

ORAL STATEMENT
BY ARAB NGO NETWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT
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Madame President,

We deliver this statement as a reminder of the ongoing lack of accountability and justice in Lebanon for the victims of the 4th of August tragic explosion in the Port of Beirut, and as a reiteration of the call for an international, independent and impartial investigation, which is a demand broadly supported in Lebanon, besides being advanced by more than 60 Lebanese and other regional and international organizations in a letter raised to holders of special mandates and reiterated in the statement by 37 UN special procedures and independent experts, who collectively called for “a prompt, impartial, credible and independent investigation based on human rights principles, to examine all claims, concerns and needs in relation to the explosion as well as the underlying human rights failures” .

The explosion was a manifestation of the systemic failure in the role of the State in Lebanon and the collapse in the governance system, underpinned by negligence, corruption and failure or disregard of the obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of every person living on Lebanese territory, starting with the right to life.

All of this at a time when Lebanon has been facing financial and monetary collapse, which is rooted in a deep political crisis in the nature and structure of the governance regime.

The practices of the Lebanese government since the explosion continue to violate the rights of people living in Lebanon and fail to ensure protection of the rights of all without discrimination, including the rights to life, personal liberty, health, housing, food, water, education, and a healthy environment. More than 55% of the population live in extreme poverty, 60% of the population is in the informal sector outside any social protection systems; and unemployment rate is over 50%. With ongoing deteriorating human rights conditions and no accountability and justice provided; people in Lebanon are trying to flee the country and risk their lives in the Mediterranean.

Excessive force, live ammunition, teargas and arrests were the State’s response against protestors and human rights defenders that took to the streets in light of the explosion, in an attempt to silence calls for justice, accountability and end of impunity. This systemic violation of people’s freedom of peaceful assembly and expression of opinion has been witnessed in Lebanon since the October 2019 Revolution.

There has been no indication that the Lebanese authorities will fulfill their responsibilities of conducting an effective, transparent and impartial investigation.

A core question is how a government could, failing on all those fronts, conduct an efficient and transparent investigation into its own failures. We do not believe in sidelining the role of the Lebanese judiciary. We also do not want to see international investigation efforts guided by vested interests. An international fact-finding mechanism mandated by the UN Human Rights Council could provide a way out of this dichotomy and could operate in cooperation and coordination with competent arms of the Lebanese judiciary as well as Lebanese experts and civil society.

We regret that the Human Rights Council did not respond to the Special Procedures' request of a special debate on the Port of Beirut explosion. As the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food wrote, we believe that a truly independent international investigation is essential to renew the Lebanese people's hopes for their country's future. Such an investigation should ensure responsible duty bearers are made accountable and should guarantee the victim's rights to truth, and effective, transparent and impartial remedy and justice. It could be one step in the process of a needed transformation in Lebanon towards a governance system that ensures non-repetition of such tragedies and respect, protect and peoples' human rights.

We also reiterate our call for concerned special procedures mandates holders to urgently visit Lebanon in order to assess the human rights situation under their respective mandates, making recommendations to Lebanon in line with its obligations under international human rights law, and to meaningfully engage with civil society during the visits.