include in the legal framework temporary positive measures, such as quota to strengthen equality between men and women and women’s representation in Parliament, in line with Lebanon’s international commitments.” The team stated that Lebanon should “adopt temporary special measures, to increase women’s political representation at national and local levels.”<sup>8</sup> **This recommendation must be urgently endorsed and applied: the next Lebanese municipal elections will take place in May 2023.**

We regret that the status of Lebanese women’s political participation is appalling by global and international standards.

**We refer to the failure of mechanisms and legal frameworks** to support significant participation of women in political processes both at the domestic and international levels, which results in women’s experiences and perspectives being largely absent from dialogue and decision-making to resolve conflicts and crises and to promote sustainable development.

We recognise that Lebanon has been facing deep socio-ecological-political turmoil for decades. Yet this is no justification for not adhering to its international obligations with respect to women’s rights. We call on the government to fulfil its responsibilities and obligations to promote gender equality, empower women, and achieve their full participation in political decision-making processes.

We welcome that in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Lebanon has supported several recommendations regarding the need for increased and equal representation of women in the public and political spheres,<sup>9</sup> which is an important step towards addressing discrimination against

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<sup>8</sup> European Union Election Observation Mission LEBANON 2022 Final Report. Available at: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU%20EOM%20Lebanon%202022%20Final%20Report%20English.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> For example, in the third UPR cycle in 2021, Lebanon supported recommendations such as : 150.217 Continue its efforts to achieve an equitable representation of women in the public and political spheres, including in legislative and executive bodies (Greece); 150.219 Continue to implement legislation to empower women in decision making and create economic independence (Indonesia); 150.220 Continue strengthening women's rights in the participation of political and public life (Iraq); 150.225 Continue necessary efforts to empower women economically, politically and socially, and take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women (Nepal); 150.227 Continue progress in increasing the participation of women in public life, including in elected government positions, the judiciary, and the armed service (Philippines); 150.231 Ensure greater inclusion of women in the various public administration structures and update the laws that support them (United Arab Emirates). However, Lebanon supported only the first part of recommendation 150.215 Take effective measures in order to accelerate the increase in the representation of women in all spheres of public and political life and amend its legislation so that it treats equally all women and men with respect to marriage, divorce and inheritance rights as well as conferring citizenship to their children and spouses (Czechia). It noted the part of the recommendation relating to amending “legislation so that it treats equally all women and men...”. (Source of position A/HRC/47/5/Add.1, 23 June 2021).

women and promoting their meaningful participation. Concrete and immediate measures to implement those recommendations must be taken.

## **Recommendations**

**We urge the state of Lebanon to fulfil its commitments and reform its electoral law (at the national and local levels) as follows:**

- Introduce quotas of at least 40 per cent for women candidates on electoral lists at national and local levels, and put lists at risk of not being registered if they fall below this percentage;
- Allocate at least 33 per cent reserved seats for women candidates across all electoral constituencies;<sup>10</sup>
- Adopt a law to criminalise any act of violence against women in the context of political and public life, and raise awareness among the wider public;
- Include the prevention of violence against women in politics in the mandate and competence of the Electoral Monitoring Body, so that it can monitor, prevent and respond to violence perpetrated against all women active in politics and adopt an efficient complaint and prosecution mechanism;
- The Electoral Monitoring Body must ensure gender-balanced and fair media coverage during the electoral campaigns.

**As political parties, in principle, are gateways for women’s political participation, we call upon them to promote women’s representation without prejudice** in the upcoming elections and to adopt internal measures to reserve funding for women candidates. Furthermore, we urge sectarian political parties to conduct a structural political reform by defying the patronage systems dominated by powerful families, which resulted in the historic and systematic exclusion of women from political power.

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<sup>10</sup> Many feminist associations request this clause. Studies have shown that a proposed minimum of 30 per cent of women as candidates may not help women actually reach parliament, which is why we need to allocate a certain number of seats in parliament for women to have equal opportunities to succeed or fail as men do.