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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by International Human Rights Council, 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.

[04 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Lebanese protest October 17-21, 2019

Due to the deterioration of the economic conditions since January 2019; Lebanon has witnessed mass demonstrations and protests after the government announced a plan to impose a new package of taxes, including taxes on the use of the application “WhatsApp”, and these protests began over the days to grow gradually since Thursday October 17 2019.

The great devastation witnessed in the Lebanese capital Beirut reflected the economic situation in Lebanon, which was a powerful engine for thousands of people to be present in the streets to express their rejection of the government's tax and reform policies which became later a mass demonstrations involving thousands of angry Lebanese in several areas, including the capital Beirut to reach the whole country.

Protestants also agreed that Lebanon needs a change in the methodology and behavior of the government and the need for a mental shift in approaching matters. Meanwhile political parties decided to take advantage of the current situation and join the protesters in their areas of power which changed the whole set up of the protest; from civilians suffering from deteriorating economic situation, 30 years of corruption, and minimum rights; to have a kind of political vendetta from other political parties within Lebanon. Some political parties use their power to inject some of their people within the protests in an inhumane way to destroy shops, throw pebbles and stones towards the Army and ISF, and set fires in the middle of the streets in down town Beirut and nearby buildings in an attempt to threat civilians to force them to get back home. However, the social media showed what happened in videos with plenty of evidences for what really happened which was a main cause to escalate the protest on the second and third day.

“The Middle East Commissioner for Human Rights and United Nations (UN) Security Advisor in Geneva Ambassador Haitham Abu Said requested a report from the International Human Rights Commission Chapter Lebanon pointed out what the Lebanese state has done with unarmed peaceful demonstrators and the use of rubber bullets and tear gases, especially after the Minister of Interior stated that the demonstration is a sacred right guaranteed by the Constitution and there are instructions for ISF not to be exposed to demonstrators, which then caused a rebelling of political parties towards demonstrators after the speech of the Lebanese Prime Minister And the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The security forces also launched a campaign of random arrests of demonstrators, including minors and journalists, and blocked roads leading to the center of Beirut and attacked some gathering points of peaceful protesters, by setting up barricades to prevent them from their right to peaceful demonstration. IHRC also wished the media to convey the facts in a transparent and objective manner and not to comply with the threats of security forces and the army to leave areas surrounding downtown Beirut”.

What happened afterwards became a social uprising that has not been witnessed in contemporary Lebanese history before, because it exceeded the sectarian, political alignments, because it hit the living and the dangers that beset the Lebanese society.

Lebanon's protests rose for the second day in a row on Friday October 18 2019, with protesters arriving for the first time in years at the entrance to the Baabda presidential palace under tight security. Dozens of protesters arrived at the entrance leading to the presidential palace east of Beirut, demanding the resignation of the government and the overthrow of the authorities, while security forces besieged them and prevented their progress, and prevented cars from approaching.

In light of all this, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri has announced that he and his government partners will be given a 72-hour deadline to resolve the crisis. Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces party, announced on Saturday the resignation of the four ministers in his party from the government headed by Saad Hariri. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah asserted that Hezbollah does not support the resignation of the current government, because the formation of a new government may take two years while the political forces remain the same. He called on the government to continue its work with a new methodology, and the need to hold everyone responsible.

Regarding the presidential speech and the feasibility of the resignation of the Lebanese government, some considered that the presidential speech issued from the heart of the presidential palace did not give any importance to the suffering of the people and did not give positive signs of the problems experienced by the people, which increased the tension among the people, which led them to go further, and unless it is accomplished by three years which cannot be achieved within the 72-hour deadline launched by the prime minister. The time factor was compressive and cannot go to the big choices that eat time-consuming processing times.

From a legal point of view, there were different scenarios that explain the feasibility of the resignation of the government, where politicians said it has no effect because the system in Lebanon is a parliamentary system. Therefore, if the current government resigns, this will not affect the balances within the parliament and therefore a new government will be adopted according to the previous government's consensus. Others felt that when he resigned the government is considered a caretaker government until the formation of another government.

The weekend on October 19th and 20th, 2019 witnessed massive demonstrations that took place in the north of the country, along the main roads, especially the coastal highway, the international road with the Syrian Arab Republic, and the road leading to Rafic Hariri International Airport. The squares of the capital Beirut are witnessing large sit-ins, especially in Martyrs Square in central Beirut, and in the vicinity of Riad Solh Square leading to the Grand Sengraïl and the Parliament. The protest was more likely similar to an earlier one in 2005. However this time people were very relaxed with Dj, singing, belly dancing, and use of dirty languages in an excessive way towards the politicians' families with some presence of religious people in downtown Beirut. Some videos showed the distribution of money, food, and beverages within the protest whereas in many areas no one claimed to receive anything where they went to make a difference and they did not receive any support or invitation from any party.

On Monday October 21st, 2019; Demonstrations continued excessively in Lebanon after a statement by Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri promising economic reforms where the government had an exceptional meeting in Baabda before the end of 72 hours period. The Office of the Presidency of the Republic and the Council of Ministers continue to discuss the reform paper presented by Prime Minister Saad Hariri and approved many items, pointing out that "the atmosphere of the meeting was calm and the debate was positive among all participating ministers."

Knowing that the Lebanese President Aoun, considered earlier the protests across the country as "people's pain," but said it was "unfair to accuse all politicians of corruption."

Consequently, protests began in Lebanon after the government decided to impose a tax package that angered the Lebanese, but the ceiling of demands rose later to demand the departure of the government, parliament, and politicians. Knowing that the Lebanese army is exceptionally deployed in major cities and streets; banks are still closed because of the situation in the country and the Internal Security Forces (The Army included) are expressing extreme cooperation, attention, and awareness of the delicate situation and doing its best to handle the crises and prevent any outsider intervention from any political party to create any tension with the protestants. This was obvious on Monday October 21st when motorcyclists carrying political parties' flags were heading to the protest in downtown praising their political leader were confronted by Internal Security Forces and the Army who in turns prevented them from getting close to the protest locations.