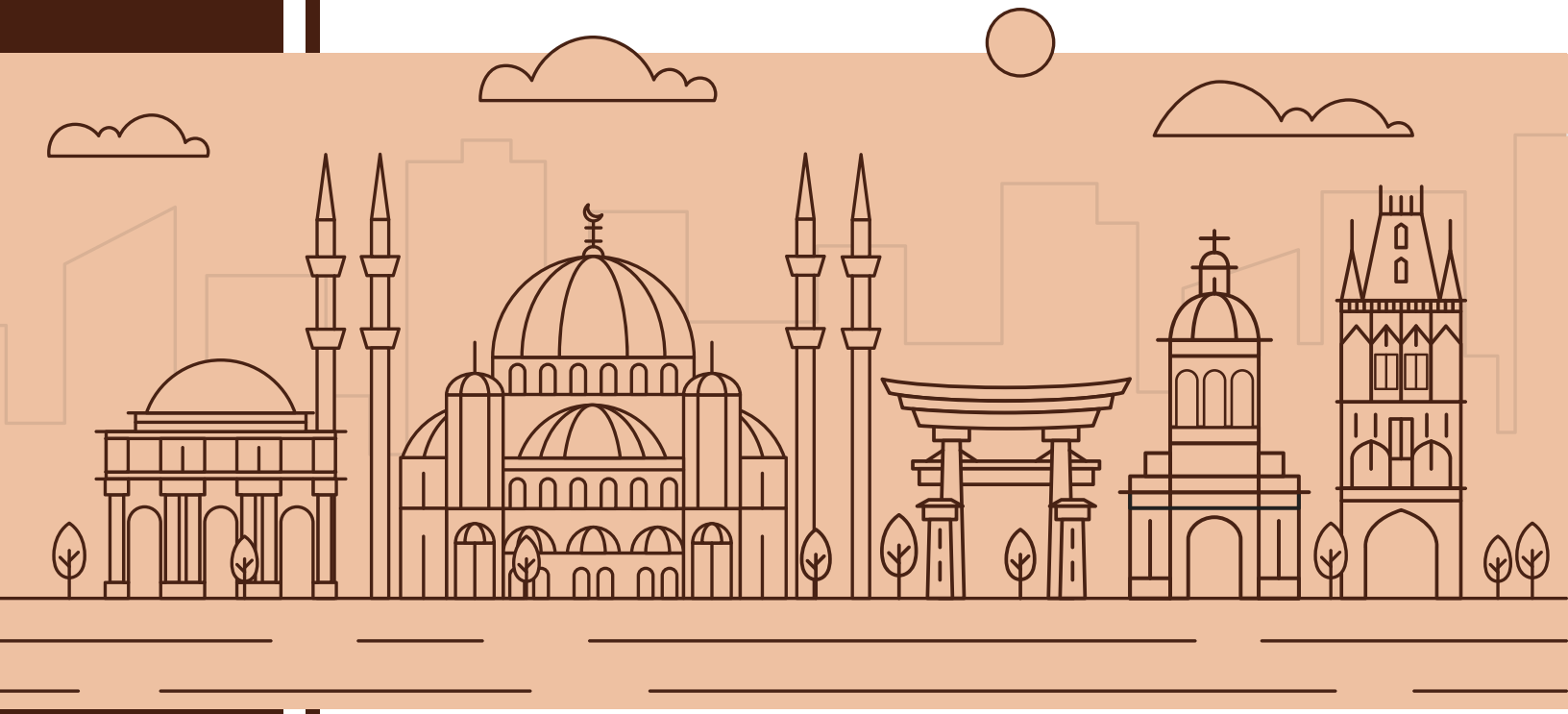
THE NATIONAL WORKING GROUP ON FoRB

NATIONAL REPORT ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Lebanon

July 2023



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II. Executive Summary, July 2023.

Fadi Hachem, Search for Common Ground, Lebanon

About this Report

This report is the proud work of the National Working Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) in Lebanon. It compiles different contributions from diverse organizations and experts from various regions in Lebanon.

The report addresses a wide range of subjects that directly or indirectly intersect with FoRB. These topics span from religious dialogue to peacebuilding and human rights, highlighting the multifaceted nature of FoRB in Lebanon and offering recommendations on how to advance it for the good of all. To provide a comprehensive view, the report incorporates various types of contributions.

Some contributions serve as descriptive accounts, offering concise narratives on the assigned topics. Other contributions reflect the analyses and opinions of experts and organizations within the working group. Indeed, each contribution possesses a unique style, writing approach, and content that collectively contribute to the overall composition of this report, enhancing its depth and breadth.

Lebanon Context

Lebanon, a small Mediterranean country in the Middle East, boasts a rich tapestry of diverse populations and religious communities. Throughout its history, the interplay of sectarianism and religious diversity has significantly influenced the country's politics, culture, and society. By examining the historical trajectory of Lebanon, predating its independence and the establishment of Great Lebanon in 1943, one can gain insight into the origins of this population diversity. Indeed, Lebanon has served as a home to various civilizations, including the Phoenicians, Romans, Ottomans, and French. Exploring this historical context enables a deeper comprehension of the nation's diverse composition.

Moreover, the concept of FoRB in Lebanon has been intricately woven through the fabric of its political, social, and religious dynamics over time. From the implementation of the millet system and the influence of the French mandate to the struggles for independence and the tragic civil war of 1975, studying these pivotal events provides valuable context to understand how FoRB has evolved into the central and indispensable concept it is today in Lebanon.

Religion in the Legal Context

The Lebanese Constitution, established in 1926, emphasizes the importance of protecting freedom of religion and belief under Article 9. The legal framework in Lebanon includes significant laws, such as law no. 60/1936 L.R., which governs the recognition and organization of religious practices within the legal system. However, it is essential to note that Lebanon also has laws that criminalize blasphemy, incitement of sectarian conflict, and the impersonation of religious leaders. Consequently, the current legal system poses challenges for non-religious individuals, including the requirement to disclose parental affiliation, reliance on religious institutions for personal affairs, and barriers regarding government and electoral processes.

Freedom of Religion and Belief - What Does it Include, and What Are its Limitations?

This chapter examines the issue of the freedom to adopt, change or renounce a religion or belief and the freedom from coercion. Other aspects of FoRB in Lebanon include the right to practice, freedom to worship, the status of places of worship, religious symbols, observance of holidays and days of rest, education on religion, registration and non-registration of religions, and conscientious objection.

Additionally, like any other human right, predominantly

civil and political rights, FoRB is not absolute and may be subject to limitations. It is essential to note that FoRB is universally listed among private rights, which means it may be limited under certain well-defined and narrow circumstances.

By exploring these themes, one can better understand the legal and social structures governing FoRB in Lebanon and the challenges in ensuring that all individuals can enjoy these fundamental rights.

Freedom of Religion and Belief - Obstacles in Lebanon

Lebanese War, Transitional Justice, and FoRB

While various complex and interlinking factors - geopolitical, political, and economic - contributed to the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war and its continuation for nearly fifteen years, deep cracks around religious issues are seen as having had a solid catalyzing influence. Of course, the Lebanon war had geopolitical, political, and economic reasons, but religious factors have been regarded as the deep cracks that catalyzed the impact of the other factors.

In this section, the authors urge all stakeholders and policymakers to embark on a transformative journey to restore history's engaging and participatory aspect, which involves thinking, criticizing, and discussing, and use it as a transitional justice tool to help promote diversity and FoRB. Recommendations include designing a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum that reflects the rich tapestry of Lebanese diversity and encompasses the narratives of all individuals rather than perpetuating one- sided accounts propagated by different factions to favor their respective communities.

Secularism v. Sectarianism - Where Does Lebanon Fall?

The first constitution of 1926, the National Pact of 1943, and the amendments introduced by the Taef agreement in 1989 all adopted a clear separation between religious authority and political authority, i.e., a secular state.

However, articles 22–24 and 95 of the constitution — which concern the legislative and executive branches, respectively — have served as the basis for developing a political sectarianism system that has given rise to manipulation, misinterpretation, and mis- implementation. Article 24 left the distribution of seats in the parliament to the "electoral laws in effect." Nevertheless, specific guidelines in the Taef agreement ensured that seats would be distributed exclusively and in equal numbers to Christians and Muslims, resulting in a predetermined proportional representation of all sects and regions. At the same time, Article 95 lays down the establishment of a National Committee for Countering Sectarianism in the hope of one day ending the need for political sectarianism.

In this section, the author believes that the most crucial step is for the Lebanese to rediscover the essence of the constitution as the "founding fathers" intended and to work on establishing strong and secular state institutions. Only such a state can guarantee the proper functioning of specific Lebanon's democratic model that is not imported as a standard one-size-fits-all model but is tailored and adapted to its realities and context.

Violations of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Lebanon, 2020-2022

Diverse views have emerged within Lebanese society and have driven communities apart at a sectarian level. Since October 2019, religious and political

tensions among the Lebanese have been on the rise, exacerbating political, regional, and economic fractures. The economic crisis, the Beirut blast, and the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly impacted the current context. The crises have been a catalyst for discrimination and tension among Lebanese citizens.

FoRB has been weakened by the multiple crises that Lebanon has undergone. These crises are driving the rise of inter-communal tensions and violence among Lebanese citizens. This situation has encouraged discrimination and stigmatization based on religion. Sectarian parties have taken advantage of this escalation for their own interests, further fracturing national unity.

Education and Freedom of Religion and Belief

The Lebanese education system has been significantly influenced by various religious denominations emblematic of the country's cultural and social fabric. Following the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), the tremendous social fragility that Lebanon experienced in 1990 had a significant impact on both formal and informal education. In Lebanon, where schools are known for their religious diversity, young students most likely encounter one of two behaviors: total disregard for their religious beliefs or, more commonly, an education aimed solely at developing their birth-acquired confessional identity.

Further, by focusing on the Curricula of Sharia Programs in Lebanon, the author showcases the importance of monitoring informal education in Lebanon. Indeed, the author introduces the importance of "criticism" during religious studies to allow the promotion of FoRB, and the creation of safe spaces for students, especially in university, to criticize and provide alternatives.

The recommendations proposed include the adoption of a collaborative approach to develop a national education strategy in consultation with various educational stakeholders. This strategy must go beyond the education program's content to address challenges around the training of teachers and ensure enough time is allocated to students' schedules. The necessary decrees should be issued to enforce Law 150/2011 on compulsory and free education at the primary level. Finally, civil society organizations must also assist in implementing these new curricula, especially in capacitating teachers on new notions included in the curricula to ensure proper facilitation and delivery of the content.

The Challenges of a Diverse Society

Role of Religious Leaders in Peacebuilding

In Lebanon, several religious leaders and faith-based organizations and actors have been highlighting the significance of interreligious dialogue by promoting the role of religious leaders in advocating for sustainable peace. Religious Leaders represent more than just themselves; they also carry their religion's history and their communities' stories.

In this section, the author explains that religious leaders are called to promote peacebuilding because they inspire, prevent conflict, and reflect compassion and acceptance. The author continues by explaining how to empower religious leaders in spreading peace together and elaborates on the importance of interreligious dialogue and spiritual solidarity and of promoting a culture of peace rather than one of fear.

Religious Dialogue in Lebanon between the Reality and the Desired

In different periods of Lebanon's history, religious dialogue has always been at the heart of negotiations and the coming-together of Lebanese leaders., Even to this day, religious dialogue is needed to achieve critical steps in the country's progress, such as electing a president and forming a cabinet of ministers. In this section, the author explains the different types of dialogue, providing examples for each and showcasing the different expected outcomes. Dialogue can happen at many levels. The required level is to be selected according to the needed outcome.

Citizenship and Religion in Lebanon

The institutionalization of religion within the sectarian system consecrated a mentality that links the Lebanese identity to sectarian rather than national belonging. This has perpetuated a fear of the 'other' and an existential competition at the expense of state-building and identity formation.

In this chapter, the author explains how engagement in civic and political activities enables individuals and especially young people, to exercise moral agency and serves as an opportunity to develop resilience to radicalization. For instance, the 2019 protests witnessed cross-confessional and cross-sectoral participation, including diverse religious communities and leaders. The demands of the protesters included social justice, accountability, and system reform. The fervor and hope that brought the Lebanese together are indicative of youth activism-in-waiting, growing awareness of the politicization of religion, and the joint need for a system of governance that builds on this brief moment of shared identity and flourishing of the ideals of citizenship.

Role of Youth in Promoting FoRB

Although just over half of the population feels that they can express themselves honestly within their family environments, the shift in the response rate is immense in the broader community context. The percentage of respondents who feel they can express themselves fully in the broader community drops from 59% to 27% in the North Bekaa region of Lebanon, reflecting the many barriers and challenges youth face regarding self-expression. Some of those barriers pertain to traditional societal values, such as belittling r opinions of youth or simply not providing them with a suitable space to express themselves. This is why building open, safe spaces for the youth to express their views freely is crucial.

Other weak points include the fragile relationships between young people of different regions, the lack of support and proactiveness of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the lack of capacity and resources, and most importantly, the underestimation of youth, which results in their lack of involvement in decision-making processes, and especially in decisions that relate to them specifically.

Of the many approaches that have proven successful in promoting change, art plays a significant role in providing societies with the space to communicate and amplify their voices and get their messages across. It is a safety net that allows for preserving local identities and protecting the uniqueness of people, especially minorities, by helping to provide them with a platform and an audience.

Vulnerable Groups

Lebanon's history is characterized by diverse sects and minorities seeking refuge and freedom. However, certain minorities like the Kurds, Syriacs, and Assyrians have not been officially registered by the Lebanese government despite their long-established presence. This lack of official recognition poses challenges for these groups in terms of identity and rights. This chapter's author argues that the government must take active measures to ensure effective participation and protection of minority rights at the national level.

There is a lack of public policies and strategies to address the needs and rights of minorities in Lebanon. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities emphasizes the importance of their participation, but Lebanon has yet to implement a comprehensive approach.

Recommendations include promoting these groups' rights, reframing how they are perceived, and amending legal texts to provide better protection. It is also crucial to foster collaboration and coordination among social and cultural associations representing minorities and develop programs to preserve their rich cultural heritage.

On another note prisoners in Lebanon have the right of access to religion. However, the situation of prisons in the country is perilous.

Many prisoners are deprived of their rights There should be no discrimination based on religion, and detainees have the right equally not to subscribe to a religion if they so choose. Prison authorities should ensure that detainees adhering to a religion can participate in private and collective prayer, have visits from religious representatives, and possess religious objects, signs, and materials.

Finally, migrant workers whose religious beliefs and practices are not acknowledged by the Lebanese state are discriminated against. Since most migrant domestic workers come from African and Southeast Asian countries, some do not belong to any of the 18 recognized religious groups. Thus, these groups do not have defined religious spaces to practice their faith. In the absence of civil courts, they also do not have access to a wide range of rights. For instance, they have no space for worship or a place to manifest, practice, or teach their religion.

Freedom of Religion and Belief and Women's Rights in Lebanon: What are the Obstacles to a Civil Personal Status Law?

Lebanon's political system, established along sectarian lines, has enforced adherence to personal status laws based on sectarian
beliefs since its inception. Presently, there are 15 personal status laws in Lebanon, each according to the 18 recognized sects in the country. This system perpetuates inequality among Lebanese citizens and mainly affects women, as religious courts specific to each denomination and religion govern their rights.

Political and sectarian forces have hindered attempts to reform the system and recognize civil marriages. Indeed, the existing personal status laws discriminate against women, denying them rights in divorce, custody, inheritance, and property.

To achieve consistent reform, foundational principles of equal treatment and FoRB should be established, and sectarian laws should be subject to the same standards for all. Recommendations include the crucial adoption of a comprehensive Civil Code of Personal Status and providing people with a choice between civil and sectarian laws.

Religious Extremism and FoRB

In Lebanon, the root causes of violent extremism are fundamentally related, on the one hand, to the weakness of the state and, on the other, to its sectarian system. In this section, the author explores the roots of violent extremism within the Lebanese context and showcases how FoRB can create resilience to violent extremism.

Among others, the author focuses her recommendations on strengthening the Ministry of Education and Culture's role in fighting delinquency, establishing reintegration programs for youth, and establishing a clear separation between the religious institutions' religious and political roles to rebuild trust between religious institutions and local communities. This would enable religious institutions to take a proactive role in PVE.

FoRB and other Human Rights

In Lebanon, there are significant limitations on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The deeply polarized political system and sectarianism contribute to a culture of hate speech, particularly on social media and in news outlets, which often escalates into censorship and death threats.

Religious authorities significantly influence the evaluation of cultural works, leading to complaints about their interference. Concerts, movies, songs, and art have been censored based on the opinions of religious leaders.

The LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon faces discrimination and exclusion based on their gender identity and sexual orientation. Religious groups have engaged in discriminatory acts, such as vandalizing billboards and claiming that the LGBTQ+ community poses a threat to their religious beliefs.

Conclusion

This first-of-its-kind comprehensive report of the National Working Group on FoRB offers a way forward to improve freedom of religion and belief in Lebanon and to solve some of the many problems that are fracturing the state. We hope that its many recommendations will be taken seriously by government and society alike so that Lebanon can once again realize its potential as the Jewel of the Mediterranean.

III. Message from the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Professor Nazila Ghanea, June 2023

This mandate carried out a mission to Lebanon back in 2015 when Professor Heiner Bielefeldt visited the country in March-April 2015. The resulting report (A/HRC/31/18/Add.1) drew attention to Lebanon's legacy of religious diversity, its history, including of living together in that diversity, as well as challenges to the development of interreligious coexistence. Personal status issues, matters relating to refugees and migrants, gender and other aspects were also given due attention.

It is both reassuring and concerning that 8 years on your report is drawing attention to some of the very same issues. Indeed, freedom of religion or belief challenges give rise to systemic and structural issues that may be embedded and need concerted attention on multiple levels to address effectively.

Your report's 2020-2022 period update some of the mandate's previous observations and draw attention to topics such as education, peacebuilding, and the role of youth are particularly helpful.

Lebanon is unique in so many ways and could provide lessons for so many other contexts of successful transformation in relation to freedom of religion or belief.

I hope the contributions of its civil society, and detailed reports such as this one, can encourage it along that journey.

Nazila Ghanea

UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

June 2023

IV. Introduction

Search for Common Ground (Search) has been privileged to work with our partners in Lebanon, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan over the past three years to build interreligious freedom roundtables to enable advocacy for Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) in their countries. The Lebanon roundtable became known as the National Working Group on FoRB, and we are profoundly grateful to all the members who worked with us to author this - the first-ever comprehensive report on the state of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Lebanon - reflecting the combined wisdom and expertise of all the Working Group members.

Search for Common Ground is the world's largest organization dedicated to peacebuilding, with locally led teams operating in 35 countries, including Lebanon. We have worked on religious engagement in peacebuilding for more than 20 years, bringing together the commitment and expertise of our teams in global initiatives like the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites, and our groundbreaking free online course on religious engagement in peacebuilding, in partnership with the United States Institute of Peace.

Search for Common Ground upholds the critical importance of recognizing and valuing a person's religion or belief as a key part of their identity. Valuing and enabling all human beings to express their religions and beliefs is at the heart of human flourishing and human dignity. Although underpinned by Article 18 of the UNHCR, FoRB has been somewhat neglected within the wider human rights movement, perhaps because of its perceived complexity in interaction with other human rights.

From our many years of working with religious dynamics and engaging religious actors in conflicts, we know that by taking a peacebuilding approach - listening to all sides, recognizing the fears and concerns of everyone involved in conflict, and through dialogue and acting together - we can find the common ground on which to build a better future for all. This is the approach that underpins all our work to secure sustainable progress on FoRB, including the roundtables project that led to the publication of this report.

Holding firm to this peacebuilding approach, Search Lebanon brought together all those already working for many years to secure greater Freedom of Religion and Belief in Lebanon based on the shared understanding, the 'common ground', that we can achieve more collectively than individually. This report and the National Working Group, now led by The Adyan Foundation, are the fruits of that approach, and we trust they will continue to advance FoRB in Lebanon long into the future.

As this report makes clear, FoRB is both prized and protected, as well as limited, in Lebanon, particularly for unrepresented sects, the non-religious, and with regard to women's rights through personal status laws. Lebanon is a complex country with inspirational aspirations for FoRB, but also in much need of further progress. We hope that readers of this report, both locally and internationally, will be encouraged by its careful and impassioned analysis and will work together for religious freedom and human dignity for all peoples in Lebanon and further afield.

Elizabeth Nelson

UK Director/Project Director, Search for Common Ground

June 2023

V. Acknowledgments and Disclaimer

We would like to express our gratitude to the National Working Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief in Lebanon (FoRB) for their valuable research work and dedication in promoting and protecting the fundamental right to freedom of religion and belief. The working group consists of various organizations, experts, stakeholders, and researchers who have contributed their time, expertise, and resources to this report.
We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the members (mentioned below) of the working group for their significant contributions and commitment to the cause of freedom of religion and belief.
Each working group member has shown a deep commitment to the principles of freedom of religion and belief, human rights, and peacebuilding. They have demonstrated their expertise and dedication, and their contributions have greatly enriched the content of this report.

While the working group's collective effort has played a pivotal role in compiling this comprehensive report, we disclaim that each member is individually responsible for their contributions and the statements included.

VI. Authors

Organizations:
(In no particular order)

Search for Common Ground (Search) is the world's largest dedicated peacebuilding organization and supports programming in 32 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, the Middle East, and the United States. Our mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict, moving away from adversarial means toward shared solutions. Our activities range from conflict mediation and peace education to social stability and women's empowerment. In each project, we seek to engage all stakeholders to work together to address shared challenges and develop joint solutions. Search's programming in Lebanon commenced in 1996, having since addressed multiple issues in Lebanon's diverse society.

The Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace (LFPCP) was founded in 1986. The objective is to encourage the exploration of the Lebanese experience, which encompasses both a profound and challenging period, through theoretical and practical endeavors. Common suffering can generate a renewed collective memory and a better immunized civil society against internal as well as external dangers. The Foundation has propagated areas that had already been integrated into the Lebanese cultural field, including the right to memory, national contrition, the school of the people, the identity of our suffering, an analysis of war in its aftermath, and an accounting approach of common properties. The Foundation sets out to diffuse a civic culture distinct from controversy among rival associates.

Founded in 2010, the Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation Organization (DLR) is a non- profit, non-governmental organization with a core mandate on interfaith dialogue and building dynamic bridges between different religious communities. DLR is an independent and apolitical organization whose mission, values, and activities reflect its impartiality and inclusiveness. Since its establishment, DLR has taken the initiative of believing and promoting interfaith/intercultural dialogue among youth by creating an open space for positive interaction with the different other. DLR's vision is to build a reconciled peaceful/non-violent society that cherishes differences as an added value. DLR's goals and objectives include promoting and believing in the dignity of being different, reconciliation, establishing and carrying out youth-centered inter-religious dialogue, diversity management, and cross-cultural exchange.

Newroz Association is an Association established in 2013 that is concerned with the affairs of the Kurds residing in Lebanon, teaching the Kurdish language, reviving Kurdish culture and heritage, and concerned with women's affairs, awareness, and empowerment.

Peace of Art is a registered non-profit organization that started in 2016 with the objective of promoting an open space for youth, mainly in marginalized communities, to build their skills and knowledge, foster their engagement, and to promote dialogue among diverse religions, nationalities, and backgrounds. It coaches youth on leadership, coexistence, non-violent communication, peacebuilding, combating fake news and disinformation, gender equality and positive masculinities, debate and advocacy, mediation, conflict resolution, livelihood, entrepreneurship, life skills, advanced computer, programming, and technology. Peace of Art delivers integrated awareness and training programs with arts, culture, and education designed and implemented by professional artists and trainers (photography, filmmaking, music, theater, fine art, drawing, design and editing, content creation, etc.).

Adyan Foundation is a foundation for managing diversity, promoting solidarity, and safeguarding human dignity. Adyan consists of a group of individuals who strives for a world that embraces diversity, in which we live together in peace and work locally, regionally, and globally to achieve inclusive citizenship, develop Education on acceptance of the other, activate Religious Social Responsibility, and promote Spiritual Solidarity. Adyan also seeks to contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism and advancing freedom of religion and belief. We work through homegrown solutions in education, research, policy-making, media, and community engagement networks.

Kulluna Irada is an advocacy group committed to political reform in Lebanon. We believe we can set the foundations of a modern, secure, efficient, sustainable, and just state through strong and fair governance. We are financed exclusively by our members: Lebanese citizens, residents, and members of the diaspora who seek to bring positive change to their country

The Global Forum for Religions and Humanity is a youth-led organization based in Lebanon with a global perspective dedicated to promoting a culture of pluralism and diversity. It acts as a platform for dialogue and permanent exchange and believes in empowered communities.

ALEF – Act for Human Rights is a Lebanese non-profit, non-partisan human rights watchdog organization that works on documenting and promoting human rights violations and values in Lebanon. ALEF seeks to strengthen the respect and fulfillment of human rights as a cornerstone of social, economic, and political development. By embracing a comprehensive approach to monitor, defend, and educate on human rights, ALEF aims to complement and gear all efforts towards achieving an influential human rights constituency and realizing a durable peace.

The Lebanese Association for History is seeking to promote the teaching of history in Lebanon and raise public awareness about the importance of history, and to ensure that history teaching becomes more recognized by society and more attractive to learners. It aims at encouraging continuous learning for different age groups as a way to build learners' critical thinking, shape their personalities, and develop a sense of individual and collective responsibility.

Danmission's work in the MENA region focuses on dialogue and interreligious understanding of minority rights, inclusive citizenship, poverty reduction, and church development. Danmission has been present in the MENA region for more than 100 years. Currently, it's supporting projects in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan. Danmission is an independent Danish NGO connected to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Our mission is to create peace and understanding through dialogue and combating poverty for people in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Today, we have approximately 55 employees and more than 8000 volunteers associated with the organization. Our work is supported by private donors who profit from thrift shops in Denmark, the Danish government, and the European Union.

The Permanent Peace Movement (PPM) is an independent Lebanese non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1989 at the height of the Lebanese civil war by a group of young university students unified by their common vision of the future and their aversion to war. They considered that the peaceful means for conflict resolution are the most useful of all. PPM works on building peace in the local, national and international communities through spreading the culture of peace and transforming/preventing conflicts. It also strives to empower individuals and institutions to enable them to play a more active role in peacebuilding. PPM is a member of several regional and international networks active in the fields of peacebuilding, violence aversion

and conflict prevention, including the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) - PPM is the global partnership MENA secretariat.

The Berghof Foundation is an independent, non-governmental, and non-profit organization that supports efforts to prevent political and social violence, and to achieve sustainable peace through conflict transformation. The Foundation's head office is located in Berlin, Germany, and maintains a branch office in Tübingen, located in the South of Germany, and project offices in several countries, such as Lebanon, depending on project requirements.

The Druze Consultancy meeting was established, by Adel and Hayat Erslan, to stream consultation on how to resurge the Druze community & the administration of its resources to serve its members. Consulting is positive in itself. Religion recommended it (a Quran verse says let consulting be the tool among you for governance). As well it is adopted by worldly institutions where for example, we see the jury as the most important committee in the jurisdiction. Consulting means teamwork which counters individualism. It also means benefiting from the variety of ideas & suggestions that develop awareness & widen horizons.

Individuals:
(In no particular order)

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VII. Lebanon Context

History of Religions in Lebanon

Author: Global Forum for Religion and Humanity

Lebanon, a small Mediterranean country in the Middle East, is known for its diverse population and religious communities. The country's history of sectarianism and religious diversity has shaped its politics, culture, and society. This paper explores a brief history of sects and religions in Lebanon, dating from ancient times to the present.

Historical Overview

The history of religions in Lebanon dates to ancient times. The land that is now Lebanon was home to various civilizations, including the Phoenicians, who inhabited the region around 1200 BCE and were known for their maritime trade and seafaring skills. The Phoenicians were polytheistic, and their religion included worshipping various gods and goddesses, including Baal and Astarte. In the following centuries, the region was ruled by various empires, including the Persians, Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. Each of these empires brought its own religious traditions to the region, including Zoroastrianism, Hellenistic paganism, Christianity, and Judaism.

Lebanon is mentioned 75 times in the Bible, mainly in reference to its cedar trees, which were highly prized for their beauty and strength. The prophet Isaiah also referred to Lebanon as a symbol of beauty and prosperity. During the Roman period, Christianity began to spread throughout the region. In the 4th century, the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and made it the official religion of the Roman Empire. Christianity quickly became the dominant religion in Lebanon, and many churches were built throughout the country.

Islam arrived in Lebanon in the 7th century CE, following the Islamic conquests of the Middle East. While Islam became the dominant religion in many parts of the region, Lebanon remained a predominantly Christian country. In the following centuries, Lebanon was ruled by various Muslim dynasties, including the Umayyads, Abbasids, and Fatimids. In the 11th century, the Crusaders invaded the region and established several kingdoms on the shores of the Levant. During that period, the Maronite Church, a Catholic sect that originated in Syria, became the dominant Christian denomination in Lebanon.

A major era in the history of Lebanon was under the Druze Emirate in Lebanon, which was a semi- autonomous region that existed from the 11th to the 19th century. It was ruled by the Ma'an dynasty, a Druze family, and had its capital in the town of Baakleen in Mount Lebanon. The Emirate enjoyed a degree of independence under the Ottoman Empire and was known for its stability and relative prosperity. The Ma'an dynasty also played a significant role in Lebanon's history, with some members serving as governors and others as influential political leaders. The emirate came to an end in the early 19th century with the arrival of the Egyptian army under Ibrahim Pasha, who sought to centralize power in the region.

The Ottoman Empire ruled Lebanon from the 16th century until the end of World War I. During this period, Lebanon remained a diverse society, with Christians, Muslims, and Jews living together in relative harmony. The Ottomans recognized the various religious communities and allowed them to practice their own religions and govern themselves according to their own laws.

Formation of the Eighteen Sects

The formation of the eighteen religious sects in Lebanon is closely tied to the country's history of sectarianism. Sectarianism in Lebanon is a complex phenomenon that has shaped various historical, political, and economic factors. One key factor contributing to sectarianism in Lebanon is the country's history of foreign domination. Indeed, various empires and foreign powers have ruled Lebanon throughout its history, and these rulers often attempted to impose their own religious and cultural traditions on the population. This led to a fragmentation of the population along religious lines, as people sought to maintain their own religious traditions in the face of external pressure.

Another factor that has contributed to sectarianism in Lebanon is the country's system of confessionalism. The Lebanese political system is based on a system of power-sharing between the country's various religious sects, with each sect being allocated a certain number of seats in parliament and other government institutions. While this system was initially intended to promote stability and inclusiveness, it has also had the effect of reinforcing sectarian divisions and preventing the development of a strong national identity.

In addition to the country's 18 sects, three other sects exist but aren't officially recognized due to political/sociological reasons. And with a country that is characterized by a diverse and complex religious landscape, there is certainly a growing interest among some segments of the population in non-religious or alternative spiritual beliefs and practices. This may include atheism, agnosticism, or various forms of non-theistic or non-Abrahamic/new-age religions. Additionally, some individuals may be attracted to alternative or non-traditional forms of religious practice.

The 18 religious sects in Lebanon are historically divided into three main categories: Christians, Muslims, and others. Each of these categories is further divided into several sub-sects. The following is a brief overview of the formation of each of these sects.

***Christians*:**
1- The Maronite Church is one of the Eastern Catholic Churches, and serves as the largest Christian community in Lebanon. It was founded in the 4th century by Saint Maron, a Syrian monk who lived in the Orontes Valley in present-day Syria. In Lebanon, the Maronite Church played a significant role in the political and social life of the country, and its leaders played a vital role in the creation of the modern Lebanese state.

2- The Greek Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Christian communities in Lebanon, and it traces its roots to the apostles. It was formally established in the 5th century AD when Lebanon was under Byzantine rule. The Greek Orthodox Church played an essential role in the cultural and intellectual life of the country, and it has maintained close ties with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All of the East.

3- The Melkite Catholic Church is a part of the Catholic Church and has a unique relationship with the Vatican. It was founded in Lebanon in the early 19th century and was granted the title "Royal" by the Pope in 1929. The

Royal Catholic Church in Lebanon played a significant role in the country's political life, and its leaders were prominent members of the Lebanese government.

4- The Armenian Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Christian communities in Lebanon, with roots dating back to the early days of Christianity. It was formally established in the 4th century AD and is in communion with the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia. The Armenian Orthodox Church played a vital role in preserving Lebanon's Armenian language, culture, and identity.

5- The Armenian Catholic Church is a part of the Catholic Church and was founded in Lebanon in the 18th century. It is in communion with the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Catholic Church, and its members are mainly of Armenian descent. The Armenian Catholic Church played a significant role in the cultural and educational life of the Armenian community in Lebanon.

6- The Syrian Orthodox Church is an Oriental Orthodox Church that traces its roots to the ancient Church of Antioch. It was formally established in the 5th century AD and has maintained close ties with the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch. The Syrian Orthodox Church in Lebanon played a vital role in preserving the Syriac language and culture.

7- The Syrian Catholic Church is a part of the Catholic Church and was founded in the 17th century in Lebanon. It is in communion with the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, and its members are mainly of Syrian descent. The Syrian Catholic Church played a significant role in the cultural and educational life of the Syrian community in Lebanon.

8- The Assyrian Church of the East is an ancient church that traces its roots to the early days of Christianity. It was formally established in the 5th century AD and has a unique theology and liturgy. The Assyrian Church of the East in Lebanon played a vital role in preserving the Assyrian language and culture.

9- The Chaldean Catholic Church is a part of the Catholic Church and was founded in the 16th century in present-day Iraq. It is in communion with the Assyrian Church of the East and the Catholic Church, and its members are mainly of Chaldean descent. The Chaldean Catholic Church played a significant role in the cultural and educational life of the Chaldean community in Lebanon.

10- The Latin Church is a part of the Catholic Church and is the largest Christian community in the world. It was formally established in Lebanon during the Crusades in the 12th century, and its members are mainly of European descent. The Latin Church played a significant role in Lebanon's religious and political life during the7- The Syriac Catholic Church in Lebanon traces its origins to the Syriac Orthodox Church and was established in the 17th century when a group of Syriac Orthodox Christians reconciled with Rome. The Syriac Catholic Church in Lebanon has a small following and is centered mainly in the country's northeastern region.

11- The Coptic Orthodox Church arrived in Lebanon in the early centuries of Christianity. According to tradition, Saint Mark the Evangelist, who founded the church in Egypt, sent his disciple Saint Anianus to evangelize the city of Alexandria. Anianus later became the first Patriarch of Alexandria, and the Coptic Orthodox Church traces its lineage back to him.

The arrival of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Lebanon likely happened around the same time as the spread of Christianity throughout the region. However, there are few historical records available about the early days of the church in Lebanon, but it is known that there was a significant Coptic Orthodox community in Lebanon by the 19th century and that the church has continued to grow and establish itself in the country since then.

12- Protestants/Evangelical churches: Protestantism arrived in Lebanon in the 19th century, primarily through the efforts of American missionaries. The missionaries sought to spread the gospel and establish Christian communities in the Middle East, and their efforts were met with mixed success. Today, there are several Protestant denominations in Lebanon, including the Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Church, and the Baptist Church.

The Evangelical Church in Lebanon is still a relatively small community, with an estimated 15,000 members. The church is known for its emphasis on personal faith, individual conversion, and social outreach programs.

Lebanon has many evangelical churches; the most known are:

- The National Evangelical Church of Beirut: This isthe oldest Protestant church in the Middle East and was established in 1848 by American Presbyterian missionaries.

- TheUnionoftheArmenianEvangelicalChurchesintheNearEast:Thischurchwasfounded in the late 19th century by Armenian immigrants and has a significant presence in Lebanon, Syria, and other parts of the region.

- The Evangelical Baptist Church of Beirut: This church was founded in the early 20th century and focuses on evangelism and social outreach.

- The Evangelical Community Church of Beirut: This church was established in the 1970s and had a diverse membership that includes both Lebanese and expatriate Christians.

- The Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development: While not a church, this organization is affiliated with the evangelical movement and promotes social justice and development in Lebanon.

Muslims:
13- The Sunni sect in Lebanon is the largest Islamic sect and is estimated to comprise approximately 27% of the population. The Sunnis in Lebanon trace their origins to the early years of Islam, and their history in Lebanon can be traced back to the Umayyad period. The Sunnis in Lebanon have traditionally been centered in the northern and eastern regions of the country.

14- The Shiite sect in Lebanon is the second-largest Islamic sect and is estimated to comprise approximately 27% of the population. The Shiites in Lebanon trace their origins to the early years of Islam, and their history in Lebanon can be traced back to the Fatimid period. The Shiites in Lebanon are centered mainly in the country's southern regions and the southern suburbs of Beirut.

15- The Alawite sect in Lebanon is a small minority sect estimated to comprise less than 1% of the population. The Alawites in Lebanon trace their origins to the Syrian coastal region, and their history in Lebanon can

be traced back to the Ottoman period. The Alawites in Lebanon are centered mainly in the country's northern regions.

16- The Ismaili sect in Lebanon is a small minority sect estimated to comprise less than 1% of the population. The Ismailis in Lebanon trace their origins to the early years of Islam, and their history in Lebanon can be traced back to the Fatimid period. The Ismailis in Lebanon are centered mainly in the country's northern regions.
17- The Druze sect in Lebanon is a small minority sect estimated to comprise approximately 5% of the population. The Druze in Lebanon trace their origins to the Ismaili sect, and their history in Lebanon can be traced back to the Fatimid period. The Druze in Lebanon are centered mainly in the country's southeastern regions, particularly in the Chouf Mountains.

Other Sects:

18- The Israelites (Jews): Jews have been present in Lebanon since ancient times and played an important role in the region's economy and culture. However, the Jewish population in Lebanon declined significantly in the 20th century due to emigration, persecution, and political instability.

19- The Bahá'í (not officially recognized): The Bahá'í faith arrived in Lebanon in the late 19th century, primarily through the efforts of Iranian immigrants. Today, there are several Bahá'í communities in Lebanon, but the faith is not recognized as an official religion by the Lebanese government due to the Iranian influence on the Lebanese prominent sect (Shiaa), with the power of the armed militias of Hizballah and Amal.

20- Jehovah's Witnesses (not officially recognized): Jehovah's Witnesses arrived in Lebanon in the early 20th century and have since established several communities throughout the country. The sect is known for its distinctive beliefs and practices, including door-to-door evangelism and the refusal to participate in political activities.

21-The public right sect (not officially recognized): established in Lebanon in accordance with the law of the French High Commissioner. This law, known as the "Statut Personnel des Communautés Religieuses", was enacted in 1936 and aimed to regulate the personal status of religious communities in Lebanon. Followers of this sect build on this law to claim existence. It is still a small and relatively unknown public community in Lebanon, trying to build its legacy as a symbol of religious freedom and independence, inspiring others who seek to challenge the status quo and assert their identities and beliefs.

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History of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Lebanon

Author: Adyan Foundation

Lebanon's history of Freedom of Religion and Belief has been shaped by a variety of political, social, and religious factors over the years. The following section seeks to present a more in-depth explanation of how it historically evolved.

During the Ottoman Empire's reign over the region and what would later become the independent nation of Lebanon, the Millet system granted autonomy to various religious groups and allowed them to govern themselves as they saw fit. This system protected non-Sunni religious sects and gave them rights related to worship, belief, internal management, and the regulation of their own personal status laws.

The Millet system indirectly increased each sect's internal solidarity as a group but resulted in a lack of unity and a common identity among people.[1] However, the Ottoman authorities did not treat all religious communities equally, and the Millet system was not uniformly applied across the Sultanate.

While the Greek Orthodox, Armenian, and Jewish Millets were recognized in the 15th century, no other groups were added until the 19th century. Due in part to pressure from European nations, a number of Millets were recognized by the Ottomans from 1830 onwards. The Catholic and Protestant Millets were established, respectively, in 1830 and 1850. The Maronites and Syriac Millets were established around 1860, despite the former being officially recognized by the Ottoman Empire since 1571. Shia, Druze, and Alawite denominations were not recognized as separate Millets but were allowed, to some extent, to freely practice their religion and run their own religious institutions.[2]

The Ottoman Millet system offered religious minorities protection and certain rights that were not commonly available to them in other parts of the world at the time. Under this system, different religious communities were granted a degree of autonomy and were allowed to govern themselves according to their own laws and customs. This autonomy included the right to establish their own religious institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and places of worship, as well as to regulate their own personal status laws, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. The Ottoman authorities also recognized the influence of religious leaders within their respective communities.

One of the main advantages of the Millet system in the field of FoRB was that it allowed for greater religious diversity and tolerance.

By recognizing the legitimacy of different religious groups and allowing them to govern themselves, the Ottoman Empire created a framework for peaceful coexistence among different faiths. This system was especially beneficial for non-Muslim minorities, who were often subject to discrimination and persecution in other parts of the world.

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[1] Dinno, K. S. (2017). The Syrian Orthodox Christians in the Late Ottoman Period and Beyond. Gorgias Press. pp. 45-46.

[2] Rutar, S. (2014). Beyond the Balkans: Towards an Inclusive History of Southeastern Europe. LIT. pp. 107-108.

Additionally, the Millet system enabled recognized religious minorities to preserve their cultural and religious identities. By granting them autonomy, the Ottomans allowed these communities to practice their faith and maintain their traditions without interference or assimilation into the dominant culture and religion.

On the other hand, the non-recognition of certain religious minorities by the Ottomans created a sense of oppression and feelings of inferiority among them and may have contributed, in one way or another, to increasing disputes, division between people, and social instability.

Besides the Millet system, three other significant factors played a role in the resurgence of FoRB in Lebanon. The first one was related to the establishment of the Qa'imaqamia system in Mount Lebanon in 1842 - a quasi-federal system giving each region autonomy under a common authority while recognizing and consecrating representative power-sharing on the administrative level between different religious sects.[3] As a result, there was an increase in religious freedom after the central Ottoman authorities were weakened, and their interference in social, religious, and administrative matters decreased. Despite the many advantages of this system, such freedoms took a serious blow due to the many civil wars and massacres of sectarian and religious nature that occurred between 1842 and 1860.

The second factor was linked to the growing number of foreign Christian missionaries in Lebanon and the establishment of numerous schools that spread the latest Western concepts emphasizing individual freedoms and rights, including the Freedom of Religion and Belief.[4]

The third factor was connected to the prosperity of silk production in Mount Lebanon and some parts of the Beqaa region during the 19th century, which inevitably transformed Beirut into a real cosmopolitan city and a major transportation hub for this commodity between the Middle East and Europe. This led to significant cultural developments in Beirut, as foreign merchants, consular employees, foreign companies, and other institutions from various backgrounds built religious centers and influenced the local population through interaction and imitation.[5]

After World War I, Lebanon was placed under French mandate, and the Lebanese Constitution of 1926 emphasized what the older system under Ottoman reign granted to some religious communities. The Lebanese constitution was the first in the Arab world to include a specific article related to FoRB, article 9 states: *"There shall be absolute freedom of conscience. The state, in rendering homage to the God Almighty shall respect all religions and creeds and shall guarantee, under its protection, the free exercise of all religious rites provided that public order is not disturbed. It shall also guarantee that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, shall be respected."*[6]

After 1926, many groups were recognized as religious sects and were granted autonomy in relation to personal status. Additionally, the constitution and the political system granted all recognized religious groups

[3] Fawaz, L. T. (1994). An occasion for war: Civil conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860. University of California Press. p. 225.
[4] Labaki, B. (1988). Education et mobilité sociale dans la société multicommunautaire du Liban: Approche socio- historique. Deutsches Institut Für international pädagogische. pp. 65-72.
[5] Murji, K., & Solomos, J. (2005). Racialization: Study in Theory and Practice. Oxford University Press. pp. 188- 189.

representation in government, parliament, public institutions, and administrations. Some believe that this system enhanced FoRB based on the argument that power-sharing between sects would protect FoRB and other communitarian rights.

In 1936, the French mandate introduced the "Religious Communities System Law (L.R. #60)" that granted certain privileges regarding the personal status of recognized religious groups. Consequently, each recognized religious group would establish its own judiciary and legal framework, allowing members to seek legal redress according to their respective laws. However, the same law grants civil authorities of the Lebanese state jurisdiction over non-personal status matters. Over time, each of the recognized religious groups had established its own procedures for managing personal status affairs.

In 1943, Lebanon gained independence, and the National Pact was introduced. The Pact is an unwritten political agreement that laid out a power-sharing arrangement among the country's various religious groups. The agreement established a quota system for government, parliament, and administrative positions based on the relative sizes of the country's different religious communities.

The National Pact became a cornerstone of Lebanon's political system and has remained in place, with some modifications, to this day. The agreement aimed to balance various religious groups' competing interests and maintain stability in the country. Thus, it relatively achieved peaceful coexistence between the Lebanese sects until 1975 – when the Civil War broke out.

During this war from 1975 to 1990, religious identity became a defining feature of the conflict, and religious communities were often pitted against each other for different political and non- political reasons. Many massacres were carried out on a sectarian basis. With the adoption of the Ta'if Agreement in 1989 and the end of the Civil War, Article 9 of the constitution remained intact stipulating freedom of conscience, respect for all religions and sects, the guarantee of freedom of worship and belief, and the autonomy of religious authorities in the field of personal status.

Presently, peaceful coexistence between Lebanese sects and religious freedoms has been challenged, especially with increased contradictory interests between the different groups and the interference of politics. On the other hand, a large number of Lebanese elites, as well as organizations and clerics, are striving to achieve peaceful coexistence among different communities. An example of such commitment would be the international "Beirut Declaration" of 2017, which favors the "identification of common ground among all religions and beliefs to uphold the dignity and worth of all human beings rather than focusing on theological and doctrinal divides."[7]

In conclusion, one can see that the development of FoRB in Lebanon has passed through many phases – some of which had detrimental consequences. In a country where diversity is embedded not only in the social fabric but also in the political one, it is always important to ensure that FoRB is protected and promoted, both on the legal level and between individuals, groups, and communities. Lebanon still has a long way to go in

[6] Lebanese Constitution. (1926). Article 9.
[7] UN-OHCHR. (2017). Beirut Declaration on "Faith for Rights". Article 10.

terms of achieving the highest degree of FoRB protection; however, taking steps forward to put words into action brings organizations and communities closer to ensuring the highest levels of religious freedom.

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VIII. Religion in the Legal Context

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Introduction

Lebanon stands out as a nation that defies traditional categorization due to its distinctive pluralistic demographic makeup and having been established as an autonomous state within the League of Nations with its current borders. Before its formation as a sovereign state, Lebanon was known as administrative Mount Lebanon until August 1920, when the High Commissioner declared the creation of the State of Greater Lebanon. The administrative organizations of this newly formed state were established on September 1, 1920, per Resolution No. 336, issued by General Gouraud, the Commissioner of the French Republic in Syria and Cilicia.

According to Resolution No. 336/1920, the "Administrative Committee for Greater Lebanon" was established, which is a metaphor for a council consisting of fifteen members, whose members later became seventeen, and which was considered the nucleus of the Representative Council, where the members of the Administrative Committee were distributed among the sects, and providing that the High Commissioner appoints members. Lebanon has been distinguished throughout history by the multiplicity of its sects that came to it either to escape persecution or yearning for freedom. Indeed, the Lebanese Republic was formed from religious and ethnic minorities that came to Lebanon in different periods of history. One of the most important reasons for staying in Lebanon was the freedom with which it was distinguished and the guarantee of these groups' religious and social rituals.

Legal texts that underpin religious freedom in Lebanon

The Lebanese Constitution

The Lebanese Constitution of May 23, 1926, and its amendments enshrined the principle of public freedoms in its preamble, which is considered an integral part of its text. It also imposed equality among all Lebanese and stipulated that they *"enjoy equal civil and political rights and bear public obligations and duties without any difference between them."*

The constitutional lawmakers deemed it necessary to ensure the freedom of thought and belief for all religious groups and factions. However, this guarantee was later relinquished to allow the sects to manage their affairs according to the existing laws. The consecration of these rights and freedoms came at the forefront of the Constitution, as in several articles thereof. Article 9 of the Constitution stipulates the following: *"There shall be absolute freedom of conscience. The State, in rendering homage to the God Almighty, shall respect all religions and creeds and shall guarantee, under its protection, the free exercise of all religious rites provided that public order is not disturbed. It shall also guarantee that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, shall be respected."*

This article is considered the key underpinning for religious personal status, as it explicitly recognizes the right of sects to regulate their own affairs on the one hand and their right to regulate the personal status of their adherents or sect members on the other.

In this regard, we note that the Constitutional Council, in its interpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution, clarified that although Article 9 of the Constitution *"gives sects autonomy in managing their religious affairs and interests, it does not obscure the state's right to enact various legislations related to regulating the conditions of these sects in accordance with to the provisions of the Constitution. And since the state's right to legislate is one of the rights of sovereignty that derives its source from the people and is exercised by the state through its constitutional institutions."*

Based on the aforementioned, it is evident that the constitution mandates the state to uphold the personal status of religious sects. This means that the legislative authority is prohibited from completely annulling these texts or undermining the autonomy of these sects. However, this obligation does not imply that such imposition is comprehensive and exclusive, as it does not bar the existence of other civil legislation aside from the sectarian one. Therefore, religious personal status laws are a "constitutionally permitted exception." If there is no constitutional protection for the rights of religious sects to maintain their independent personal statuses, it would lead to a conflict between all religious laws and the constitutionally established principle of equality. Therefore, for this exception to remain valid, it requires recognition and inclusion in the Constitution.

Further, Article 10 of the Constitution stipulates that *"Education shall be free insofar as it is not contrary to public order and morals and does not affect the dignity of any of the religions or sects. There shall be no violation of the right of religious communities to have their own schools provided they follow the general rules issued by the state regulating public instruction."*

Similarly, Article 19 of the Constitution grants the leaders of acknowledged religious sects the privilege to seek the counsel of the Constitutional Council concerning personal status, freedom of religion, the practice of religious customs, and liberty of religious education. Consequently, this gives religious authorities the same status as the official authorities, which is unprecedented in global political systems, and creates a situation where the official state authority becomes a neutral party advising all religious groups on the law and, therefore, potentially a neutral source of authority and unification among the various creeds.

In addition, Article 24 of the Constitution gave religious groups the right to political representation, as it stipulated the following:
"The Chamber of Deputies shall be composed of elected members; their number and the method of their election shall be determined by the electoral laws in effect. Until such time as the Chamber enacts new electoral laws on a non-confessional basis, the distribution of seats shall be according to the following principles:
a. Equal representation between Christians and Muslims.
b. Proportional representation among the confessional groups within each of the two religious communities.
c. Proportional representation among geographic regions."

Therefore, the Lebanese Constitution and subsequent legislation have established the protection of public freedoms, particularly religious freedom and political representation of religious groups.

Upon reviewing the constitutional articles, it can be concluded that the Constitution includes several provisions to provide for religious freedom, reserved powers for the sect and religious group representatives, sectarian representation of citizens in government, and the distribution of parliamentary seats among sects. However, the Constitution also stipulated that this sectarian basis for Government and parliament should be abolished after the election of the first parliament on a national, non-sectarian basis within a transitional period.

Since the approval of the constitutional amendments in 1990, various attempts have been made to create the National Commission for the Abolition of Sectarianism, which would be responsible for proposing ways to eliminate sectarianism, presenting them to the Council of Representatives and Ministers, and monitoring the implementation of the interim plan. Despite these efforts, the National Commission has not been formed to this day.

The Legal System of Religious Sects

The legal system of Religious sects in Lebanon consists of law No.60/1936 L.R. issued by the French High Commissioner on March 13, 1936, according to the constitution, during the French Mandate over Lebanon, the system of religious sects was approved under this law, and the first article of this decision stated that *"the sects that are legally recognized as sects with a personal status system are the historical sects whose organization, courts, and laws were defined in a legislative instrument."*

Further, this law grants the eighteen historical sects the right to establish their personal status systems; it also states that the texts and regulations under which the sect be administered be submitted for scrutiny to the governmental authority; and confirms that the system is ratified by a legislative decision from the Lebanese government, that makes it effective, provided that it does not include a text contrary to public security.

Recognizing a New Religion or Sect

Recognition of a new religion or sect requires the issuance of a legal text, and therefore it requires, in accordance with the provisions of Article 18 of the Constitution, either to refer a draft law by the government to the parliament or to submit a draft law by members of the parliament. And according to Article 2 of Law No. 60/L. R. (approving the system of religious sects), *"The legal recognition of a sect with a personal system has the effect of giving the text defining its system the force of law and placing this system and its implementation under the protection of the law and the control of the public authority."*

Further, nothing in the law prevents the recognition of a new sect, provided that the sect is "old" or "historical" and provided that it submits "its internal regulations" to the government, as did all the sects specified in Appendix No. (1) of Resolution No. 60/LR. The state contented itself with publishing these regulations in the judicial bulletin issued by the Ministry of Justice, and these regulations have not yet been recognized as stipulated in Article 2 of Resolution No. 60/1936, and Article 33 of the Law issued on 4/2/1951. However, jurisprudence considered it sufficient that the sect submits to the government its personal status law and the procedure law in its courts for these laws to be applied to its members, even if it was not published or officially recognized.

The Impact of the Non-recognition of Some Religious Groups

Any religious groups that do not have official recognition in law are not allowed to practice their religion, and doing so is illegal. Consequently, unrecognized religious groups practice their religion secretly, without declared places for performing their rituals. One such group is the "Jehovah's Witnesses" or "Shouhoud Yahwa" in Lebanon, which is banned, as the Catholic and Orthodox churches consider this group to be a religious heresy and are actively fighting against it.
Another example is the Baha'i faith is a distinct religion that advocates for the belief in one God among all peoples and recognizes all other religions. It is founded on the principle of unity of humanity, as taught by Bahá'u'llah, its founder. Although the Baha'i religion has been present in Lebanon since the late 19th century, it still remains unrecognized by the Lebanese state.
Consequently, Jehovah's Witnesses and Baha'is in Lebanon face difficulties completing official transactions, such as marriage contracts which are not recognized by the state. To marry legally, they are required to travel outside Lebanon and obtain a civil marriage, then have it confirmed in Lebanon. Additionally, individuals who do not belong to officially recognized sects are excluded from public jobs reserved for those sects and ineligible for parliamentary or ministerial positions.

The "Ordinary Law Denominations"

Law No. 60/L.R. approved the "ordinary law denominations." Article 14 of this decision stipulates that "the ordinary law denominations organize and manage their affairs freely within the limits of civil laws." Additionally, these sects are subject in their personal status to civil law.

Article 15 of this decision also gave sects affiliated with ordinary law *"the possibility of obtaining recognition, if their religious teachings and moral principles do not contradict public security, morals, the constitutions of states and sects' constitutions, or the provisions of this decision, and finally, if the number of followers is sufficient and guarantees of their continued existence justify granting them this advantage. However, the eligibility of these sects is limited to their ability to obtain, with or without compensation, the real estate and property necessary to perform their religious rituals or to house their service."*

The Right to Remove Sect from an Individual's Personal Records, 2009 Circular

On February 6, 2009, the Minister of Interior and Municipalities at the time, Ziad Baroud, issued a circular related to the registration of their sect in an individual's personal records and the permissibility of not declaring it or of removing it. That right derives from the provisions of the constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and all the international conventions to which Lebanon has acceded, in addition to the Lebanese constitution.

He also emphasized that *"the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of belief includes the right to belong or not belong to a sect, as well as the right to declare or not declare this affiliation in the personal status restrictions, delete it and amend it."*

Therefore, this circular approved the following:

1- "Accepting that the person concerned did not declare the sect registration and accepting requests to remove the sect registration from the population records, as they (the requests) are received by the registry, without the need for any additional procedure."

2- In the event that the sect is not declared or requested to be removed, a "/" sign should be entered in the field designated for the sect in the personal status records of the person concerned."

Notably, this circular was applied to individual records without family ones. Therefore, individuals kept being somehow registered under the religion of their family. While its application was somehow allowed, the process was hard and costly, which was difficult for people who wanted to take this step and could not afford it, violating by that their Freedom of Religion and affiliation to a religion. Furthermore, many who have done so were subjected to criticism and obstacles while trying to apply for public positions, especially ones that were divided among seats of election per sect.

The Lebanese Penal Code:

The Lebanese Penal Code, promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 340 of March 1, 1943, and its amendments enshrined several articles to punish intolerance, racial discrimination, provoking of religious and sectarian strife, and inciting sectarian conflicts.

In the article related to impersonation, it was also considered that anyone who publicly and without the right to wear an official uniform or carry a medal or insignia from the uniforms, medals, or insignia of the state shall be punished with imprisonment and a fine as well. The law approved the application of this provision to every person who unlawfully wears special clothing for a religious function based on a complaint from the valid sectarian authorities.

In the sixth chapter of the second book of the Penal Code, and within the first chapter related to misdemeanors affecting religion, the first summary (Articles 473 to 475) dealt with crimes that affect religious feelings, starting with the crime of blasphemy against God, passing through contempt of religious rituals, and ending with crimes of causing confusion while standing. With one of the rituals, ceremonies, religious drawings, or the destruction of buildings for worship and other things that are honored by the people of the religion or a group of people.

After Lebanon acceded to several international conventions related to human rights and the promotion of guarantees related to human rights and freedoms, the Parliament approved legislation related to toughening penalties for actions that affect these rights and freedoms, including the law on strengthening basic guarantees and activating defense rights (Law No. 191 dated 10/16/2020), the most important of which are stipulated in the international conventions concerned with guaranteeing human rights and ratified by the Lebanese state.

It is noteworthy that despite the importance of these legal articles, especially those stipulated in the Penal Code in protecting religious freedoms, they are sometimes used to limit other rights rather than to protect religion. For example, Lebanon's use of defamation laws to punish people, journalists, and activists for thoughts and expressions protected by international human rights law has long been documented by local and international human rights organizations.[8] Lebanese defamation laws are being used to "target activists and dissidents and… intimidate online journalists, bloggers, and Internet users from speaking about certain

[8] Human Rights Watch: "Lebanon: Pattern of Prosecution for Free Speech";
https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/31/lebanon-pattern-prosecutions-free-speech; 2018.

subjects, thus paving the way for self-censorship and the chilling of speech," according to a 2016 report by the Skeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom.[9]

As previously mentioned, not only is defamation penalized, but also "steering sectarian strife. What can steer sectarian strife? How can we evaluate if this specific action leads to sectarian strife? And what event can amount to sectarian strife? Without an answer to all the above questions, this law remains one of the Lebanese penal code's most ambiguous and vague laws.It is still in application today, primarily used to criminalize journalists and individuals for opinions in which they criticize religious symbols or sometimes political leaders at the discretion of Lebanese judges.

For instance, Mustafa "Ahmad" Sbeity, a poet, was detained for 17 days before trial on November 27, 2017, after being apprehended by the ISF's Information Branch in Saida for sharing a "controversial post on Facebook." Even though he deleted the post the following day, the public prosecutor charged him with "steering sectarian strife" in violation of Article 317 and insulting religion, in violation of Article 474, both of which carry a three-year maximum.[10]

The Penal Code needs amending to include a new penalty for the crime of non-public incitement to discrimination, hatred, or the use of violence against a person or group because of ethnic, religious, or partisan affiliation or for other similar reasons and to set a prison sentence and a fine for these criminal acts, in line with the international agreements that have been adopted combating racial and religious discrimination.

International Conventions and Covenants:

Lebanon is also a signatory to a number of international conventions. These include:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Lebanon's commitment to international conventions and covenants came explicitly in the preamble to the constitution, as Paragraph (b) of this preamble stipulated the following:

"Lebanon is Arab in its identity and in its affiliation. It is a founding and active member of the League of Arab States and abides by its pacts and covenants. Lebanon is also a founding and active member of the United Nations Organization and abides by its covenants and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Government shall embody these principles in all fields and areas without exception."

Further, Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, dated December 10, 1948, to which Lebanon committed after participating in its drafting, states that *"Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."*

[9] Skeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom: "Digital Rights and Online Expression in Lebanon"; https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Reports/11-03-2016/Digital-Rights-and-Online-Expression-in-Lebanon; 2016.
[10] Human Rights Watch: "There is a Price to Pay: The Criminalization of Peaceful Speech in Lebanon", https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/11/15/there-price-pay/criminalization-peaceful-speech-lebanon, 2018.

Moreover, other articles also reflected in the Lebanese Constitution, from the UDHR, also restate that no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, legal, or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self- governing, or subject to any other limitation of its sovereignty.

Finally, Article 7 of the Declaration also stipulates that *"all people are equal before the law and have the right to enjoy equal protection without any discrimination..."* and Articles 18 and 19 expressly enshrine the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and freedom of expression.

The Two International Covenants on Human Rights of 1966:

In Resolution No. 2211 (1) in December 1966, the General Assembly adopted three international instruments, namely the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Effectively, Lebanon acceded to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights on September 1, 1972.

Concretely, Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates that
"it is not permissible in countries where there are ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities to deprive their members of the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess their religion, to perform their rituals, or to use their own language."

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:

The Lebanese parliament authorized the government to accede to this agreement, which was approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations in its resolution No. 2106 of December 21, 1965, pursuant to Law No. 44/71 of June 24, 1971, noting that the Lebanese state did not express any reservation on the application of the provisions of this agreement, pursuant to Article 20 thereof.

This agreement aims to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, which is based on the principles of equality and dignity of all human beings or religions. This agreement also stipulated the denunciation of racism, in particular racial segregation and apartheid, and it also stipulated the denunciation of all propaganda and organizations based on its ideas and theories saying the superiority of any race or any group of any color or origin or that attempt to justify any form of racial hatred or discrimination. racism or reinforcement.

In this regard, we note that the Lebanese Parliament also authorized the government to ratify the Convention on Combating Racial Discrimination in the Field of Education, which was approved by the UNESCO General Assembly at its eleventh session in Paris on December 14, 1960.

The Agreement of the Two Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 12/8/1949 for the Protection of War Victims:

The Parliament authorized the government to ratify the two protocols under Law No. 613 of 28/2/1997.

With regard to minorities, Clause (C) of Article 85 related to violations of these two protocols stipulates the following:

"In addition to the grave breaches specified in the preceding paragraphs and in the Agreements, the following acts are considered grave breaches of this Protocol, if committed willfully, in violation of the Conventions or the Protocol:
(c) The practice of racial segregation (apartheid) and other methods based on racial discrimination that is inhumane and degrading, and that undermine personal dignity."

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief Pursuant to Resolution No. 55/36 of 11/25/1981:

The first article of this declaration stipulates the following:

"a. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and this right includes freedom to believe in a religion or any belief of his choice, and the freedom to manifest his religion or belief through worship, rituals, practices, and education, whether alone or with a group, publicly or secretly. Article 2 also added that "no one shall be subjected to discrimination by any state, institution, group of persons or individual on the grounds of religion or other beliefs."

Also, according to this Declaration, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the freedom to worship, to reside and to maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions, to teach religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes, and to observe days of rest, to celebrate holidays and to perform rites in accordance with the teachings of one's religion or belief.

The Arab Charter for Human Rights:

This charter was signed in Tunisia on May 23, 2004, during the sixteenth session of the Arab Summit, and the Parliament authorized the Lebanese government to conclude this charter according to Law No. 1, issued on September 5, 2008.

The first clause of Article 3 of the Charter stipulates the following: *"1- Each state party to this Charter undertakes to ensure that every person subject to its jurisdiction has the right to enjoy the rights and freedoms stipulated in this Charter, without discrimination as to race, color, sex, language or language. religious belief, opinion, intellect, national or social origin, wealth, birth, or physical or mental disability."*

And Article 30 of the Charter stipulates (in its clauses 1 and 2) the following:

« 1 - Every person has the right to freedom of thought, belief, and religion, and no restrictions may be imposed on it except as stipulated in the legislation in force.

2 - The freedom of a person to manifest his religion or belief or to practice his religious rites alone or with others may not be subjected except to the restrictions stipulated by law and which are necessary in a tolerant society that respects freedoms and human rights to protect public safety, public order, public health or public morals, or To protect the rights and fundamental freedoms of others."

Conclusion

The last official census of the country was conducted in 1932, when Lebanon was still under the French Mandate, when atheists were estimated to make up 0% of the population. As a result, positions in the government that have historically been allocated according to recognized sectarian quotas, including seats in the parliament and prominent government positions, are not reserved for this section of the society. Since then, no census has been conducted since the topic of sectarian demographics has been politically contentious because it directly affects power-sharing arrangements.

The National Pact, an attempt to update the political and social contract in Lebanon after it attained independence in 1989, further marginalized the ideas of citizenship and national identity by restating that the president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament must be Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shia Muslims, respectively. Therefore, high-ranking government officials and members of parliament continued to be chosen and elected under sectarian quotas.

Although the constitutional amendments in the Taif Agreement used more recent census data, all the power-sharing quotas were still allocated, in different proportions, to the 18 officially recognized sects of Lebanon, and the non-religious were again assumed non-existent. No allocation was thus reserved for atheists, agnostics, seculars, and the non-religious for government or parliament positions or high-ranking public jobs.

Until today, people with no religious affiliation still have to carry their parental affiliation on their civil extract. They must also hold their marriage ceremony, divorce, inheritance, and other personal status affairs in religious institutions since people cannot have a civil marriage in Lebanon. Further, in some cases, individuals, especially women, might need to change their religious affiliation after marriage to follow their husband's sect or religion. In addition, Lebanese citizens must present their religion when applying for a government position or when running for any elections. Hence, while freedom of religion and belief is somehow widely respected in Lebanon, freedom of non- religion remains a contested area, violating many individuals' human rights.

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IX. Freedom of Religion and Belief in Lebanon, Where is it Found?

Author: Adyan Foundation

The question of religious freedom and belief is a complex and important issue in many societies around the world, including Lebanon. As a country with a diverse religious landscape, Lebanon has a rich history of religious pluralism but faces a number of challenges in protecting and promoting religious freedom for all its citizens. In this context, it is essential to examine the issue of the freedom to adopt, change or renounce a religion or belief and the freedom from coercion. Various other aspects of religious freedom and belief in Lebanon, including the right to practice, freedom to worship, the status of places of worship, religious symbols, observance of holidays and days of rest, education on religion, registration and non-registration of religions, and conscientious objection will be discussed in the following sections. By exploring these themes, one can better understand the legal and social structures that govern religious freedom in Lebanon, as well as the challenges that exist in ensuring that all individuals can enjoy these fundamental rights.

The freedom to adopt, change or renounce a religion or belief, and the freedom from coercion related to religion or belief in Lebanon, are protected by a number of legal stipulations. Firstly, Lebanon explicitly guarantees the freedom of conscience and the freedom to practice religious beliefs in Article 9 of the Constitution. Secondly, Lebanon has ratified a number of international human rights treaties that protect the right to FoRB. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that Lebanon ratified in 1972, which guarantees the "right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion."[11] Thirdly, there are legal provisions in place to protect individuals from coercion related to religion. For example, Article 401 of the Penal Code criminalizes forced conversions and the use of violence or threats to force someone to change their religion, among other grounds.[12]

Overall, the legal framework related to the freedom to adopt, change or renounce a religion or belief and the freedom from coercion in Lebanon provides strong protections for individuals' right to religious freedom. However, there are still challenges in ensuring these rights are fully realized in practice, particularly in political and sectarian tensions. Although these rights are clearly granted to individuals by laws and treaties, it is important to note that in many cases, those who adopt, change, or renounce a religion or belief are subjected to social, psychological, and economic pressure from their local communities.

At the same time, unrecognized religious groups and atheists do not enjoy the same rights as members of recognized religious groups. They are not legally protected when it comes to the freedom to adopt, change or renounce a religion or belief since the Lebanese constitution stipulates, in its 9th article, that these rights are exclusively given to recognized religious groups. In addition, converting to a non-recognized religious belief may lead to societal discrimination and the loss of civil rights, such as the right to vote.

[11] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. (1966). Article 18.
[12] Lebanese Penal Code, 1943, Article 401.

Furthermore, freedom to worship is generally respected in Lebanon, and individuals are free to attend religious services and participate in religious activities. However, unrecognized religious group members cannot practice their religious rites in public, but they do so in private. Although it is illegal according to Article 9 of the Constitution, the Lebanese authorities rarely suppress believers or prevent them from practicing their rituals, except in special cases linked to cults that undermine public order, which is a slightly loose term to understand.

Lebanon has numerous places of worship for various religions, including churches, mosques, khalwat, and synagogues. According to Article 8 of the Lebanese Property Tax Law, places of worship have a special legal status according to the Property Tax Law that exempts them from paying certain taxes, including property registration fees, annual taxes on immovable property, and capital gains taxes. Additionally, the Lebanese Muslim and Druze religious leaders are considered state employees and get paid monthly by the government. However, Christian religious leaders are not treated equally by the state and do not receive any salaries from the government.

On the other hand, Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution guarantees recognized religious groups the freedom to express their opinions and beliefs and to disseminate them through speech, writing, or any other means of expression. Nevertheless, blasphemy is punishable by prison time according to Article 473 of the Lebanese Penal Code.

Furthermore, the freedom to display religious symbols publicly is protected by the general understanding of the constitution, which mentions that the state *"in rendering homage to the God Almighty shall respect all religions..."*[13] Although there have been some incidents of religious symbols being vandalized or desecrated, particularly during times of sectarian tensions, religious symbols can be seen almost everywhere in Lebanon including in public administration, schools, universities, on roads and in private institutions.

Indeed, observance of holidays and days of rest are generally respected in Lebanon by ministerial decrees, with both Muslim and Christian holidays recognized as national ones. However, there have been some challenges in ensuring equal treatment of all religious communities, particularly in allocating public holidays. Some recognized religious groups in Lebanon don't have any particular "official holidays," nor are individuals legally allowed to take days off to celebrate their religious rites.

Moreover, religious education is not fully regulated by law. The Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education just sets general guidelines for religious education in schools. The issue is then left to religious communities to develop their own curricula. Therefore, religious curricula are not centralized and are developed either by religious institutions, the schools themselves, or the teachers and their respective coordinators.[14]
In general, private schools, which are mostly owned and operated by religious institutions, coordinate with the religious official authority and cooperate with them to determine the content that needs to be taught. In public schools, the religion of the majority of students who attend the school is taught, or more often, the school teaches the religion most dominant in the school's geographic location.

[13] Lebanese Constitution. (1926). Article 9.
[14] Ferrari, S. et al. (September 2022). Preventing discrimination and persecution. Models of inclusion of religious minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean space (ReMinEm). Center for Religious Studies. pp. 20-21.

Further, official recognition by the government is a legal requirement for any religious group to be able to exercise religious rights and activities. Effectively, any group seeking official recognition must submit an application to the government explaining its faith, moral principles, and doctrine. According to articles 15 and 16 of the *"Religious Communities System Law (No. 60/1936 L.R.)"*, the group seeking recognition should provide facts about the number of adherents to its principles, which should be sufficient to maintain its continuity and have principles not contrary to public morals, general security or the Lebanese Constitution. In many cases, these loose expressions allow the government to reject or recognize any group at its own discretion.

As stated in previous chapters, individuals have the option to remove their religious affiliation from their personal identification documents through a defined process. However, this results in the loss of any privileges previously associated with their religious affiliation and some of their civil and political rights. Indeed, even if individuals are free to join a different religious sect if they so desire, removing religion from their civil extract is still a complex matter that is "frowned upon."

Besides, conscientious objection is not protected by Lebanese laws, and therefore the failure to participate in military service (theoretically) for religious and belief reasons leads to disciplinary penalties. However, it's important to mention that practically, military service has not been compulsory in Lebanon since 2007.[15]

Overall, the Lebanese Constitution and laws protect Freedom of Religion and Belief for the 18 registered sects, and related rights are generally respected by the government and society. Lebanon has no state religion, and religious groups have significant autonomy in matters such as family law, personal status, and education. The laws recognize 18 different religious sects and allocate political power according to a system in which each major religious group has a proportionate share of power.

However, while FoRB is legally guaranteed, the extent to which it is fully realized in practice may depend on a range of factors, including individual experiences and social and political contexts. In many cases, and especially in light of political and sectarian tensions, many laws related to FoRB are not implemented. Individuals who renounce their religion or marry someone from another sect, for example, are subjected to social, psychological, and economic pressure by their own sectarian groups.

In addition, the application of laws providing FoRB is uneven among recognized religious groups and between recognized and non-recognized ones. The absence of a unified personal status law makes it harder to ensure everyone's freedom is protected, especially with the power given to religious institutions through personal status laws and courts. Therefore, this makes it harder to talk about FoRB in Lebanon – especially when there are a significant number of factors to consider.

Last but not least, Lebanon often goes through crises of a "representative" nature in governance amid major disagreements over the rights, powers, and representation of sects which directly affect the rights and freedoms of individuals. Additionally, the application of laws often takes into account the interests of the major religious sects represented in the political system, while smaller groups have little opportunity to act freely, advocate for their interests or protect themselves in a truly significant way.

[15] Aljazeera. (2007). Lebanon scraps military service.

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X. Limitations on Freedom of Religion and Belief

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What is a Limitation of Human Rights?

A limitation is a restriction or constraint on something; it connotes a condition or circumstance that prevents or restricts its entire exercise or realization. Limitations can arise in various contexts, such as in legal, financial, technical, personal, or professional situations. In legal contexts, limitations can refer to the specific restrictions or conditions placed on certain actions or rights as outlined in laws or regulations.[16] Specifically, a limitation on human rights is a restriction or curtailment of the exercise of a particular human right. The concept of limitations on human rights is often the subject of debate, as there is a tension between the need to protect individual rights and the need to balance these rights with those of all other individuals, and to ensure public safety and order.

Human rights vary in their offered range of protection, as they can be absolute or non-absolute and can have inherent limitations. Certain fundamental human rights, such as the right not to be subject to torture, slavery, and retroactive criminal laws, are considered absolute, meaning they cannot be restricted, even for a legitimate purpose. For example, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment explicitly states that *"no circumstances whatsoever [...] may be used as a justification for torture."*[17]

Most human rights, however, are not absolute, and States can limit individuals' exercise of said rights under certain conditions. For example, the rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, and movement may be "reduced" for reasons such as national security or public order and, of course, upon the satisfaction of certain legal conditions. Therefore, in international texts, the general parameters for limitations are available in Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights generally and Article 19 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, specifically.

However, any limitations must uphold the essence of the right is limited, and those limitations must be subject to review and challenge. Therefore, this section will study the limitations on freedom of religion and belief and give specific attention to the situation of these limitations in Lebanon.

Can Freedom of Religion and Belief be Limited?

Like any other human right, predominantly civil and political rights, freedom of religion and belief (FoRB) is not absolute and may be subject to limitations. It is essential to note that FoRB is listed among qualified rights,

[16] G. Gunatilleke, Criteria and Constraints: the Human Rights Committee's Test on Limiting the Freedom of Religion or Belief, University of Oxford, (2020).
[17] Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), art. 2 (2).

which means it may be limited under certain well-defined and narrow circumstances defined by the limitations criteria listed in the following sections of this chapter. However, FoRB has both an absolute dimension (the individual freedom, i.e., the right to have, not to have, to choose and not to choose, and change or quit their religion or belief) and a qualified dimension (the public freedom, i.e., the right to practice a religion or belief). Therefore, any limitation of freedom of religion and belief can only apply to outer freedom, i.e., the right to manifest, practice, and express religion or belief.

However, two essential facts must be noted when the State wants to set limitations on FoRB. First, restrictions to FoRB must be carefully applied. Otherwise, they can have a 'chilling effect' or even an eliminative one.[18] Second, restrictions can be used as either limitations or derogations, two distinctly defined notions requiring different conditions.[19] Since the former is a restriction on human rights and is permanent until changed again by law, as it will be explained further in this section, whereas the latter (a derogation) is a "temporary" and an "emergency-related" measure.

What are the Conditions for Limiting Freedom of Religion and Belief?

Focusing on limitations, they are allowed at any time and not necessarily for a temporary period.[20] They can be applied when "precisely[21] provided by law,[22] when deemed necessary," and for a legitimate purpose[23] (either to protect others or the national security or public order,[24] public health, or morals).[25] They must be proportionate[26] to the need on which the limitation is based and non-discriminative.[27]
First, limitations must be provided by law.[28] This means it must be precisely indicated in legal texts from the parliament. Since any restriction on FoRB constitutes a severe curtailment of a human right, it is not permitted (especially since Lebanon signed and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and protects freedom of religion and belief under the Constitution)[29] for a restriction to be enshrined in traditional, doctrinal, religious, or other customary laws.

[18] Baczkowski v Poland (2009) 48 EHRR 19, Fedotova c Russian Federation, CCPR/C/106/D1932/2010 (19 November 2012)
[19] UNHRC 'General Comment 29' in 'States of Emergency (Article 4)' (31 August 2001) UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.11, par. 4
[20] Eckart Klein, On the Limits and Restrictions of Human Rights (Cambridge University Press, 13 August 2021)
[21] UNHRC 'General Comment 22' in 'Article 18: Freedom of Religion and Belief' (1994) UN Doc HGI/Rev.1/1/35 22 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR) art 19, par. 3
[23] UNHRC 'General Comment 22' in 'Article 1: Freedom of opinion and expression' (12 September 2012) UN Doc GE.11-45331, par. 33
[24] Communication No. 1157/2003, Coleman v. Australia
[25] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR) art 19, par. 3 (b)
[26] Communication No. 1022/2001, Velichkin v. Belarus, Views Adopted on 20 October 2005.
[27] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR) art 26

Furthermore, the law must be formulated with sufficient precision to enable individuals to regulate their conduct accordingly. It must be clear and must be used to create any confusion. It is also essential that the law and all its possible interpretations and guiding principles of application (when available) must be clearly communicated to the public, to the fullest extent, to protect the right to access information. Legal institutions, lawyers' associations, and civil society organizations all play a role in communicating and informing the public about any changes to the law and its consequences for their daily lives.

Second, limitations must be "necessary" to achieve a legitimate purpose. Accepted legitimate purposes include but are not limited to protecting other human rights, individuals' safety and well- being, or the general welfare; this is referred to as the "balancing of rights,"[30] which entitles the State the right to limit a right for the enjoyment of the other.

Under human rights law, FoRB may be restricted to protect other human rights or community values; examples include banning "religious gatherings" that have a "diabolic" or "satanic" connotation or ones that demean the current existing religions. While something might be a sincerely held belief of that group, if it defies "community values," many countries see it as acceptable to abolish and ban these groups, to protect the general welfare.

On the other hand, general welfare is a broad notion that includes the safety and well-being of individuals and public order. While public order does not have a specific definition and remains vague, it is usually referred to as "a set of mandatory rules that affect the organization of the Nation, the economy, morality, health, security, public peace, the rights and essential freedoms of each individual."[31] This vague definition permits the State to decide what falls under the umbrella of general welfare and what does not. And while public order is a contested notion in terms of what it really translates to in practical matters, limitations of rights can be a thin line to walk to remain protective and not suppressive.

Third, limitations must be proportionate. As mentioned before, inner freedom cannot be restricted in any situation, for any purpose, or under any measure. The State cannot force people to change their beliefs and cannot enforce a particular religion upon them. Besides, even when outer freedoms are limited, the limitation must be proportionate to the need to which it is limited, i.e. the State cannot restrict the freedom of individuals to wear or display religious signs in public places for the purpose of general welfare.[32] France's limitation of religious display in governmental premises to protect the "secular" aspect of the State, while controversial, can be considered a proportionate limitation and valid reason to limit this right, to preserve a "cultural" and fundamental aspect of the country. However, banning the practice of religion altogether, including in private spaces, would be considered a disproportionate limitation.

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[28] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR) art 19, par. 3

[29] Lebanese Constitution, article 9.

30 UNODC: "Limitations Permitted by Human Rights Law"; https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/terrorism/module-7/key- issues/limitations-permitted-by-human-rights-law.html.

[31] Court of Appeal, Lebanon, Decision no. 24082004, Mount Lebanon.

Finally, limitations must be non-discriminative.[33] Equality before the law is a universal and constitutional right. Therefore, limitations must be set without discrimination. In this respect, discrimination on any grounds, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, or another status, is prohibited and qualifies as discriminatory.[34] While there is an ongoing debate on what is considered discriminatory and what is not, we consider that in relation to Freedom of Religion and Belief, it is crucial for States, especially religiously diverse ones, not to impose a limitation on the practice of one religion and not another, and to keep limitations, when necessary, lawful and proportionate, to religion as a whole, and not to favor or discriminate against a certain sect, religion or belief in the country.

Limitations of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Lebanon

As previously indicated, Lebanon recognizes "absolute freedom of conscience" and affirms respect for all religious traditions, including its members' personal status and religious beliefs. The Constitution provides for equal rights and obligations for everyone without discrimination or preference. It not only guarantees the free exercise of religious rites (provided, of course, that they do not violate public order)[35] but also goes further by guaranteeing the obligation of the State to protect this right.[36]

Furthermore, every individual is free to convert to a different religion if a local senior official of the religious group that the person wishes to join approves the change.[37] The religious group issues a document confirming the convert's new religion, allowing the individual to register their new religion with the Personal Status Directorate of the Ministry of Interior.[38] Following that, the new religion is included on government-issued civil registration documents. While the legal, theoretical, and text-book aspect of this seems simple, in practice, it gets complicated, especially when people want to convert their religion due to social and family pressure, the complexity of the process in terms of bureaucracy, and the political divides upon this matter.

On another note, Lebanese "have the right to remove or change" the traditional notation of their religion from government-issued civil registration documents. While doing this does not require the approval of religious officials (in principle), it does not, however, change or remove the individual's registration with the Personal Status Directorate. The individual will always be registered under his religion of birth. Crucially also, removing one's sect from their civil extract can cause many difficulties, especially in acceding to public positions and specific public procedures, and tends to be associated with "atheism," which is castigated and demeaned by religious institutions in Lebanon. This implies that the freedom to not believe is not substantively protected in Lebanon, at least to the fullest extent, which is a clear limitation on the full right to FoRB in Lebanon and on the individual's freedom of conscience.[39]

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[32] Stephanus Alliance: "Freedom of Religion and Belief for Everyone"; https://www.forb- learning.org/uploads/1/1/3/5/113585003/forb_english_2020.pdf; (Booklet, 2020)
[33] Lebanese Constitution, 1926, Preamble.
[34] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Art. 26.
[35] US Department of Justice: "2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Lebanon"; https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/lebanon/; June 2, 2022. 36 Lebanese Constitution, Article 9.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

In a broader aspect, blasphemy laws in Lebanon can also be considered a significant limitation for FoRB, as the penal code stipulates a maximum prison term of one year for anyone publicly convicted of blaspheming God.[40] While the law does provide a clear definition of what is considered blasphemy, it entails a suppressive autonomy for authorities to criminalize any symbol, drawing, film, song, or any other mode of expression, that would carry messages that are critical of any religion or religious institution, even when these expressions carry the person's own belief.

Lebanese law also includes provisions that impose potential fines or prison terms for sectarian provocation and prohibit anyone from publishing or communicating blasphemous content about the country's officially recognized religions or content that may cause sectarian strife.[41] What can cause a "sectarian strife" is another ill-defined concept that the Lebanese authorities exploit for other purposes, such as limiting freedom of expression or harassing journalists and human rights activists, or sometimes only to feed into clientelism campaigns,[42] as well as for limiting any possible criticism of any religion.

Limitations on FoRB in Lebanon have unfortunately been customized to reflect that if someone is a critic of a religion or has sincere beliefs that contradict the teachings of a religion, whether they belong to it or not, they are at risk of being seen as blasphemous and hence being persecuted. So, put simply, as long as a person's beliefs conform to the general rules of the ones recognized by religions in Lebanon, there may be no limitation on their right to enjoy this freedom. However, when they aren't, individuals may be at risk of being convicted for being blasphemous when they express something against religion, or be accused of fomenting sectarian strife, if they are seen to be criticizing a religion different from the one they belong to.

[39] Lebanon Freethought:" Legal Report: Discrimination Against Atheists in Lebanon";
https://www.freethoughtlebanon.net/atheists-in-lebanon-legal-report/; 2021.
[40] Lebanese Penal Code, 1943; Art. 473.
[41] Article 357 Lebanese Penal Code.
[42] Freedom House: "Freedom in the World: Lebanon";
https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom- world/2021; 2020.

XI. Freedom of Religion and Belief and Obstacles in Lebanon

Lebanese War, Transitional Justice, and Freedom of Religion
Author: Dr. Elias Amin, Lebanese Association for History

Introduction

Many schools of thought have overlooked the significance of religion in conflict transformation within Arab societies, instead emphasizing other factors like societal, economic, and material concerns, often attributing them to colonialism. However, more comprehensive studies reveal that religion not only permeates all aspects of life but also plays a crucial role in shaping major political transitions, conflicts, and dynamics between different states and regions worldwide. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of religion when examining the evolution of societies in the MENA region, particularly in recent decades, if we aim to comprehend the dynamics and challenges of conflicts in the Arab scene.

The Arab world has long been characterized by a system prioritizing the group or the ummah over the individual, religion over the human being, tradition over modernization, transmission over reason, and faith over freedom of conscience, belief, and religion. This paradigm significantly influenced the Lebanese scene, particularly during the events of 1975.

First - The Religious Factor During the Lebanon War

If it is true that the factors of the outbreak of the Lebanon wars and their continuation for nearly fifteen years — between 1975 and 1990 — are many, complex, and combined, then the religious factor was, to a large extent, a primary factor, critical in understanding how this war erupted and comprehending its dynamics.[43] Of course, the Lebanon war had geopolitical, political, and economic reasons, but religious factors have been regarded as the deep cracks that catalyzed the impact of the other factors.

Lebanon's foundation is rooted in the coming together of two major population groups, Christians and Muslims, each encompassing their own unique diversities. The social contract established between these two groups, known as the National Pact, was considered a fundamental building block in shaping the Lebanese formula, which relied on a dynamic interplay between the Constitution and the Pact, recognizing the importance of accommodating the interests and aspirations of both communities.

Whenever this agreement weakens or is violated by either party, Lebanon's stability is compromised. This was evident during the events commonly referred to as the "revolution" of 1958, as well as the significant division that occurred in 1969 regarding the presence of Palestinian arms and the involvement of certain

[43] Farid El-Khazen, The Disintegration of the State in Lebanon (1967-1976), Beirut, Dar Al-Nahar, 2002.

Lebanese factions, particularly the majority of Muslims, left- wing groups, and Arab nationalist parties, in supporting the armed Palestinian resistance originating from Palestinian camps in Lebanon. Regrettably, this situation rapidly evolved into a "revolution" that detrimentally affected the security, stability, prosperity, and sovereignty of the Lebanese state. Subsequently, the events of 1973 and the thirteenth of April 1975 marked the onset of a prolonged period of multifaceted wars involving various actors and encompassing different aspects and scales.[44]

Indeed, if we look at each of these events, we will find that the religious factor has always been fundamental in violating the social contract, and that arguments put forward to justify deviations from this contract are often religious in nature, either directly or indirectly.[45] Examples abound in this regard. It is enough to review the political debate that took place during the summer of 1975, which came a few weeks after the outbreak of the spark, and review the events that followed, to realize the centrality of the religious factor in these wars.[46] On September 18, 1975, the director of Dar Al Iftaa[47] of the Lebanese Republic, Mr. Hussein Al- Quwatli published an article in the Lebanese newspaper As-Safir in which he aimed to express "the Muslim sentiment" in general, and the Sunni one in particular (considering that at the time, he did represent this majority). Al-Quwatli says in the introduction to his published article:[48]

> *"Either the ruler is Muslim, and the rule is Islamic, and he [the Muslim] is satisfied with him and supports him, or the ruler is non-Muslim and the rule is not Islamic, so he rejects and opposes it and works to abolish it with softness or force, openly or secretly. This is a clear position […] It is at the foundation of a Muslim's faith. Any waiver by a Muslim of this position or part of it is necessarily a waiver of his Islam and belief."*

Of course, this logic could not be accepted by the "Christian Leaders" of 1975, whose solution to the problem was secularization or federalism. For the first time, after the proclamation of the State of Greater Lebanon in 1920 and the settlement in 1943, Christians began to think seriously and openly to reconsider the formation of Great Lebanon and started discussing "federal Lebanon."

It is noteworthy to mention that President Charles Helou gained an understanding of the division between Christians and Muslims in 1969 when he signed the Cairo Agreement. He perceived this agreement as the catalyst for the conflict between the two religious groups. President Helou made efforts to prevent the agreement's implementation and, disheartened by the opposition from Muslim leaders, elites, and public opinion; he proposed to the United Nations that Lebanon be divided similarly to the model seen in Cyprus. This model entailed a Christian Lebanon, akin to the Greek Orthodox Cypriots, and an Arab-Muslim Lebanon, mirroring the Muslim Turkish Cypriots.

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[44] Dima DE CLERCK et Stéphane MALSAGNE, Le Liban en guerre 1975-1990, Paris, Belin, 2020.

[45] Pour un nouveau pacte au Liban, Sous la direction de Mouchir Basile AOUN, Charles CHARTOUNI and Antoine FLEYFEL, Paris, Harmattan , 2021.

[46] Amin Elias, Greater Lebanon, from the Magic of Historical Mistake to the Desired Civilizational Role, Beirut, Dar Saer Al-Mashreq, 2020.

[1] It serves as the highest authority for issuing religious rulings (fatwas) within the Sunni Muslim community in the country.

[48]- Hussein Al-Quwatli, "On Formula, Fear and Equality", As-Safir , Beirut, September 18, 1975.

In an interview, P. Antoine Najm puts forward a different approach, suggesting federalism as a system to preserve the unity of Greater Lebanon while providing a platform for Christians and Muslims to coexist. Under this proposed federal system, each party would be free to practice its beliefs, lifestyle, and convictions without interference from the other party. Each federal entity would have the autonomy to enact its own laws on religious practices while still upholding the constitutional protection of freedom of religion and belief.

It is important to consider the Shia community's shifting political stance, particularly after Imam Moussa Al-Sadr's disappearance. Many Shia individuals embraced the Iranian Islamic model following the 1979 revolution. This shift is evident not only in Hezbollah's political charter of 1985, which outlines their objective of integrating Lebanon into the Islamic Republic under the leadership of the Wali Al-Faqih but also in the projects for Islamic constitutions that several Shia imams were involved in.[49] However, it should be noted that some later returned to more moderate positions and moved away from these projects.

This discussion merely scratches the surface of the complex issue surrounding the dominance of the religious factor in the Lebanese conflict and the profound costs of the wars that Lebanon has endured throughout its contemporary history, particularly from 1975 to 1990.

Second - Religion in the Heart of the Identity-Crisis

Arab societies have faced a significant crisis due to their longstanding struggle to establish clear boundaries between the public and private spheres. Over the course of centuries, they have failed to develop structures that can effectively separate the civil public sphere from the personal and intimate sphere, where freedom of conscience should be respected within the limits of public order, security, and stability. Religion, particularly official Islam supported by the Islamic state in its various forms, has played a central role in shaping these societies' social, political, institutional, intellectual, cultural, and educational aspects. Consequently, the state's designation of Islam as the official religion, based on a specific doctrine, has contributed to divisions along religious lines that have persisted for decades. This is particularly noticeable in states with diverse majority-minority dynamics.

Indeed, Arab societies encompass various religious and sectarian groups, such as various Christian denominations, Shiite Muslims, Druze, Alawites, Ismailis, and others.50 While the oumma, a group adhering to official Islam symbolized by the caliphate, represents a prominent faction, other groups have developed distinct identities based on their religious affiliations. This socio-political framework has influenced societies

[49] The open letter that Hezbollah addressed to the oppressed in Lebanon and the world, explaining its perceptions and methodology, February 16, 1985.

[50] It is useful here to return to the writings of the Lebanese historian Wajih Kawtharani , who refuted the concept of power and religion in the Islamic state throughout its history: Wajih Kawtharani , The State and the Caliphate in Arab Discourse, Study and Texts, Beirut, Dar al-Tali'ah, 1996, and Power, Society and Political Action from the History of the Ottoman Empire in Bilad al-Sham, Beirut, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1988. Also see Amin Elias' study on the writings of Wajih Kawtharani , "On Reform and the Modern State, a Reading in the Writings of Wajih Kawtharani ," Wajih Kawtharani , Historian of Structures and Transformations, supervised by Dr. Pascal Lahoud, Baabda, Antonine University Publications, p. 207–228.

throughout the Arab region.[51]

For a long time, Lebanon has been considered to stand out from other countries in its unique characteristics. Unlike its counterparts in the region, Lebanon lacked a dominant religious group. It benefited from a balance between the two main religious groups (Christians and Muslims), which is why the country has established a political system that embraces participatory sectarian representation. This system evolved gradually over time, commencing with the era of Kaimkamiyat and the reforms introduced by Shakib Effendi in 1845. It reached its culmination with the establishment of the Lebanese Republic in May 1926, accompanied by the proclamation of the Lebanese constitution.[52]

Constitutional scholar Edmond Rabbat has extensively explored the topic in his book "The Historical Formation of Political and Constitutional Lebanon."[53] Rabbat's work provides a compelling critique of the historical development of religious sects. Through his comprehensive study, it becomes evident how each sectarian group transforms into an independent entity akin to a nation. Similar to the "official Islamic nation," these groups intertwine spiritual, political, and social affiliations. Religious identity takes precedence in defining the individual within each group, and this religious or sectarian group identity becomes the primary source of personal identification. Professor Antoine Najm calls this phenomenon "communal identity," accurately capturing its essence.[54]

From here, the struggle over identity in Lebanon acquired a religious dimension. This struggle took on a religious dimension during the conflict, as most of the Muslims in Lebanon aligned themselves with Arab nationalism, mistakenly equating it with Islam. They saw Arab nationalism as a unifying force connecting them with the wider Arab-Islamic world. On the other hand, the Christians in Lebanon strongly identified with the idea of a Western-Phoenician Lebanon that set them apart from their Arab-Islamic surroundings. They feared that an emphasis on Arab nationalism would dilute their distinctiveness and jeopardize their rights and autonomy within Lebanon.

This clash of perspectives created a deep divide along religious lines, intensifying existing tensions and exacerbating communal rivalries. The misconception among many Muslims that Arab nationalism equated to Islam led to a sense of unity and shared identity within their community. Conversely, Christians felt increasingly marginalized as their unique Lebanese identity and desire for privacy were disregarded or misunderstood.

[51] Fawaz Traboulsi, History of Lebanon, the event from the Emirate to the Taif Agreement, Beirut, Riyad Al- Rayes for Books and Publishing, 2011.
[52] See , Antoine HOKAYEM, The Genesis of the Constitution of Lebanon, Bayrouth, Les éditions universitaires du Liban, 1996.
[53] Edmond Rabbat, The Historical Formation of Political and Constitutional Lebanon, Translated into Arabic by Hassan Kobeissi, Beirut, Lebanese University Publications, 2002.
[54] Antoine Najm, The Mirage of National Thought and the Reality of Societal Identity, Beirut, Saer Al-Mashreq House, 2021.

Third - How Was the Lebanese War a Catalyzor of Religious Discrimination?

Religious factors were pivotal in the Lebanon war, further exacerbating existing tensions. As a result of the war, religious discrimination among the Lebanese intensified, persisting even today. This discrimination manifested in various forms, including forced displacement, arrests at checkpoints and crossings, kidnappings, targeted killings based on identity, and sectarian employment practices. From 1975 to 1990, numerous attacks driven by religious discrimination occurred, leading to mass displacement in various neighborhoods of Beirut, its suburbs, the mountain region, and parts of the south, such as eastern Sidon. What characterizes these displacement practices is that they were systematized by sectarian militias[55] seeking to create semi- clear sectarian and religious areas where they would exercise their hegemony under the banner of protecting the existence of the religious sect they were affiliated with.[56]

In the aftermath of the war, religious discrimination persisted, albeit in different forms. Sectarian militias played a significant role in perpetuating this discrimination and leveraging their influence within state institutions. They took advantage of the sectarian quota system, which had peaked during this period. These militias gained control over various state facilities and appointments, disregarding competence and merit in favor of sectarian loyalty to their respective leaders. This practice undermined the principles of fair governance and hindered promoting of a merit-based system. Although Article 95 of the Lebanese Constitution provides for parity only for first-class employees, religious and sectarian criteria and party loyalty dominated all selection processes within the Lebanese administration and security institutions.[57]

Fourth - How Can Transitional Justice and History Education Constitute Solutions to Consolidate Peace and Promote FoRB in Lebanon?

A - Transitional Justice

It is likely that one of the most important factors that kept Lebanon in a state of sustainable war since 1969 — with the signature of the Cairo Agreement between the Lebanese state and armed Palestinian organizations in Lebanon— is that the nor State nor individuals who have participated undertook any form of accountability[58] or punishment. Indeed, no work has been done by the State after the Taif Agreement[58] to achieve justice for the victims of the civil war.

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[55] See Joseph Abu Khalil, The Story of the Maronites in War, a biography, Beirut, Publications Company for Distribution and Publishing, 2001, and Igor Timofeev , Kamal Jumblatt, The Man and the Legend , Beirut, Dar Al- Nahar, 2000.

[56] See Samir Khalaf, Lebanon in the Orbit of Violence, A Reading in the Internationalization of Factional Conflicts, Beirut, Dar Al-Nahar, 2002.

[57] The article says: "The rule of sectarian representation is abolished, and specialization and competence in public jobs, the judiciary, military and security institutions, and public and mixed institutions are approved in accordance with the requirements of national reconciliation, with the exception of first-class jobs in them and in what is equivalent to the first category in them. These jobs are equally between Christians and Muslims without allocating any job to any sect while adhering to the principles of competence and competence .

[58] Joe Khoury El-Helou, Charles Helou and the Cairo Agreement, Facts and Secrets , Beirut, Dar Saer Al-Mashreq, 2018.

This highlights the importance of transitional justice in helping victims and the population that has directly endured war to move from a state of conflict to a state of recovery and build a collective memory that allows moving forward toward building peace. And if the definition of transitional justice is "a mechanism for the democratic transition of societies from the stage of the war to the stage of peace based on reconciliation and preserving the rights of the affected groups based on the principles of truth and dignity, and intending to build a state of law, human rights, social justice, and sustainable development,"[60] then everything that happened in Lebanon after The year 1990 went in the opposite direction to the spirit of this mechanism.[61]

Perpetrators were exempted from accountability. What is more, those among them who were loyal to the Syrian tutelage authority, which was obligated to implement the Taif Agreement by the Arab and international community, were rewarded with positions of power. The Syrian authority sponsored introducing these people —militia leaders or businessmen with strong regional or international ties for most of them[62]— into the state and the introduction of their followers into its administration and security institutions. Instead of the members of militias and factions aligning themselves with the laws and established traditions of the state, many of them, driven by a non- state mentality or even animosity towards the state and its principles, transformed the state into a network resembling a mafia. This network deviated from the concept of serving the common good and instead focused on evading accountability and prioritizing private interests over the public interest. They disregarded laws, perpetuated injustice, nurtured corruption in both individuals and society, and fostered organized crime. To deceive the public, they resorted to bribes and gifts, while also manipulating public opinion through media outlets that were compromised and under their influence.

Certainly, extensive discussions revolve around the war crimes perpetrated in Lebanon, as the lingering tension continues to grip the nation. There is a pervasive fear among the population that even minor incidents could escalate into something far more severe, regardless of the underlying cause. However, it is undeniable that this situation could have been averted if Lebanon had implemented transitional justice mechanisms during the post-1990 nation-building process. Such mechanisms would have effectively prevented those responsible for instigating the war from assuming positions of power within the country. Furthermore, the establishment of a sustainable system of justice, supported by an independent judiciary, is imperative to safeguard the rights and uphold the dignity of the Lebanese people.

B - Teaching History, How Can it Help?

Education serves as a fundamental catalyst for progress, stability, and peace. While applied sciences are crucial for equipping individuals with the necessary life and professional skills to drive societal development, the humanities hold significant value in shaping the character traits of individuals who can effectively meet the demands of their society and the broader global community. Without education, it becomes exceedingly challenging to achieve meaningful advancements and establish a stable and harmonious society. By

[59] The National Accord Document (known as the Taif Agreement) in 1989, on the basis of which constitutional amendments were approved in 1990.
[60] Azza H. Suleiman, "Transitional Justice in Lebanon... Transition to the Unknown", Transitional Justice in Lebanon... Transition to the Unknown - Azza H. Suleiman - 180 Post , link accessed March 30, 2023.
[61] Ibid.
[62] See Albert Mansour's book , The Coup Against Taif, Beirut, Dar Al-Jadeed, 1993, and Nizar Younes' book, The Pact or Independence, Taif That Unknown, Beirut, Dar Sa'ir Al-Mashreq, 2021.

emphasizing the humanities, education cultivates individuals who possess not only technical expertise but also a broader perspective on societal challenges. This multidimensional approach enables them to address the needs of their communities and the world at large. The humanities provide individuals with the capacity to understand different perspectives, engage in meaningful dialogue, and contribute to ethical decision-making.

History, as a human science and a field of knowledge, occupies an essential position within the basket of human sciences, and its teaching contributes to building the features of this person, and thus building a society capable of crossing from a state of conflict to a state of peace, from a state of underdevelopment to a state of development, and from a state of marginality to a state of participation in the universal civilizational progress. Hence, it has become necessary in Lebanon to take a serious path to develop history education in Lebanon according to an approach based on considering this subject, in school and university education, as a "discipline" through which a person, his features, and capabilities are built, and not as a mere narrative or story officially passed down through the generations.

By embracing history as an integral subject in schools, we can free it from the burdens unfairly placed upon it. Previously, history was manipulated under the guise of melting the diverse Lebanese society, and it was often politicized to serve the interests of those in power, who sought to perpetuate their control over the people. However, reclaiming history in education can become a powerful tool for nurturing students' growth and abilities while imparting essential human and citizenship values without overtly stating them.

When history is taught in schools, it should not be about indoctrinating students or enforcing a predetermined narrative to be memorized. Instead, it should be a means of cultivating students' critical thinking skills and shaping their character indirectly. By examining historical events, individuals develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of human experiences, including diverse perspectives and the struggles faced by different groups throughout history.

Indeed, history offers valuable lessons on diversity and the acceptance of others. By studying the experiences of different cultures, societies, and civilizations, students gain a broader perspective on the richness of human diversity. They learn to appreciate and respect various ethnicities, religions, and belief systems, fostering a spirit of inclusivity and tolerance. History teaches students that differences should be celebrated rather than feared, promoting a society where diversity is valued and accepted.

Additionally, history is crucial in promoting FoRB: by studying the past, students learn about the struggles individuals and communities face in their pursuit of religious freedom. They understand the importance of protecting the rights of individuals to practice their faith or hold their beliefs without discrimination or persecution. History serves as a reminder of the significance of safeguarding religious freedom as a fundamental human right.

When history is approached in this manner as a subject that develops critical thinking, empathy, and an appreciation for diversity, it becomes a powerful tool for building informed and responsible citizens. It equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to challenge false narratives, question authority, and actively participate in shaping a more just and inclusive society.
Thus, instead of the history teacher entering the classroom, taking a history book from his bag, and putting the title of the lesson on the board so that his students can hear the lesson imposingly, the teacher, according to this new approach, will enter the classroom with a significant amount of historical documents (historical

text, photos, videos, drawings, graffiti, money, etc...) and a plan of activities. One might ask, what will be put on the board instead of the lesson's title? The title is replaced by an inquiry question reflecting a historical concept: causation, change and continuity, diversity, historical significance, etc.

And the moment the professor puts his question on the board, distributes his documents to his students, dividing them into joint work teams according to activities designed to answer the inquiry question, he will have transformed his class into a workshop, or rather to a journey, through which student's skills are developed in research, investigation, reading and analyzing historical documents, comparing and crossing them with each other, and ensuring their reliability, leading to the extraction of historical information and historical evidence that answers the investigation question.

More than this, if we take the whole process, we will have transformed the history class from a lecture by the star professor in which the students are only non-interacting recipients to a workshop in which the students become the stars, turning into investigators. We even say "young historians" who are all working under the supervision of their teacher who has a broad culture and high efficiency in class management and activities. [63]

Conclusion

Instead of teaching our students a single narrative to memorize, students themselves will build their historical knowledge based on the historical documents in their hands. Thus, instead of the one imposed narrative, we will have enough for each student to build his knowledge and historical narrative, reflecting the saturated historical reality with multiple angles and perspectives.

It is this individual with the skills, human values, citizenship, and historical culture that he acquired in school during the history class who will be able to build and maintain a new social contract between the Lebanese and to build sustainable stability and peace, bring about prosperity and development, and make Lebanon a space for encounter, interaction with the universal human civilization and participate in its development and criticism. When building this human-citizen- individual-person, building the better citizens of tomorrow becomes realistic and possible.

The Lebanese Association for History urges all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, history educators, historians, social scientists, education experts, and policymakers, to embark on a transformative journey to restore the human essence of history. This can be achieved by designing a comprehensive and

[63] In this regard, see Towards a New Path for the Development of History Education in Lebanon, the conclusions and recommendations of the conference "Chat in Transformations and Approaches to History Education in Lebanon" (coordinated by Dr. Amin Elias), Beirut, publications of the Lebanese Association for History, with the participation of the Lebanese Center for Studies, and the Peace Building Project in Lebanon. The United Nations and the Lebanese American University, 2022.
Towards a New Path in History Education in Lebanon, Summaries and Recommendations of the Conference "Talks about the Trends and Approaches for History Education in Lebanon 2021"", Conference Moderator and Coordinator Dr. Amin ELIAS, Beirut, Lebanese Association for History (LAH), with the partnership of the Peace Building Fund UNDP, Center for Lebanese Studies, and Lebanese American University, 2022.

inclusive curriculum that reflects the rich tapestry of Lebanese diversity and encompasses the narratives of all individuals rather than perpetuating a one-sided account propagated by different factions to their respective communities. Consequently, it is crucial to develop a new history textbook that incorporates these diverse narratives, aiming to cultivate a society of enlightened individuals who are open-minded and aware. It is of utmost importance that schools and universities in Lebanon assume the role of safeguarding the envisioned civilized Lebanon —a Lebanon characterized by its people, peace, and prosperity. These educational institutions should actively contribute to the construction of modern human civilization by fostering an environment that encourages critical thinking, respect for diversity, and the pursuit of knowledge. By instilling these values and principles in the hearts and minds of the younger generation, Lebanon can aspire to create a society that embodies the ideals of progress, harmony, and human advancement.

Secularism vs. Sectarianism, Where Does Lebanon Fall?

Author: Dr. Elie El Hindy

Introduction: The Constitutional System in Lebanon

As presented in previous chapters, Lebanon is indeed one of the most diverse countries in the region. However, Lebanon's diversity goes beyond the recognized sects to include several non- recognized religious groups like the Baha'i, Ahmadi, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Buddhists (mostly migrant workers). It also has several ethnic groups that are either recognized as sects (recognizing their religious belonging only), like the Armenians, Assyrians, Syriacs, and Copts, or not recognized at all, like the Turkoman, Kurds, or Cherkasian.[64]

By virtue of its diversity and historical experience, Lebanon was the only country in the region that has attempted a non-adversarial political system that accommodates its different components and the only country that rejected giving the state an exclusive identity, be it ethnic or religious. Thus, the first constitution of 1926, the National Pact of 1943, and the amendments introduced by the Taef agreement in 1989 all adopted the clear separation between religious authority and political authority, i.e., a clearly secular state. The Lebanese Constitution of 1926, along with its subsequent amendments, unequivocally upholds the rights and freedoms of every Lebanese citizen. It emphasizes equality before the law, ensuring everyone is treated fairly. The Constitution also firmly commits, in Article 9, to safeguarding Freedom of Belief for everyone, recognizing the state's duty to ensure the exercise of religious practices.

However, by virtue of that same diversity and historical experience, the founding fathers and drafters of the Constitution understood very well the need to recognize the presence and role of the religious groups who preexisted in the formation of the Lebanese state. Indeed, these groups carried a measurable social, cultural, educational, and even political heritage, beyond the religious tradition they represent. The result was a power-sharing system[65] based on the foundational premises that no sect can rule the country without or against the others and that some privileges that the sects had will be recognized and allowed to continue in particular areas within the constitutional framework of the newly established secular republic (El Khoury, 1983; Dahir, 1984; Firro, 2003; El Solh, 2004).[66]

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[64] The 18 recognised sects are: 12 Christian sects – Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Assyrian, Chaldean, Latin, Evangelical, Copts, 5 Muslim – Sunni, Shiite, Druze, Alawites and Ismaili, as well as Judaism with 5,635 members still registered, though only a few dozens actually live there. There is a significant Kurdish population (~50,000) in Lebanon, notably in Beirut, but they are considered as part of the Sunni group and are not recognised as a separate ethnic group (Meho, 2002). Chamie (1980) presents a good descriptive exploration of the Lebanese religious groups. Table 3 at the end of this section presents a review of all the sects and their changing numbers over the years.

[65] The power sharing resulting from the National Pact divided the top positions among the two main groups and set a quota for parliamentary representation of 6 Christians to every five Muslims as per the demographic statistics of 1932.

[66] Al Hindy, Elie (2020), Lebanon's Consociational Democracy: A Blessing or a Curse, in Revisiting the path of Lebanon over the past 100 years: Analysis of different constitutional aspects of the state, Notre Dame University and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Before discussing Lebanese secularism any further, it is essential to point out the above-mentioned specific areas in which the constitution recognizes religious groups' roles and/or privileges. These areas are presented and discussed in the following paragraphs.

Political Representation

Articles 22–24 and 95 of the Constitution — which concern the legislative and executive branches, respectively — have served as the basis for the development of the whole political sectarianism system and have given way to manipulation, misinterpretation, and mis-implementation. Article 24 simply left the distribution of seats in the parliament to the "electoral laws in effect."[67] In contrast, Articles 22 and 23 provided that each (recognized) sect would be represented in the Senate until canceled in 1947.

Indeed, specific guidelines in the Taef agreement foresaw that seats would be distributed exclusively and in equal numbers to Christians and Muslims, ensuring a proportional representation of all sects and regions. However, this was clearly stated as a temporary measure, and Article 22 was re-introduced, stating the creation of a Senate for representing religious groups. At the same time, the Parliament should be completely secular.

Furthermore, article 95 —added as part of the Taef agreement— lays down the establishment of the National Committee for Countering Sectarianism in the hope of one day losing the need for political sectarianism (i.e., the allocation of political positions to the different sects). The article does not specify a time frame for countering sectarianism; on the other hand specifies that until this is achieved, *"religious groups should be represented fairly in the formation of any cabinet"* and in the first-level administrative positions. However, it is significant to note that Article 95 also clearly states that no position can be restricted to one group and that all appointments must adhere to the criteria of merit and expertise.

From the above, it is clear that the intention of the legislator and thus the political powers in Lebanon to insist on the secular nature of the political system, notably when it comes to the separation of religion and politics and on the people being the sole source of legitimacy (article d of the preamble). However, the state recognizes religious groups' presence and role, ensuring their fair representation and participation in the political process. As per the constitution, this special recognition should be restricted to the Senate and should

[67] Article 24 of the Lebanese Constitution, 1926:
"The Chamber of Deputies shall be composed of elected members; their number and the method of their election shall be determined by the electoral laws in effect. Until such time as the Chamber enacts new electoral laws on a non-confessional basis, the distribution of seats shall be according to the following principles:
a. Equal representation between Christians and Muslims.
b. Proportional representation among the confessional groups within each of the two religious communities.
c. Proportional representation among geographic regions.
Exceptionally, and for one time only, the seats that are currently vacant, as well as the new seats that have been established by law, shall be filled by appointment, all at once, and by a two thirds majority of the Government of National Unity. This is to establish equality between Christians and Muslims as stipulated in the Document of National Accord. The electoral laws shall specify the details regarding the implementation of this clause."

not contradict basic democratic norms such as the rule of the political majority, accountability, merit, and proper functioning of state institutions.

Veto Power

Article 19 in the Constitution (as amended by the Taef agreement) mentions the formation of the Constitutional Council. It gives the heads of the "recognized" religious sects the right to file complaints with the Council against any law that, according to them, diminishes/limits/constrains their freedom, rights, and privileges in particular areas: personal status laws, freedom of religion and belief, freedom of religious education.
A great power as it is, giving heads of religious sects a veto power does not diminish the secular nature of the Lebanese state and political system because the Constitution limits the practice of this power to peculiar topics (which is common and even in good practice in plural societies), and puts it within the framework of the Lebanese laws and judicial branch, thus respecting the separation of religion and government and reconfirming the people (through the Parliament) as the only source of legitimacy and of power, not any of the religious institution or any of their divine laws/regulations.

Personal Status Laws

While Article 9 of the Constitution offers itself as a strong affirmation of FoRB, it also challenges the secularism of the State. Indeed, it is stipulated in its second part that the State shall also guarantee Lebanese from different religious groups the "right to have their own personal status and religious interests." Understandably, constitutional articles cannot (and probably should not) go into further details, however using general terms like "respect" and "religious interests" and even "personal status" blurs the meaning and opens the door to different interpretations of the relation between the Parliament as the only legislative authority and the civil judicial system on one side, and the religious institutions and religious courts on the other.

Today, in regulating their personal status, the Lebanese men and women are subject to 15 different religious legal systems affiliated with the sects, in a clear defiance of the concepts of equality before the law, citizenry and human rights, that are clearly stipulated in the Constitution. But even this exceptional measure does not make Lebanon less secular. In fact, the respect of religious personal status laws and the acknowledgement of their rulings as legitimate is not in itself the problem. Many states around the world, and out of respect to freedom of belief, do regulate religious personal status and authorize religious leaders to perform legally binding proceedings[68]. In short, the constitutional right guaranteed to the various religious sects to legislate their own personal status laws is not an absolute or exclusive right.

Furthermore, the understanding in Lebanon as per the law of April 2nd, 1951 is that any religious personal status regulations needs to be approved by the Lebanese Parliament to become a law and enter into force. In a constitutional sense, the Lebanese Parliament did not and cannot give up its exclusive right of legislation; thus, Article 9 gives religious groups the right to have their own personal status laws passed by the Parliament and applicable to the people who are part of these groups.[69]

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[68] Ferrari, Silvio (2022), Religiously Based Personal Status Laws and Management of Diversity in Europe, Law and Business, Vol. 25, pp. 1-15
[69] Hajal, Chady (2022), The legislative authority in personal status laws, between democracy and sectarianism, in Women's rights in religious personal status laws in Lebanon, Adyan Foundation, pp. 192-198

On the other hand, as per (Resolution 60/L.R. of March 13th, 1936, the Parliament is obligated to legislate a law for any group who wishes to have its own regulations, and to enact a civil law for all those who do not wish to follow either a religious group or what it called "community under ordinary law", something that it never has since 1926. Resolution 60/L.R. also organizes the cases of sect change among the Lebanese, and recognized civil marriages concluded between Lebanese abroad. It provides for the establishment of a Supreme Judicial Court tasked with settling disputes that arise among religious personal status courts, or between these courts and civil courts.[70]

Other Privileges

Article 10 of the Constitution stipulates the right of sects to: "establish their own schools, provided that they do so in accordance with the general regulations issued by the state regarding public knowledge." While this causes some confusion, it at least clearly sets one single authority that can issue regulations, and forces the religious educational institutions to abide by it. While this is not the object of this chapter, it is worth noting that several studies on the influence of religious institutions on the official public curriculum (and on education in general) have shown that.

Finally, and as implicitly under stood from Article 9 and other stipulations of the Constitution, the sects also enjoy internal autonomy and control over their own internal affairs, in the sense that the state has no control over the appointments of religious leaders and/or the management of the endowments, or internal regulations. This privilege has been a trait of the Millet system implemented in the Ottoman Empire for centuries. It is also common in most democratic secular countries where the state adopts a neutral position towards religions and allows them to manage their affairs. It is a privilege limited by the stipulations of Lebanese laws and human rights standards.

Revisiting the Constitutional Framework

From the above review of the Lebanese constitutional and legal framework, it becomes clear that Lebanon has a clear separation of religious authority from political authority and that only the Lebanese people, and no divine or religious authority, is the source of power. This is, in fact, the essence of secularism. Thus it is safe to say that Lebanon is indeed a secular democracy founded on the rule of law, equality among its citizens, and human rights and freedoms, including very specifically an "absolute freedom of belief."

However, the Lebanese constitutional and legal framework presents the state as one that adopts diversity as a core value and accepts its role in protecting freedoms, including Freedom of Belief, almost as "raison d'être." The Constitution gives proper recognition to the different religious and sectarian groups and acknowledges their role not only in the private sphere but also in the public sphere, including the participation in decision-making (representative parliament and government), the right to manage their internal affairs, the privilege to have their own personal status implemented on their followers and to have their own educational institutions, and to recourse to the state (through the Constitutional Council) to plead for the abrogation of any law that

[70] Zaiter, M. & Bou Akl, C. (2022), Lebanon's constitutional system and the personal jurisdiction of sects, in Women's rights in religious personal status laws in Lebanon, Adyan Foundation, pp. 5-32

threatens the aforementioned privileges and rights.

Thus, it is safe to say that the power (rights and privileges), given by the State, to the sects was primarily aimed at promoting diversity and equality between sects. It does not mean at all the withdrawal of the state, in its legislative, executive, and judicial institutions, from performing its role in all fields of governance or its duty of monitoring the extent to which the practice of these religious privileges conforms to public order and constitutional and legal principles —and primarily to human rights of individuals —, in line with the international obligations of Lebanon enshrined in the preamble to the Constitution.

The state is the only authority, especially in a democratic parliamentary system, tasked to establish and maintain equality by securing a balance between public rights and freedoms of every individual on the one hand and the interests of the different groups on the other. The state has a paramount duty to monitor personal status laws issued by sects as per their mandate. It should also constitute the fundamental guarantee for protecting the foundations of democracy, freedom, and equality, through its legislative and oversight powers, and it may not, therefore, under any circumstances relinquish this role to any party or authority.
The problem thus lies not in the privileges given to the sects but in the failure of the state and its constitutional institutions to fulfill the duty of providing the necessary protection and fair treatment to all its citizens. On the one hand, the State relinquished its duties and powers to sectarian and religious authorities and political parties, and leaders who mastered using sectarian diversity for their own benefit and permanence.
In conclusion, the most crucial step to be achieved is for the Lebanese to rediscover the essence of the constitution as the "founding fathers" intended and to work on establishing solid and secular state institutions. It is only such a state that can guarantee the proper functioning of Lebanon's democratic model that is not imported as a standard one-size-fits-all model but is tailored and adapted to its realities and context. Lebanon is a secular state that embraces and promotes religious diversity, ensuring that the different religious groups live harmoniously under the rule of law and inclusive citizenship.

XII. Violations of Freedom of Religion and Belief 2020-2022

Author: ALEF – Act for Human Rights

Introduction

As previously stated, religious groups in Lebanon are free to practice their faith, hold religious ceremonies and assemble freely under the guarantee and the protection of the State. However, people belonging to groups which are not recognized, such as Buddhists, Ahmadis, Jehova's witnesses, Buddhists, Hindus, and several Protestant groups, are still able to practice their religion but do not enjoy many of the rights and privileges that recognized groups do. They are not afforded standing in the courts, do not qualify for government positions, and can't get married, divorced, or inherit property since, in the absence of civil courts for personal status matters, religious groups are in charge of these questions. To undertake formal proceedings, they must resort to the courts of recognized groups or leave the country to access courts elsewhere. Several studies have shown that members of unrecognized groups are more vulnerable to harassment from security forces. Fear of persecution has also driven these unrecognized religious groups to perform their rituals behind closed doors and forced them to forego other traditions.[71]

Impact of the Various Crisis on FoRB in Lebanon

The COVID-19 Crisis

Religious diversity in Lebanon, a country known for its numerous religious groups, has been a dually positive and negative factor. Diverse views have emerged within Lebanese society and have driven communities apart, at a sectarian and secular-sectarian level. Indeed, since October 2019, religious and political tensions among the Lebanese have been on the rise, exacerbating political, regional, and economic fractures. The instability looming in Lebanon since the October protests has led Lebanese citizens and groups to become more vocal and more violent by the day. Further, the economic crisis, the Beirut blast, and the COVID-19 pandemic have had a huge impact on the current context, and have been a catalyst for discrimination and tension between Lebanese citizens.

The protests that erupted towards the end of 2019, were the direct result of years of rampant corruption, lack of justice and accountability on the part of the political establishment, neglect and the non-existence of public policies. In addition, the economic crisis, which intensified in October, further weakened the status quo between the various religious communities and political forces on one hand, while reinforcing hate speech, discrimination, and inter-community tensions on the other hand. Coupled with the Beirut port explosion,

[71] Threats to Civic Space: Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review https://alefliban.org/publications/threats-to-civic-space-submission-to-the-un-universal-periodic-review/

which led to thousands of injuries and hundreds of deaths, leaving many homeless or seeking emigration, the Lebanese people were faced with devastation and built-up anger. To aggravate the situation even more, the first COVID-19 case was detected on February 21st, 2020.[72] Certainly, the pandemic added more pressure and contributed to the rise of civil unrest, civil disobedience, and discrimination.

At the start of the pandemic, many criticized the authorities for not closing the border with Syria early on and not stopping international flights, especially from COVID-19 epicenters such as Italy and Iran. Notably, stereotypical speech online against the Shia community was intensified, accusing them of bringing the disease to the country.[73] Unfortunately, the discrimination and stigmatization based on religion exacerbate polarization, which, in turn, strengthens sectarian parties at the expense of the unity of the state.

Fueling Inequalities and Polirization of Services

On the other hand, Hezbollah and Amal, the main Shia political parties, organized localized responses to the crisis by deploying numerous party members. They provided essential resources such as equipment, ambulances, and healthcare facilities and deployed doctors and nurses in the suburbs of Beirut, the South, and the Bekaa region. However, this support primarily benefitted the supporters of Hezbollah and Amal, leading to frustration among the rest of the population and deepening their mistrust of the government. Consequently, these response efforts further divided and segregated citizens along political lines. Additionally, while many Lebanese citizens initially followed the guidelines outlined by the Ministry of Public Health during the pandemic, others disregarded them, instead adhering to measures dictated by their political leaders.
The pandemic has affected all aspects of modern life, and religious practices were not spared. Lebanese people are commonly religious, meaning religious traditions are primordial in people's lives. With the rise in COVID-19 cases, the Lebanese authorities implemented measures to impose social distancing through curfews, lockdowns, fines, etc. However, they failed to release any official decision regarding religious activities or ceremonies (including weddings) for six months since the pandemic began, despite the many warnings from medical experts and doctors, which were heavily criticized.

In 2020, the episcopal authorities of the Maronite Church in Bkerke (Maronite), Dar al-Fatwa (Sunni), and the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council decided not to suspend religious ceremonies. Meanwhile, the Lebanese state was closing schools and universities following the decision of the Lebanese government. Yet, the authorities could not enforce regulations on religious practices, delegating such issues to the religious leadership.[74]

With the first lockdowns of 2020, religious figures were given the authority to decide on whether or not they would hold religious ceremonies and celebrations. Consequently, pictures and videos of weddings or funerals

[72] GardaWorld (2020, February 21). Lebanon first case of coronavirus (COVID-19) confirmed. Retrieved from https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/316346/lebanon-first-case-of-coronavirus-covid-19-confirmed- february-21
[73] The Washington Institute (2020, March 31). Hezbollah's Corona Quagmire: An Opportunity to Empower the LAF. Retrieved from https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollahs-corona-quagmire-opportunity- empower-laf
[74] Relief Web (2020, April 24). Engaging religious leaders in the fight against COVID-19. Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/engaging-religious-leaders-fight-against-covid-19

circulated and ignited hate speech on social media.[75] Such ceremonies triggered sectarian tensions between people of different faiths, exposing how fragile the peace and stability are between different sects, as they could be triggered and turn on each other at any sign of trouble, resulting, to say the least, in excessive hate speech online.

Many ceremonies, mainly weddings and funerals, have been infection vectors. On several occasions, the authorities and the Lebanese Red Cross released reports and statements showing that several individuals were infected after attending a wedding or funeral ceremony.[76] These reports, in addition to pictures and videos of weddings on social media, led many to clash online. In fact, hate speech against believers who did not cancel or postpone their weddings until after the pandemic became very common during this period, and discussions around religious ceremonies triggered tensions between people who held different views, even within the same religious group.[77]

But despite maintaining the celebration of religious ceremonies, religious authorities implemented other measures to overcome the pandemic. For example, many churches and mosques restricted access to their premises by reducing the number of people allowed in the buildings and even organizing prayers online or outdoors. Many priests organized ceremonies online for schools, while Sheikhs used empty fields or spaces to organize outdoor prayers, thus promoting and ensuring social distancing.[78]

The Economic Crisis

The COVID-19 crisis is not the only factor that altered believers' celebration of religious ceremonies. As a matter of fact, the economic crisis also significantly affected people's ability to attend religious ceremonies, affecting their right to manifest and practice their religion. Transportation costs have been skyrocketing, leaving many unable to pay for fuel or even taxis since filling up the car with fuel costs more than the monthly minimum wage. Without viable or sufficient public transportation, citizens have had to sell their cars and rely on tuk-tuks and bikes.[79] This made trips to the church or mosque an additional burden that believers and individuals who practice their religion could not afford.

[75] Arab News (2020, August 4). Lebanon's former beauty queen throws wedding party amid ban. Retrived from https://www.arabnews.com/node/1713601/session_trace/session_trace/metrics/aggregate

[76] US News (2020, July 11). Lebanon records new coronavirus infection high. Retrieved from https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-07-11/lebanon-records-new-coronavirus-infection-high

[77] Al-ain (2020, August 2). An exception for a wedding ceremony triggers online clash between Lebanese People. Retrieved from https://al-ain.com/article/weddings-corona-lebanon

[78] The National (2020, May 11). Coronavirus forces change to religious traditions in Lebanon. Retrieved from https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/coronavirus-forces-change-to-religious-traditions-in-lebanon-1.991138

[79] The Tahir Institute (2022, September 21). Delivering Change: Responding to Lebanon's Fuel Crisis with Innovation. Retrieved from https://timep.org/2022/09/21/delivering-change-responding-to-lebanons-fuel-crisis-with- innovation/

Conclusion

Freedom of Religion and Belief has been weakened by the multiple crises that Lebanon has undergone. These crises drove the rise of inter-communal tensions between Lebanese citizens. Lebanese citizens became increasingly violent towards each other, which encouraged discrimination and stigmatization based on religion. Sectarian parties took advantage of this escalation to their interests, further fracturing national unity. With measures "to fight" COVID-19, Lebanese authorities controlled religious activities and ceremonies, including weddings. As this decision was heavily criticized, many believers continued to hold religious celebrations, even though they were vectors of the infection. Therefore, these ceremonies triggered sectarian tensions between people of different faiths.

Thus, the economic crisis affected people's ability to attend religious ceremonies and their right to manifest and practice their religion. Transportation costs have risen considerably, and insufficient public transportation made trips to churches or mosques more challenging than ever.

Moreover, it is a struggle for people from groups not recognized as an official religion in Lebanon to practice their faith. They do not enjoy many rights and privileges recognized groups enjoy, like getting married, divorced, or inheriting property, as there are no civil courts for personal status. The fear of persecution by Lebanese authorities drives these unrecognized religious groups to perform their rituals behind closed doors and, sometimes, give up their traditions.

XIII. Education and Freedom of Religion and Belief

Education and Freedom of Religion and Belief, Lessons Learned from the National Working Group Roundtable on Freedom of Religion and Belief
Author: Working Group Joint Analysis Report

The Lebanese Schooling System

The Lebanese education system has been significantly influenced by various religious denominations emblematic of the country's cultural and social fabric. The French mandate lasted until 1943 and played a prominent role in shaping the system. Before the civil war, the educational landscape in Lebanon was characterized by the dominance of each religion, as each had their own school system, rather than a unified national approach; the aftermath of the war of 1975 left an economic crisis and an urgent need for change. Consequently, reforming the education system has been pivotal in the longstanding efforts to unify the country.

The formal inception of the education reform initiative in Lebanon can be traced back to the adoption of the Taef Agreement, which not only brought an end to the civil war in 1989 but also enshrined several objectives aimed at improving the educational sector. These objectives included ensuring that education is accessible to all and making elementary education mandatory. Furthermore, the agreement emphasized the importance of upholding the right to education within general laws and regulations. The agreement also called for protecting private education and strengthening state control over private schools and textbooks. Lastly, the agreement called for the review and development of curricula to foster national unity, spiritual and cultural openness, and a sense of shared history and national identity.

After the Taef Agreement, the Lebanese government initiated a comprehensive reorganization of the education sector in 1995. The new curricula were completed in 1997 and implemented in the same year, with full implementation achieved by 2001. It should be noted that the pre-war curricula and teaching materials issued between 1968 and 1971 lacked coherence and substance. Therefore, the 1997 curriculum reform was considered a significant breakthrough. Introducing new subjects such as computer studies, technology, social studies, economics, and a second foreign language, along with a translation, represented a significant modernization of academic content. Most importantly, the curriculum emphasized student-centered teaching, cooperative living, and promoting Lebanese-Arab identity.

Despite the importance of these reforms, their implementation could have been more successful. For example, although the number of subjects was increased, teacher training programs were not offered, making it challenging to ensure that the new curricula were not taught using traditional, teacher-centered methods.

The Lebanese education system exhibits a substantial prevalence of private schools. These schools are classified into three categories: public schools, tuition-free private schools for preschool and elementary levels supported by government funds, and fee-based private schools that individuals, associations, or religious groups can own. Despite the varied categories of schools, the Lebanese Ministry of Education for Youth and Sport regulates all public or private schools. The licensing requirement imposed by the Ministry

on private schools and the need for unified examinations at the end of the secondary cycle mandate that private schools adhere to the government curricula in pre-university education to a significant extent.

Education of Religions at Schools

Following the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), the tremendous social fragility that Lebanon was experiencing in 1990 had a significant impact on both formal and informal education.[80] In Lebanon, where schools are known for their religious diversity, young students most likely encounter one of two behaviors: either total disregard for their religious beliefs or, more commonly, an education aimed solely at developing their birth-acquired confessional identity.[81] This is influenced by Article 10[82] of the Lebanese Constitution, which grants religious denominations the right to open their private schools and gives them freedom in the content of their programs, particularly religious education, as long as they abide by general national guidelines. Since then, many experts, researchers, civil society organizations, and think tanks have been calling for reforming the country's curriculum to encourage students' tolerance for diversity.[83] However, these efforts have not yielded any concrete response or support for change.

Historically, private schools overwhelmingly depended on religious institutions, which have the right to open their schools. Moreover, the plurality of religious institutions resulted in various educational institutions in the country, each following its religious system.[84] Besides, long before public schools, private schools incepted by foreign religious missions (French, Anglo-Saxon, German, and Italian) were the first to set anchor, followed by a few local and secular foreign schools.

The Schooling System in Lebanon

The majority of the students in Lebanon are enrolled in private schools (nearly two-thirds in 2018).[85] Many families prefer private schools because of the various advantages they offer on a curriculum and infrastructural level, but these are not the only factors; many parents prefer private schools because they offer a specific religious education.[86]

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[80] Faten Ghosn and Amal Khoury: "Lebanon after the Civil War: Peace or Illusion of Peace?", https://www.jstor.org/stable/23012171?seq=1.
[81] ALEF – Act for Human Rights: "Citizenship and Diversity: A Selective Teaching of Notions", https://alefliban.org/publications/diversity-citizenship-a-selective-teaching-of-notions/, 15 September 2021.
[82] Lebanese Constitution, 1926, Article 10: "Education shall be free insofar as it is not contrary to public order and morals and does not affect the dignity of any religions or sects. There shall be no violation of the right of religious communities to have their schools provided they follow the general rules issued by the state regulating public instruction."
[83] Ibid. 84.
[84] Education State University: "Lebanon Educational System – Overview," https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/827/Lebanon-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.
[85] BankMed: "Analysis of Lebanon's Education Sector", https://www.bankmed.com.lb/BOMedia/subservices/categories/News/20150515170635891.pdf.
[86] Helen Tannous: "Religious Diversity and the Future of Education in Lebanon", https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/83022415.pdf.

Religious entities are the leading investors in private schools: religiously affiliated schools represent 41.1% of private schools and 34% of all schools in Lebanon.[87] Confessional schools first appeared in Lebanon during the Ottoman-French Concordat of 1516. Suleiman the Great's Ottoman rule allowed France to introduce Western educational philosophies to the Middle East. Later, during the reign of Ibrahim Bacha (1831-1840), Jesuits and Protestants established the first missionary schools. Finally, confessional schools grew in popularity during the French mandate in Lebanon (1920-1943), when religious communities were given the responsibility to provide education.[88]

Religion, Citizenship, and Diversity, as Taught in Schools

Since most private schools are affiliated with specific sects or religious institutions, this directly influences how religion is taught in each institution. Even public schools, which are supposed to be neutral and unaffiliated, generally follow the majority religion of the region in which they are located.[89] As a result, notions of diversity and citizenship are quasi-non-existent in education systems. Not only are they not taught and do not lie in the heart of the curriculum, but the fact that a school teaches only its religion does not foster the concept of diversity in students' minds.[90]

Most schools choose to teach only the religion with which the school is affiliated, namely one of the 18 officially recognized sects, regardless of their students' religion(s), despite it being common to have multireligious student bodies. Instead, students are given the option of either attending the catechesis class or engaging in another activity in the meantime. Undoubtedly, Teaching the religion to which the school is linked is not always discriminatory to children's FoRB. However, students born from a particular religion and culture eventually learn the religion that the school promotes, which could be different from their own, and often without necessarily being given the space to discuss their religion or religious perspectives with their classmates.[91]

The Educational Center for Research and Development launched the "new school curriculum" in September 1998, training 16 000 public school teachers and 6 000 private school teachers on the new curriculum's methods and principles.[92] Even though the decree clearly states the need for reform every four years, no reforms have ever been implemented.

[87] ALEF – Act for Human Rights: "Citizenship and Diversity: A Selective Teaching of Notions", https://alefliban.org/publications/diversity-citizenship-a-selective-teaching-of-notions/, 15 September 2021.
[88] Daniel Cervan: "Religion in Education and Conflict: Lebanon and Northern Ireland Compared", https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/20006/1/Cervan_Daniel_2011_thesis.pdf.
[89] Relief Web: "Schools Plant Seeds of Sectarianism", https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/schools-plant-seeds- sectarianism.
[90] Ibid. 7.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Education International: "Situation Analysis of Education in Lebanon," http://download.ei- ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/EI-FES_Report_Lebanon.pdf.

Civic education in Lebanon is taught for 30 hours per year according to the official curriculum,[93] using the Civic Education Handbook. The handbook is a standardized manual published by the Ministry of Education and is compulsory in all schools. The objectives of the education program include the following:

- "Humanist values in one's community and country"
- "a social spirit … a larger community … enriched by a diversity of ideas"
- "… Lebanese identity… through a coherent and unifying democratic framework."
- "… regardless of gender, color, religion, language, culture, and any other difference."[94]

Education experts who took part in the roundtable organized by the project to discuss the matter stated that topics addressing broad concepts and principles, such as those mentioned in the core objectives of the civic education curriculum, especially those pertaining to diversity and citizenship, are "indirectly addressed in classrooms as teachers respond to questions." Therefore, the subjects are not tackled directly. However, they are essential, especially in classroom discussions, since children are exposed to all forms of information and polarizing discourses in the media, society, and at home. While this is not an exhaustive list, it demonstrates that the main issue is not the content or essence of the civic education program but rather the time allocated to it.[95]

Main Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to address challenges in access to education in Lebanon and for better teaching of diversity and freedom of religion in schools:

To the Lebanese authorities, it is recommended that a collaborative, participatory approach be adopted to develop a national education strategy in consultation with various education stakeholders, such as UN agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector, representatives from regional districts and municipalities, academia, and parents. Further, cooperation between the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Transport, and Ministry of Education should be increased to identify solutions to reduce barriers to accessing education. Certainly, the necessary decrees must be issued to enforce Law 150/2011 on compulsory and free education at the primary stage. Additionally, financial support should be provided to the most vulnerable families to pay registration fees, and a national campaign must be organized to promote and protect access to education for all children, especially young girls.

[93] CRDP: « Evaluation Diagnostique des acquis scolaires au Liban », https://www.crdp.org/magazine-details1/649/454/453.
[94] Ministry of Education: "The General education programs and their aims," 1997.
[95] ALEF – Act for Human Rights: "Citizenship and Diversity: A Selective Teaching of Notions", https://alefliban.org/publications/diversity-citizenship-a-selective-teaching-of-notions/, 15 September 2021.

Moreover, coordination with private schools' higher management should be increased to prevent political and religious interference. Finally, while this is not an exhaustive list, it demonstrates that beyond the content of the education program, there are challenges around the training of teachers and ensuring enough time is allocated in students' schedules to ask questions and access knowledge about diversity, citizenship, and knowledge of the other. This, of course, is to take place following the intensive training of teachers in providing and moderating these types of discussions.

Finally, civil society must support these recommendations through concrete programs, awareness- raising, creating spaces for activities, and reporting mechanisms. In addition, collaboration and lobbying efforts must increase to push for adopting the new curriculums, which are done, finalized, and ready to be adopted. Civil society organizations must also assist in implementing these new curriculums, especially in capacitating teachers on new notions that these curriculums will include ensuring proper facilitation and delivery of the content.

Curricula of Sharia Programs in Lebanon: Overview with a Focus on its Relationship with Freedom of Religion and Belief

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Background of this Research

The primary objective of this paper is to investigate various aspects of informal religious education in Lebanon. It aims to answer questions regarding the current state of informal teachings and the locations where religion is taught. Additionally, the paper explores the supervision and monitoring of these spaces, the existing curriculums, and their level of transparency. It evaluates whether this model promotes FoRB and identifies other challenges and threats associated with this educational approach. The paper is based on research conducted between 2018 and 2023 and involved collaboration with Sharia faculty members from different Arab countries, including Lebanon, to examine their programs and curricula. (See Hanafi, 2021)

University Teaching of Religion

Lebanon has had a well-structured religious education system for a considerable time, making it a beacon of knowledge in Lebanon and across the Arab region. Every religious community in Lebanon has multiple educational institutions, ranging from schools and universities to establishments dedicated to religious education.

Perhaps the oldest of these religious teaching institutions is the Christian institute, as Christian missionaries opened many educational institutions. In addition, the Maronite Church holds several institutes of higher education, such as the Holy Spirit University, the Dar Al-Hekma College for teaching law affiliated with the Beirut Diocese, and the Maronite Notre-Dame University-Louaize, later added to by the Antonine University established by the Antonine order. As for the Orthodox church, most of its elementary schools are free, and it owns some 23 educational institutes, which are distributed as follows: 17 schools in the pre-university public education sector, three technical and art schools, and three universities: the University of Balamand, Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) and the Saint George University of Beirut.

Sharia colleges and universities in Lebanon are also present and pivotal for Sharia knowledge production and dissemination in national, regional, and international Islamic circles. Despite the high tuition fees charged by private universities, Lebanese educational institutions, especially ones providing Sharia and Islamic studies, remain attractive to students from various parts of the region due to the accessibility of their courses. Moreover, these colleges grant university degrees at all levels (see Table 1). As we will see, these institutions resemble each other in some areas and differ in others.

Table 1: University Institutions with Programs in Sharia or Islamic Studies

Institution Name	Place	Program	Date of Establishment	Degree
Jinan University	Tripoli	Islamic Studies	1999	BA
		Sharia and Islamic Studies	1999	BA, Masters
		Science of Quran Readings and Islamic Studies	1999	
		Intellectual Realities in the Quran and Sunnah	1999	
Azhar University	Bekaa	Sharia	2003	BA, Masters
		Islamic Studies	2003	BA, Masters
	Akar	Sharia	2009	BA, Masters
Islamic University of Beirut	Beirut	Sharia	1990	BA, Masters
		Usul Al-Fiqh[96]	1998	Masters
		Comparative Fiqh	1998	Masters
		Islamic Studies	1998	Masters
		Usul Al-Fiqh	1998	Masters, Doctorate
		Comparative Fiqh	1998	Masters, Doctorate
		Islamic Studies	2000	Masters, Doctorate
University College of Da'wa	Beirut	Sharia, Islamic Studies and Islamic Economy	1980	Masters, Doctorate
College of Al- Imam Al-Awzai	Beirut	Islamic Studies	1986	BA, Masters, Doctorate
Makassid University	Beirut	Islamic Studies	1982	Masters, Bachelors
Islamic Studies Program at American University of Beirut	Beirut	Islamic Studies	-	Masters

[96] Fiqh refers to Islamic jurisprudence, through interpretation of the Qu'ran and Sunnah.

Institution Name	Place	Program	Date of Establishment	Degree
University of Tripoli	Tripoli	Sharia	1991	BA
			2000	Masters and Doctorate
		Islamic Studies	1991	BA
			2000	Masters and Doctorate
		Masters and Doctorate	2003	Diploma
International University[97]	Beirut	Islamic Studies		BA, master's and Doctorate

It should be noted that the curricula of these colleges follow the Ashari school of theology. Some of the teachers also teach in mosques and religious associations as well. While these universities are primarily concerned with Sharia programs, some have expanded to include other programs, such as the public management program at Al-Awzai University. In this paper, we will focus on the curricula of four important universities that teach Sharia: The Islamic University of Beirut, Kuliyyat Al-Dawa Al-Jamiyya, the College of Al-Imam Al-Awzai, and the University of Tripoli, in addition to Irshad and Islah College which has educational programs, although it is not technically a university.[98]

While looking at most of the curricula of these institutions, this paper will look in detail at the curriculum of the Islamic University of Beirut. This is the essential institution formally affiliated with the Dar Al-Fatwa for teaching Sunni religious studies. Ridwan Al-Sayyed estimates the number of graduates in this university as 3,000, with 2,000 sheiks currently giving sermons and guidance to people.

Informal Teaching of Islam

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Shia-majority region of Jabal Amel (South Lebanon) witnessed a scientific and intellectual renaissance characterized by institutionalizing Hawzas (Shi'a seminaries) and new ways of thinking and teaching - including religious education. In Southern Lebanon alone, 15 schools were established. After completing the primary educational stages, capable students could go to Iraq to continue their higher education in the Hawzas of Najaf.

[97] Affiliated with "Al-Ahbash" Islamic Charitable Organization

[98] This study is based on an analysis of the content of the curricula of the four mentioned universities, as well as on several interviews with professors and students involved in Sharia and Islamic studies programs.

Many graduates of Najaf became senior Lebanese scholars famous throughout the Arab and Islamic world. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the Islamic awakening led by Imam Musa Al-Sadr in the 1960s spread among Lebanon's Shia community. From the mid-80s, new Hawzas were established, the most prominent of which was the Hawza of Al-Rasul Al-Akram in the Harik neighborhood. With both the Iranian sponsorship and the Islamic Sharia Institute with Muhammad Huseyn Fadallah's sponsorship, graduates can complete their education in the city of Qom or join Al-Mustafa University in Iran.[99]

The 1980s witnessed a wave of Sunni Sharia schools and institutes, the most important of which are: the Dar Al-Fatwa-affiliated Azhar Lebanon, the Sharia department in the Makassed Association schools, and the Dar of Religious Education in Tripoli, all of which specialize in preparing students' religious education before sending them to Al-Azhar, one of the most important university mosques.

Moreover, the proliferation of educational institutions extends across different religious sects and within each sect. Numerous religious and political parties and movements within each sect characterize this phenomenon. As Abdelghani Imad points out, these movements established schools, institutes (ma'ahed), and universities for Sharia education in the hundreds,[100] and now compete for control over mosques and religious sites in light of the increasing weakness of the Dar Al-Fatwa and the High Islamic Shia Council vis-a-vis the rising religious and political movements at the informal private education level. These schools do not adhere to the state's formal curriculum like the rest of the private schools but "formulate their methodology according to the jurisprudential system they embrace, which has led to chaos... to the point that some of them have begun to teach controversial material propagating the difference between Sunni and Shia Muslims, which led the Ministers' Council to intervene and close one of them in 2000." (Imad 2012)

For women's informal education, there are four active groups/associations: Al-Qubaysiyyat, Al- Najat, Irshad & Islah, and Islah Zet- Al-Bayn. (For more details, see (Khaled, 2020)

The report will examine the curriculum of one informal institution, the Guidance and Reform Association (Jamiyyet al-Irshad wal islah). Located in Beirut, it has a school (Lebanese International School) that delivers informal religious education for young people. Its curriculum is not very different from the one of formal education but with more emphasis on Fiqh rulings and less theory.

Characteristics of the curriculum

The below table will analyze the Curricula of 4 formal Sharia colleges (the Islamic University of Beirut, Islamic College of Dawa, Imam Al-Awzai College, and the University of Tripoli) and one informal educational institution (Guidance and Reform Association) by comparing them in a table which will give a general picture of the curricula. (See Table 2)

[99] For more details, see: Haytham Mazahim, "Shia Hawzahs in Lebanon oscillate between the traditional and academic methodologies," (in Arabic): https://cutt.us/uUM1F and (Kassem 2018)
[100] https://almashareq.com/ar/articles/cnmi_am/features/2018/02/14/feature-02.

Table 2: Summary of the Features of Curricula in Sharia Colleges,

	Islamic University of Beirut	Islamic College of Dawa	Imam Al- Awzai College	University of Tripoli	Guidance and Reform Association
Dominant approach	Traditional	Traditional	Traditional	Traditional	Traditional
Usul al fiqh (course)	At the BA Level: Ilm Usul Al- Fiqh by Abdalwahab Khallaf (reformist) In the Comparative Fiqh Masters: Ilm Al- Maqasid Al- Sharia by Nur Al-Din Al-Khadimi (reformist)	At the BA Level: Dawabit Al-Maslaha Muhammad Said Ramadan Al-Buti (traditionalist)	At the Masters Level: Al-Da'wa wa Al-Jihad (traditionalist)	At the BA Level Usul Al-Fiqh Al-Islami by Wahba Al- Zuhayli (traditionalist) Introduction to Studying the Islamic Sharia by Abdal Karim Zaydan	N/A

	Islamic University of Beirut	Islamic College of Dawa	Imam Al- Awzai College	University of Tripoli	Guidance and Reform Association
Courses related to Social Sciences or humanities	At the BA Level: Introduction to Law History of Jurisprudence Comparative Religions Research Methodologie s	At the BA Level Sermon- Giving Civilization Studies Islamic Economy Orientalism Islamic History Media Studies Education and Psychology Ethics Social Sciences Comparative Religions	At the BA Level Islamic History Ethics The Islamic Library Principles of Research Comparative Political Systems Geography of the Islamic World Islamic History Islamic Civilization Economic Systems	At the BA Level Ethics Comparative Religions Methods of Teaching Research Methodologi es Islamic Culture Islamic History Islamic Civilization Islamic Economy	N/A
	Masters in Comparative Fiqh: Islamic Economics Research Methodologie s		At the Masters Level: Islamic Library Islam and the West Economic Systems Media Theories Contemporar y Islamic Thought Contemporar y Islamic World Development Studies Secret Movements		
	Masters in Islamic Thought: Introduction to the Social Sciences Research Methodologie s				

Little Ijtihad and Old Curricula

Like in many Arabic and Islamic countries, Lebanon's curricula combine Ashari/Azhari and Salafi doctrines,[101] with the first playing a more significant role in orienting knowledge on formal and informal curricula. This intellectual orientation is affected by the nature of classical texts and how the beliefs and ideas they entail could lead to non-compatibility with contemporary realities. This situation encourages many to call for a Fiqh that deals with this reality as a basis for its methodology. (Brown 2004) This difference manifests in the curricula' terms, as some rely on concepts of citizenship and public interest (Fiqh related to nation-state setting).

By contrast, the fundamentalists/traditionalists deal with the classical literature of imams Nawawi, Abi Shuja, and their contemporaries. The more significant problem in these paradigms is their dependence on self-referential concepts and terms, thereby producing closed knowledge and making their interaction with other paradigms difficult. For example, the Fiqh ruling on marriage did not use the high objectives of sharia (maqasid l-sharia) and how these rulings fit the 2nd year of hagir and not the current situation of young people where both men and women work and have equal dignity (a concept that developed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). These rulings are quite different from what we see currently in Morocco.

Further, most of the prescribed textbooks in these institutes are classical books. Rarely can one find a book authored in the nineties or afterward. Many interviewed in Lebanon, such as Hasam Sabat and Muhammad Amin Farsukh, both deans of Sharia colleges and Islamic studies, complained of the dominance of taqlid (blind imitation). They both expressed the need for reform in curricula and methods of teaching. Also, Hassam Sabat criticized the binaries of text and ijtihad, revelation, and reason, describing them as inseparable, not antithetical, concepts. (Sabat 2019)

The Sharp Dichotomy between Sharia Sciences and Social Sciences

Some compulsory non-Sharia courses are closer to the humanities (history, geography, philosophy, language, ethics) than the social sciences. The degree of teaching for these courses varies: whereas the Islamic University of Beirut does not teach any course in the social sciences, the Imam Al- Awzai College teaches 12 social sciences and humanities courses among the 40 required courses. By contrast, in its four years, the College of Dawa teaches nine courses in the social sciences among 65 courses. However, this does not mean that these sciences and social sciences interact with and support sufficient critical thought to develop a fiqh al-waqi', which uses social science methodologies, theories, and research techniques. This is a conclusion also reached by the late Abdelghani Imad (2019). Upon comparison between the Shia religious hawzas and the Sunni universities, the former's awareness of the importance of the social sciences is noticeable, as they require introductory books and methodologies of these sciences more than the latter.

[101] The Ash'arites, as against the Mu'tazilites, held that revelation and not reason is the real authority or criterion to determine what is good and what is bad, but nevertheless, it reconciles the doctrines of free will, justice, and divine omnipotence. Concerning Azhari fiqhi teaching, it is a classical taqlidi fiqh rulings with little ijtihad (innovations). Regarding Salafi doctrine, it is also classical but also literalist who refuse any interpretation or hermeneutic reading of the Holy Coran.

How could students resolve social problems without knowing how to read a statistical table and understand sociological and psychological reasonings? It starts from the belief that religion cannot be isolated to just Fiqh, that Fiqh necessitates an ethical understanding, and that applying Fiqh to reality requires scientific tools that were developed and still lie in the space of the human sciences in general, and the social sciences in particular. One of the most important tasks of these sciences is to connect religious practice and affiliation to other social phenomena and how these practices were institutionalized through religious, social institutions.

Therefore, it is clear that the empirical field aspect changes from one university to the next, depending on how reality is approached in framing fiqhi/jurisprudential theorization in the university. The University of Tripoli is distinguished in a practical sense by several courses such as the fiqh of dawa, which aids students in understanding tangible reality, and with courses that interact with maqasid and fiqh al-waqi', which produces a dynamic scholar who can interact with society's changing aspects. In contrast, the educational curricula at the Islamic University of Beirut, Al-Imam Al-Awzai College, and The College of Da'wa lack this practical information and stick to theoretical interaction with texts far away from reality. This makes them less dynamic, even when interacting with real-world issues such as media, politics, and the economy. Moreover, students there rely on a purely Islamic theorization, without viewing the tangible reality of these systems or in a manner that lacks the standards of the objective social sciences through textual normativity. As such, the social sciences courses lack the comprehensive human element of fieldwork.

There is a chasm between the social courses taught and the social research methods used in the research problems of these master and Ph.D. theses. This is manifested in the jurisprudential texts studied in these universities, which lack empirical approaches and depend on a traditional approach that focuses on linguistic interpretation to interact with the issues of women, citizenship, and violence. Moreover, no educational curricula depend on studying social reality to answer religious questions. Even with the presence of courses in the social sciences, there is a sharp dichotomy between the Sharia and social sciences. Perhaps, the most prominent topic these differences manifest in is the science of Siyassa Sha'riyya (Sharia-legitimate governance).

According to Abdelghani Imad's study in his studied sample, the ratio of the types of religious sciences is clear from the curricula used in these institutes (and not universities except Azhar Lebanon), which include Majma Nur, Dar Al-Tarbiyya wa Al-Talim Al-Islamiyya, Azhar Lebanon,[102] Al-Amin Institute, and Imam Al-Bukhari madrasa, according to the following table (Table 3):

[102] One of the institutes affiliated with the Dar Al-Fatwa. Its curriculum depends on that of Al-Azhar's, and its branches are spread over Beirut, Tripoli, Sayda and Bekaa.

Table 3: Established Curricula in the Sharia Institutes in Lebanon (percentage of hours taught of each course compared to total curricula).

	Al-Imam Al- Bukhari School- Akkar (%)	Dar Al- Fatwa- Affilated Azhar Akkar (%)	Al-Amin Institute in Tripoli (%)	Majma Nur in Tripoli (%)	Islamic College, Sharia Department (%)
Quran Memorization, Quranic exegesis, Quranic recitation	20.9	20.9	24	30.7	20.9
Hadith, Sirah, Fiqh	35.8	25.8	33.5	21	25.8
Creed and usul	18.5	14.5	20	14.8	14.8
Arabic Language, Syntax, and Literature	14.8	19.5	16.5	18.5	18.5
General Culture, Foreign Language, Sciences	9.8	19.3	6	15	20.9
	100	100	100	100	100

It can be noticed that these programs are derived from Al-Azhar's famous curriculum, where Quranic memorization and recitation, Quranic exegesis, hadith, Sirah, and Usul Al-Fiqh occupy the majority of the syllabus.

Combining Religious and Sectarian Concepts

The proliferation of religious institutes and universities indicates chaos rather than religious pluralism. It is noticeable that only in Maqasid University, teachers affiliated with Christianity, or the Shia sect employed to teach their creed can be found.[103] Furthermore, there is a merging or confusion between concepts universally applicable to an entire religion and those specific to a particular sect or subgroup. This led to reducing religion to the doctrine of only one sect, as observed by the "Fourth Conference on Islamic Education" in 1996.[104]

[103] For example, Naqula Ziyada, Father George Masuh, Michel Shiha, Father Anton Daw, Jafar Shams Al-Din. See Farshukh 2016.
[104] http://www.islahonline.org/display/arabic/conference/Conference.aspx?ConferenceID=7.

Nayla Tabbara (2016) called for introducing courses that present other religions according to their sources and strengthening a culture of religious diversity from schools and education on shared values and even at the university level.

University research in the religious sciences has not opened to innovative methodological approaches and different knowledge fields. Meanwhile, religion has led to reflection in many nations' modern social sciences and humanities. Within these sciences exist specialized branches on religion, e.g., sociology of religion, psychology of religion, geography of religion, philosophy of religion, anthropology of religion, etc. These specialized branches of study have yet to be integrated into existing Islamic curricula in Lebanon (Bakhush, 2020).

Absence of Ethical Approach to Religion

Only the College of Dawa teaches a course on ethics. However, the course contents focus less on preparing students to ground their reasoning in ethical considerations and more on promoting Islamic ethics over any other alternative religions or beliefs (including humanism). The lack of opportunity to develop ethical reasoning skills and an understanding of different approaches impacts the relationship between teaching religion and liberal arts and the possibility of tolerating criticism or differing beliefs.

Is Religious Criticism Tolerated?

Based on the above characteristics of the curriculum of these colleges, it does not seem that the curriculum's content, methodology or pedagogy is equipped to tolerate religious criticism, except what can be within the differences that exist between the five doctrines of Islam (Shafii, Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Jafari).

For religious studies to tolerate criticism, they must encourage discussion and dialogue in each course and be prepared to accept their reasoning; this is necessary to make Islamic moral arguments accessible not only to believers but also to those who do not belong to the same faith or do not have the same commitment to religion. The Lebanese philosopher Mouchir Basil Aoun (2023) proposes a seminal methodology to help to deal with different levels (circles) of "truth" and what can be a matter of discussion or not to carry out moral reasonings. The first circle is about scientific truth. One can distinguish between the not-for-discussion outcome of the descriptive and conceptual epistemological imperatives of sciences and what comes from the theoretical assumptions that should be the subject of discussion.

The second circle is the moral principles as a universal truth that become stable as anthropological truth (something stable through history and geography) framed by the values of dignity, freedom, equality, justice, brotherhood, and other ideals. However, this circle should be understood as a theoretical one, and guidelines that are not for discussion but how they will be applied to each society is a matter for debate. For example, how gender equality (which is part of the universal declaration of human rights) will be implemented in a society that has a specific culture and division of labor between men and women, making this implementation vary from one society to another.
The third circle is the moral reasonings that apply to the second circle's principles (i.e., how gender equality will be implemented) and deal with aesthetics (a society would appreciate certain music while others do not).
The fourth circle is the truth of beliefs (or comprehensive doctrines in the language of John Rawls), including religious beliefs. In -theology, it is difficult to discuss why one should believe in the Prophet Mohamad and not

Jesus Christ. However, of course, one can debate whether the warriors' behavior in historical wars waged in the name of religion are just or not. As society has different communities with different beliefs, one can only respect the belief of others, as far as it does not contradict the second circle. Aoun, in the line of Paul Ricoeur, rightly thinks that beyond the outcome of the two descriptive and conceptual epistemological imperatives of science, the other truths are a sort of existential truth which is, in essence, rhetorical, metaphorical and interpretive and should be taken as it is in order to facilitate innovation (ijtihad) and the possibility of discussion and dialogue. For example, religions did not ban slavery: Is it because it was so common during the revelation? Or is it something ethical that should be maintained? Holy scripts should be interpreted to privilege the former explanation.

Thus, tolerance of criticism requires considering the ethical side of Sharia and science. This attempt to discover the goals and values hidden behind the legislation, place Islam in its ethical context, and read the Quran in that light. Other than the firm universal principles of religion in creed and acts of worship, we need to overturn our priorities in our understanding of religion by confirming ethics as the spirit of religion and pushing Fiqh and legislation to be in harmony with ethics. That is, if we consider theft as being condemned ethically in every place and time (and this action does not gain its ethical adjective from the resulting harm and benefit, but from its nature as an attack on justice, and humans desire justice as they desire pleasure), the ruling on the thief (i.e., measures of punishment) should be following its context and the size of theft and its motivations.

As such, what is needed is the mainstreaming of a new paradigm to connect religion, not as legislation/Fiqh, but as ethics to the social sciences, so Sharia and social sciences can operate in tandem, inspired in their understanding by ethical sources (from religion and philosophy). Rather than considering the Sharia (Fiqh rulings) as the primary source of laws, whether personal status or positive law, and there being antagonism over the boundaries separating them, which is what Sharia colleges usually teach, there will be a recognition that human relations are ruled by different interests, identities, and solidarity principles stem from how they like their life to be and how connected to their Islamic lifeworld (Islamic tradition not as an institution but as experience). In this meaning, all sciences and Sharia will contribute to elaborating moral arguments in all domains and determining benign traditions and customs, personal status, and the political (citizenship, governance techniques, taxes, etc.). In other words, religion as ethics can have a say in conceptualizing the good life and ethics, social relations, economic transactions, and ethical politics.

In brief, ethics (derived from integrating reflection in religious and philosophical thought influences all three fields. If Sharia education hopes religion remains the organizer of human relations, it should do it as ethics, not as Fiqh. Therefore, moral philosophy must be added as a source of ethics. Furthermore, any interpretative reading (hermeneutical) of religious texts must consider the reality influenced by the natures of tradition, globalization, historical contexts, and present conditions. That is, interpretative readings of texts include moral philosophy.

What is meant by moral philosophy is not only philosophical theorization but also anthropological theory as well, taking into consideration human's cultural nature, and sociological theory, which is interested in how to understand people in a particular space and time of a specific situation, taking into account a (soft) universalism of the abstract humanistic ideas (as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and the culture of the society to project this universal concept into social reality. As such, moral argumentations (using different textual, sociological, and legal) can reach moral judgments with organic unity between customs and traditions and jurisprudential rulings and civil laws. Thus, one cannot separate moral philosophy

from political philosophy: no moral validation without debate in the public sphere using public reason.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights will guide moral philosophy. However, as Mohamad Fadel (2022), Abdullah An-Na'im Field (1994), and Mashood Baderin point out, a distinction must be made between the Universality of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the cultural particularity of each system of human rights. However, this cultural particularity, the basis of diversity, was often taken as an essence. Instead, it means the transformation of this particularity from barricades we hide behind to an inexhaustible specificity not limited to us, to become a hanging fruit ready to quench the thirst of anyone desiring this precious resource. Neither tradition nor cultural particularity is a neutrally valid domain; both are loaded with ideology.

In conclusion, teaching religious criticism is vital in promoting freedom of religion and belief in society. Encouraging critical thinking, fostering religious tolerance, and safeguarding individual freedoms empower individuals to engage in a thoughtful examination of religious ideas while respecting the rights of others to hold their beliefs. Through the cultivation of open dialogue, intellectual autonomy, and the prevention of dogmatism, society can strive toward a more inclusive, pluralistic, and respectful environment where individuals are free to express their beliefs while engaging in constructive discussions. By embracing the principles of religious criticism, we can uphold the values of freedom, diversity, and mutual understanding, paving the way for a more harmonious and tolerant world.

Recommendations

Based on the above, the following is recommended:

- Teaching a specific course on ethics. In Sharia schools, Islamic ethics can overarch all the new Fiqh rulings concerning the relationship to other religions and freedom of religion and belief.
- Reviewing the method of teaching religion to enhance the reflection of the current reality and critical thinking and tolerate pluralism within Islam and within.
- Adding courses in social sciences in religious programs encourages reflection on the current reality. This is how you connect studying religion to the liberal arts and critical thinking, which is necessary for bearing religion's constructive criticism.

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XIV. The Challenges of a Diverse Society

Role of Religious Leaders in Peacebuilding: The Experience of Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation
Author: Fadi Hachem

Introduction

"There will be no peace between the civilizations without peace between the religions! And there will be no peace between the religions without a dialogue between the religions."[105] In this statement, the theologian Hans Küng launched his "Project for a Global Ethic." He defines the need for interreligious dialogue as the primary way to build sustainable peace among civilizations. At the same time, Pope Francis, during his address at the United Nations Sustainable Development summit in New York on September 25, 2015, focused on the importance of ensuring social equality and emphasizing the notion of inclusion through "leaving no one behind." He added, "We cannot permit ourselves to postpone 'certain agendas' for the future. The future demands of us critical and global decisions in the face of worldwide conflicts which increase the number of the excluded and those in need."[106]

Similarly, in Lebanon, several religious leaders and faith-based organizations and actors have highlighted the significance of interreligious dialogue by promoting religious leaders' role in advocating sustainable peace. Over the years, we have witnessed faith actors gradually assuming more responsibilities in building more sustainable and peaceful societies, first through joining their forces and networks, then through promoting the peace-building journey within their religious communities. To better understand how this is being done in Lebanon and the learnings, success, and challenges of such efforts, this chapter will look at the experience of Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation (DLR Lebanon), a Lebanese volunteer-based organization.

This report will focus on the mission assumed by Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation (DLR)[107] Lebanon since 2010. Our primary reflection will be on how DLR reached out to different stakeholders and spared no effort to expand its outreach to Religious Leaders (RL). From this experience, collaboration is vital to such a mission, even in a very conflictual society and within this time of uncertainty that seriously affects the country.

[105] Hans Kung, 1998, p. 92
[106] Pope Francis, "Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization: Address of the Holy Father," September 25, 2015; available at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu- visita.html.
[107] Cf. the homepage of this organization: https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/lebanon/peacebuilding-organisations/dlr/ (accessed on 10 January 2020). And DLR Lebanon Facebook page (accessed on May 14, 2020)

I- What is the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding? Religion and religious leaders as peacebuilders

Religious Leaders represent more than just themselves; they also carry their religion's history and their communities' stories. Therefore, they are sought for their wisdom, knowledge, and guidance. Further, they play the role of mediators, focal points for communication bridging opposing sides and imparting knowledge on attaining peace. In this sense, religious leaders can and are expected to spread transcendent values such as forgiveness, paving the way to reconciliation. Otherwise, people would keep scores against each other and even seek vengeance. Most importantly, religious leaders lead by example; establishing relationships with each other will also connect their communities, and most importantly, their involvement contributes to a certain level of legitimacy and credibility.

In the fall of 2016, DLR launched the Sustainable Network for Religious Leaders in the North of Lebanon. Believing that religious leaders have an active role in building society, this network was initiated to connect Muslim Sunni and Muslim Alawite religious leaders with Maronite and Orthodox priests. Knowing that Tripoli is a city marked by years of clashes (in 2011, 2012, and 2015), this sustainable network not only allowed for interaction among the RLs themselves but also created a platform for dialogue and positive encounters among other people. When this network was set up, there were no more than 30 Imams and Priests; after seven years of being together, we now are a group of 52 religious leaders connected through monthly meetings, workshops, and seminars. This network allowed interaction among the religious leaders there and created a platform for dialogue and positive encounters for active peacebuilding.

To safeguard the fundamental principles of free thought and expression, fostering an environment of open discussions and honesty is imperative, thus protecting the space from influences that may seek to restrict it. While politicians may be motivated by self-interest and resort to manipulative tactics, religious leaders may assume a more neutral role. As one of the religious leaders in the network observed, "Religious teachings contribute to curbing extremist ideas that contradict human nature and correctly guide people free of any manipulation, as religions call for the rejection of violence and the establishment of peace in the world." The religious doctrine promotes nonviolence and strives for a harmonious world.

On the level of the individual, starting with oneself is the key to a better society. While an "external enemy" is always the scapegoat for all problems, religious leaders keep reminding believers that the enemy is the one within. During one of the meetings, a religious leader in the network went further, advocating to consider it the second less-known Golden Rule, and added that across all religions, a deeper understanding of the true enemy is found in the self.

Among examples of religious leadership in peacebuilding, the World Council of Churches and the All-Africa Conference of Churches mediated Sudan's short-lived 1972 peace agreement. In South Africa, various churches were at the vanguard of the struggle against apartheid and the peaceful transition. The most dramatic and most recently cited case is the successful mediation the Rome- based Community of Sant' Egidio achieved to help end the civil war in Mozambique in 1992. In Lebanon, the situation is not very different. Religious authorities called for ending all types of violence and peace during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990).

I- Why are Religious Leaders called to promote peacebuilding?

Religions present in Lebanon contain strong calls for peacemaking, as all human beings are considered to

be created "in the image of God." In an interview with a religious leader in 2019, it was said that "The premise of religious values is human first. Thus, every dialogue between the followers of religions leads to a definite convergence at the heart of society and the creation and expansion of common spaces for the living of these values" (Kassas, 2019). Simply put, peacebuilding is part of their mission, their "call."

2.1 Religious Leaders Inspire

The common humanity of all is under threat in conflict, often resulting in the dehumanization of others. On the contrary, dehumanization mentally denies others human qualities and dignity and justifies violence or derogatory treatment. Therefore, on a collective level, such as religious belonging, religion's universal and human values can help reverse the adverse effects dehumanization brings.

DLR believes that religion plays a crucial role in people's lives. Therefore, it constitutes an integral and inextricable feature of human development. Moreover, due to many disappointments from political leaders and the Lebanese political system, many will prefer to go to their respective religious leaders regarding political matters. Religious leaders are therefore involved in the country's politics and are compelled to consider themselves, de facto, as the spokespeople for their respective communities – not only in spiritual matters but in political and social matters as well. This raises the following questions: could religious leaders succeed where politicians have failed? How could religious leaders contribute to bringing peace?

Therefore, DLR sought ways to empower local religious leaders, not just high-level religious authorities, to promote peacebuilding within their respective communities to have a more significant impact. This was done in the belief and knowledge of how much the 1975 war in Lebanon and the since-then different political events have limited positive interaction between local religious communities; DLR saw the opportunity to play a role in empowering local religious leaders to deepen their understanding of the different cultural groups within the Lebanese society and build interactive bridges of reconciliation to assume their "call" to be peacebuilders. And this is what we have observed through the network of RLs in the North of Lebanon.

2.2. Religious Leaders Prevent Conflict

The religious leaders within our network were able to intervene on many occasions to limit and anticipate any escalation of hate speech or any problem among local families etc. Many other examples have been reported to us since the establishment of our network in 2016. For DLR, peacebuilders are invited to use proactive strategies to prevent escalation or occurrence of violence and constructively resolve conflicts. Consequently, to truly understand and genuinely address issues of injustice or oppression to create sustainable peace, there is a need for training on dialogue, mediation, nonviolence, peace education, and public policy development.

DLR's mission is to humanize "the other" through learning, understanding differences and embracing the richness of diversity, and breaking stereotypes by fostering dialogue. DLR aims to create an environment to foster dialogue and cooperation between the different faiths in the Middle East and serves as a catalyst for individuals to overcome their prejudice and break stereotypes.

Considering the role that religious leaders can play (as catalysts for limiting the escalation of conflicts), DLR worked on a series of initiatives that help pave the way for better interaction and open spaces for positive encounters – indispensable tools for peacebuilding. For example, some network members live only 100 meters from their co-networkers but have never interacted with them. Some had been working for more than 17 years

in the same sector but had never talked to each other or interacted in any way; none were ever offered the opportunity of entering the other's house.

Accordingly, this makes this network increasingly a pioneer project in Lebanon and the Middle East. Believing that we start existing for each other when we begin dialoguing, DLR has used different techniques to open spaces for dialogue and reconciliation among local religious leaders. From our experience, it was astonishing how the incomplete image one had of the other also negatively affected the perception of the other – even on the level of religious leaders. Therefore, this network takes a great interest in topics that allow for a better understanding and positively affect the participants, such as:

- counteracting violent extremism;
- the role of families and gender equality;
- active listening and mediation;
- the interreligious dialogue;
- and recently, the Freedom of Religions and Belief.

At this level, messages delivered by members of the network, either on a personal level or in their speeches/sermons held during Friday prayer or Sunday mass, clearly demonstrated the positive outcomes of this network. Like other faith-based actors and leaders, the members of this network were able to 'show the quality of mercy through the way that they preach [...] they convene as religious leaders and [...] through the way they provide social service'[108]. Most importantly, a decrease in tensions has been witnessed in the neighborhood and the communities related to each member of this network. Seeing the religious leaders walking together through the same city, the same streets, playing football together, being a kind of 'attraction' delivered a message of peace and reconciliation.

2.3. Religious Leaders Reflect Compassion and Acceptance

The network connected people, particularly in rural areas, by being role models. As a result, the leaders understood each other more deeply, impacting their sermons and activities, reflecting on society, and liberating each other of the stereotypes. One of the religious leaders said: "Our experience in the network is very positive in this regard. Our meeting and dialogue contributed to a deeper knowledge of our beliefs. They removed the prejudices we had, and we discovered that violent extremism is condemned in all religions. However, it stands for a few who think themselves religious and are far from religion."

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, religious leaders convened to deliberate on distributing food parcels. Demonstrating a commitment to placing the welfare of the human being above all else, as espoused by the fundamental tenets of their respective religions, one of the priests proposed an increase in the allotment of food parcels to families residing beyond his parish, having been made aware of their dire financial circumstances.

2.4. The Need for a Parallel Coalition?

To sustain this network of religious leaders, another network was launched, bringing together worshipers and believers from different faith groups to encourage them to visit one another and attend each other's prayers.

108 United Nations. 2018. 'Annual Report of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development.'

Successfully, the experience showed that many stereotypes collapsed when attending the service/prayers in the churches/mosques of 'others.'

Believing that future religious leaders have an essential role, religious studies students were invited for training and activities to raise awareness of their responsibilities as prospective imams or priests. While these students were still studying at their universities, some were brought together in a team and then started a series of interdisciplinary activities to promote interreligious dialogue among them. 'It is neither a culture of confrontation nor a culture of conflict which builds harmony within and between people, but rather a culture of encounter and dialogue; this is the only way to peace,' Pope Francis said.

On another note, DLR joined a coalition of faith-based organizations to sustain the Lebanese millennial interreligious experience. For example, the feast of the Annunciation of Mary, celebrated by different Lebanese religious groups, is a pioneering model rich in theological meanings, challenges, and opportunities. This celebration began with gatherings and meetings initiated by peacebuilders and believers in interreligious dialogue. It became a national holiday and yearly event in which Lebanese reconfirm their faith in their country as a land of interfaith coexistence and a "mosaic of religions."

II- How to Continue Empowering Religious Leaders in Spreading Peace Together?

The understanding of DLR in spreading peace did not stop at sustaining religious leaders' mission within the Sustainable Religious Leaders network in the North or the promotion of the Feast of the Annunciation of Mary as a common interreligious holiday. DLR's mission is perceived as a journey of spreading common interreligious values and empowering the commitment of religious leaders toward assuming their mission as active peacebuilders. Among the main guidelines are the following:

3.1. Interreligious Dialogue and Spiritual Solidarity

For DLR, dialogue is more than just a two-way communication between individuals who hold significantly different views; it aims to allow participants to learn more about one another and must therefore be deepened in all its dimensions. It transcends boundaries and allows a constructive reciprocal interaction that enhances and strengthens a culture of openness and promotes diversity. The root of such dialogue focuses on cooperation and the mutual brotherhood/sisterhood found in monotheistic religions. In his essay, "Understanding Dialogue," Leonard Swidler[109] defined dialogue as a way to express different parties' needs to seek more. From the ontological point of view, it is an intrinsic necessity to humankind and therefore represents an inexorable ethical duty which is being promoted.

Several studies have sought to define not only dialogue but, more specifically, its interreligious aspect, which refers to constructive reciprocal interaction between individuals of different faiths. From here, "The primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly."[110] Each partner must admit that they have something to learn from the other and that they

[109] See Leonard Swidler, "Understanding Dialogue," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 43 (Spring, 2008): 9–24.
[110] Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 20 (Winter, 1983): 1. Note that his earliest version of just five ground rules was published as "Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 15 (Summer, 1978): 413–414.

do not alone have an "absolutized" grasp of the truth. As such, interreligious encounters may be defined as a genuine "spiritual dimension," paving the way for dialogue partners to experience different religions "from within." Accordingly, experiencing this emotional and spiritual power will allow a real "passing over" into another's spiritual experience, allowing for a broader perspective.[111]

Father Fadi Daou and Dr. Nayla Tabbara introduced the concept of "spiritual solidarity" as the normal outcome of dialogue: "Dialogue should not stop at dialogue but should go beyond into spiritual solidarity."[112] Dr. Tabbara[113] indicated that the concept of spiritual solidarity is taken from the 1994 pastoral letter of the patriarchs of the Orient, "Called Together in Front of God." This document's definition of spiritual solidarity is "including the other in my prayer," recognizing "the richness and authenticity of the other's spiritual experience," and sharing it.[114] It goes beyond short-term solutions and temporary aid toward a long-term institutional change. Interreligious dialogue engages emotions, imagination, and intuitive consciousness. "Spiritual solidarity, as we are living and experiencing it etc., is about including the other in my theology," according to Tabbara.[115]

3.2 Promoting the Culture of Peace vs. the Culture of Fear

Lebanese religious pluralism, according to DLR, is based on the fundamental understanding that the more local religious communities are engaged in an honest encounter and genuine dialogue, the greater the understanding, mutual respect, and cooperative action aiming at serving members of different communities. Such a journey represents an invitation to deliver a message that, on the one hand, counteracts the culture of fear and, on the other hand, finds its way among the different religious groups. The violent extremism that exists nowadays is not facilitating such a mission. Even though there is a detectable higher level of awareness and a more active role played by religious leaders who aim at easing tensions among the different communities, the prime mission of the other religious communities in the country is still to promote sustainable peace as a common value to all religious cultures and to promote communal living. However, for DLR, this way of thinking must be spread on the grassroots level and not only on the upper hierarchy level of the different religious groups.

The resurgence of a global 'culture of war'/ 'culture of hate,' spread by the violent extremist movements, underlines the importance and the necessity of a 'culture of peace'/'culture of dialogue.' The message delivered by the millenary inter-religious coexistence in Lebanese society, in particular, should serve as an invitation to abdicate the 'culture of war' and to uphold a 'culture of peace.'

[111] See John S. Dunne, The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion, University of Notre Dame Press, 1978.
[112] Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, "Lebanese Interfaith Group Grounds Work in 'Spiritual Solidarity' with the Other," National Catholic Reporter, April 25, 2016; available at https://www.ncronline.org/preview/lebanese-interfaith-group-grounds-work-spiritual-solidarity-other. This is her interview with Nayla Tabbara.
[113] Nayla Tabbara (2019), interview with Alvaro Dorantes, s.j.
[114] Schaeffer-Duffy, "Lebanese Interfaith Group."
[115] Nayla Tabbara (2019), interview with Alvaro Dorantes, s.j.

Conclusion

The DLR journey is one of many local initiatives where religious leaders significantly promoted peacebuilding. DLR's approach is mainly based on building interactive bridges where religious leaders can understand diversity and participate in "the interreligious pilgrimage."

In such a pilgrimage, the belief is that no one will be left behind. Believers and religious leaders are all called to participate in a journey celebrating the dignity of being different and joining the "cosmic dance" of dialogue.

The words launched by Reuel L. Howe's describing dialogue perfectly encompass this perception of interreligious dialogue and its reciprocal nature and transformative essence: *"Dialogue is to love, what blood is to the body, when the flow of blood stops, the body dies. When dialogue stops, loves dies, and resentment and hate are born. But dialogue can restore a dead relationship. Indeed, this is the miracle of dialogue etc. There is only one qualification to the claims of dialogue. It must be mutual and proceed from both sides, and the parties must persist relentlessly."*[116]

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[116] Quoted in Priti Chaudhari, "Interreligious Dialogue as a Way to Peacebuilding," International Education and Research Journal 2 (January, 2016): 22.

Religious Dialogue in Lebanon between Reality and the Desired

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The importance of dialogue in the Lebanese political system

Interfaith dialogue in the Lebanese political system acquires particular importance due to the fact that religious institutions have had an active role in the national and political life since before the proclamation of the State of Greater Lebanon in 1920, passing through Lebanon's independence, the National Pact in 1943 and the Taif Agreement in 1989 to the present day. During those stages, the so-called "political sectarianism" remained at the forefront of issues in the scope of public interest, which initially arose to ensure the participation of Muslims in a state that they considered stripped of its Arab identity and later accepted reluctantly. After this, political sectarianism moved to guarantee the involvement of fearful Christians in a State that is "not final" for their Muslim partners. During these chronological moments, the discussed reform projects constantly faltered due to the fear of losing the identity of Christians and, thus, the decline of their existence, and at the same time, aiming to prevent Muslims from suffering an absence of fair representation, marginalization, and the feeling of second-class citizenship.

As for the social, cultural, and political identities, which each party tried to link to the national identity, this was the subject of lengthy discussion and debate, as this issue dominated politics throughout the civil war, which centered around the purely Arab identity advocated by Muslims and which Christians considered to a large extent a precursor to the "Islamization" of the state and obliteration of their Aramaic-Canaanite-Phoenician identity. The dialogue was based on an Arab- Islamic Lebanese identity on the one hand and a Lebanese Christian Levantine Greco-Latin identity on the other. Following Lebanon's independence in 1943, the country held a close association with Arab identity (ذو وجه عربي). However, the Taif agreement emerged in the aftermath of the civil war, aiming to assert Lebanon's Arab affiliation separate from the state itself, leading to its official transformation into the Lebanese Arab Republic.

Regrettably, the power-sharing arrangement in Lebanon was primarily governed by the "sharing rule" outlined in Article 95 of the Lebanese Constitution. According to Article 95, "Temporarily and in pursuit of justice and accord, the sects shall be represented in public offices, and in forming the government without prejudice to the interest of the state." However, in practice, this led to the monopolization of sectarian parties on sectarian parliamentary representation. As a result, they successfully introduced a law for parliamentary elections that ensured victory for sectarian parties, without considering the rights of individual citizens based on their human rights, but prioritizing 'sectarian rights' (Nehme, 2019). This approach undermined the principles of equal representation and individual freedoms, further entrenching sectarian divisions within the political landscape.

The election law continues to be a topic of discussion across various platforms and at all levels of society. Presently, there are renewed debates surrounding the need for a new and reformed election law that can effectively address the concerns of different religious sects. The aim is to strike a balance between meeting the fears of Christians and addressing the perceived injustices among Islamic sects. However, it is essential to note that the influence exerted by these sects on the discussions has led to the emergence of inherent problems within the proposed reformed law. Consequently, there are doubts about whether this new law, even if implemented, would be able to break the deadlock created by the sects' stronghold over elections. In essence, while the religious sects may have managed to safeguard their own existence, the well-being of

both the citizens and the nation as a whole has suffered as a result.

In Lebanon, just as the constitution provides for preserving the rights of sects in public office, it also stipulates, in its foreword, respect for freedom of religious belief and the freedom to practice all religious rites, provided that they do not affect public order. Furthermore, the Constitution requires the state to respect all religions and sects and guarantees respect for the personal status system and the religious interests of people of all religious denominations. The Constitution also affirms equal rights and duties granted to all citizens without discrimination or preference. Still, it requires a balance of power between the main religious groups to preserve diversity within the State.

Faced with this reality, interfaith dialogue in Lebanon has been essential to political life and critical in many of the crises moments of politics, including following security shocks, after long periods of vacancies in positions of responsibility, or during protracted negotiations over the formation of a government or nomination of a prime minister. This can be described as a sectarian dialogue within a political template. There is no doubt that political sectarianism in Lebanon is one of the most critical features of the Lebanese democratic system, with which democracy came to be called "consensual democracy." In 1943, the first independent government said in its ministerial statement that one of the foundations of reform required by Lebanon's supreme interest is to address sectarianism and eliminate its disadvantages. This text, also known as the National Pact, impedes national progress on the one hand and Lebanon's reputation on the other, in addition to poisoning the spirit of relations between the various religious groups that make up the Lebanese people.

Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge that the concerns raised by these religious groups are not without merit, as they are rooted in historical experiences. Both the leadership and members of these sects genuinely believe that eliminating political sectarianism would result in their marginalization and the loss of their participation in political decision-making and the overall state- building process in Lebanon. Their apprehension stems from a fear of potential majority dominance. However, the Taif Agreement has addressed this particular concern. The agreement specifically mandated equal distribution of parliamentary seats in the Parliament between Christians and Muslims, regardless of demographic numbers—this provision aimed to ensure fair representation for all religious groups. Additionally, the agreement encompassed other significant guarantees, such as establishing a Senate and the recognition of the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon as a unified entity.

Another type of dialogue can also be seen, which is political dialogue held within a sectarian/religious template, such as dialogue at spiritual summits that are held from time to time, especially those that are held in Bkerke by the invitation of the Maronite Patriarchate or that are held in Dar al-Fatwa by the invitation of the Grand Mufti. For example, at the summits held at the Patriarchal Seat in Bkerke on May 12, 2011, and then at Dar al-Fatwa on September 27, 2011, the emphasis was on:

- Strengthening national unity among all Lebanese.
- Considering the Lebanese state as the source of strength for all the Lebanese and the incubator for them.
- Commitment to a culture of dialogue that respects different points of view and aims to achieve consensus and the common good and is the best way to discuss major national issues based on the constitution, the national charter, and the agreed-upon national constants.
- Strengthening national affiliation culturally, educationally, socially and politically, resorting to

constitutional institutions to resolve differences, relying on the army and legitimate security forces alone to maintain security and the constitution, affirming the right of the state to liberate its lands and protect its sovereignty, inviting the youth to adhere to their land and national values, and a culture of openness to diversity, rejecting extremism and introversion in homogeneous groups that are disconnected from each other, respecting human dignity and fundamental freedoms, including individual, religious and political freedoms, freedom of expression, considering diversity as a richness and enrichment of humanity, considering citizenship as a basis for equality in rights and duties, and adhering to the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their land and homeland, in addition to the importance of Resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which is the key to peace and stability in the Middle East.

Thus, the focus and declarations of these religious/sectarian summits closely resemble in their content the priorities and concerns of general political life in the country.

Dialogue Topics and Principles

The focus of interfaith dialogues varied over the years depending on the political developments inside Lebanon and in the Arab region. From the fifties to the eighties, the issues of atheism and totalitarianism were the dominant topics in interfaith discussions; human rights and democracy became a focus after the eighties, alongside issue of preserving civil peace and coexistence, and the role of religions in that has been a key issue from the formation of the Taif Agreement to the present day.

And just as interreligious dialogue across the Arab region is founded in the urgent belief for Muslims that dialogue means "recognition" of some kind, so dialogue for Christians enhances and guarantees the preservation of their identity and privacy in a region with a Muslim majority. On all sides, the principle of recognizing, talking to, and understanding the other on an equal footing, and not targeting it with humiliation or nullification remains the most important objective of any dialogue. This has remained constant despite the changes that had occurred globally, regionally, and locally, especially before, during and after the revolutions in Arab countries and the wars that arose in some of them, which caused vibrations and splits in the various political, ideological, religious, and sectarian formations.

In addition, within Lebanon, interreligious dialogue is founded on the "rule of tolerance," meaning coexistence between different religions and respect for privacy, feelings, symbols, and religious sanctities belonging to each religion and sect; on the "rule of freedom" for each religion to practice its own religious rites; and on the "rule of partnership" based on equality in mutual recognition.

Lebanon was and remains a welcoming platform for all issues of Islamic-Christian dialogue in the Arab region. Those topics can be classified according to the following:

1. "Dialogue of life," which is daily living in a spirit of openness, good neighborliness, and fraternal sharing of joys and sorrows.
2. "Dialogue of Theological Exchanges," which is to deepen mutual understanding and appreciation of the same religion and the spiritual values specific to each of the two religions.
3. "Dialogue of Spiritual Experience," which is sharing spiritual goods with prayer, meditation, supplication, and seeking God's face.

The religious motives for establishing such a dialogue are based on the principle that God wants everyone to be saved. Therefore, there is no exclusive salvation for any of the followers of Christianity or Islam, but also for all who do good deeds.

There is no doubt that religion plays a significant role in addressing various concerns that affect individuals, both in this life and beyond. It serves as a belief system that provides guidance and meaning to people's lives. Furthermore, religion plays a vital role in shaping social identities. It allows its adherents to partake in shared experiences of happiness and sorrow, fostering a sense of belonging and community. In Lebanon, the concept of political sectarianism further accentuates these dynamics. As previously mentioned, political sectarianism in Lebanon grants specific privileges to followers of the country's officially recognized eighteen religions, enabling them to hold political, administrative, and security positions within the Lebanese state. This intertwining of religion and politics adds another layer to the social fabric of Lebanon.

Within the interreligious dialogues, there remain sensitive issues that religious leaders avoid talking about, where there are issues that are still a source of suspicion and sensitivity on both sides, for example the issue of Christian evangelism and, on the other hand, the Islamic call to prayer. Instead, each party focuses on verses, hadiths, and content consistent with the language of dialogue and acceptance of the other. Many institutions concerned with religious dialogue have also had a positive and distinguished role in this regard, including the Arab Team for Islamic- Christian Dialogue, and the Adyan Foundation, who focus on the sources in the religious heritage that support diversity and acceptance of others, thus building coexistence, and spreading the spirit of brotherhood and reconciliation.

Unity has also been found in the State's recognition of religious holidays, shared equally between Islam and Christianity. The Lebanese government issued a decree on February 18, 2010, stipulating that the 25th of March of each year be designated as the Feast of the Annunciation, based on the text of Luke in the Holy Bible, which is in harmony with the mention of the Annunciation with Surat Al-Imran in the Holy Qur'an.

A Reflection on Coexistence and Forms of Dialogue

Typically, individuals tend to adhere to the beliefs and doctrines they inherit from their families and societies. These beliefs are not merely personal choices but are deeply rooted in their cultural and social fabric. They encompass various aspects such as life values, religious identities, doctrinal interpretations, jurisprudence, historical narratives, rituals, and outward appearances. Consequently, abandoning these beliefs can be an immensely challenging endeavor for individuals, as it involves letting go of significant aspects that shape their lives and religious identities. Hence, it is not new to say that Lebanese are profoundly attached to their sectarian affiliation. Still, in their overwhelming majority, the Lebanese want to be liberated from being reduced to their religious affiliation.

One of the most critical questions for Lebanon today is: Can a person live an ordinary and healthy life with the other, regardless of the many points of difference in identity between themselves and their fellow citizens? Diversity among human beings and in human identities is a natural part of society, coexistence with others is an inescapable necessity, and disagreement is man-made. Therefore, how can our social and public life be formulated according to these two needs: the need for difference and distinction in terms of identity and coexistence with the other?

Through dialogue, we must search and follow diligently, away from violence in all its forms, solutions to social and political questions that do not abolish the right to difference, diversity, and pluralism, nor legitimize entrapment and isolation, or chaos and disintegration. Dialogue must be based on our shared homeland and citizenship, away from ideological and sectarian distinctions and differences, and upholding human rights and working to preserve them. These rights, human rights with all the values and requirements they embrace, are the largest incubator through which to provide sustainable coexistence.

Effectively, inter-religious dialogue has been an ongoing process in Lebanon, occurring in both formal and informal settings at various intervals and levels. It encompasses a wide range of initiatives that have played a crucial role in addressing national problems and crises, although sometimes hindering political stability in the country. Noteworthy examples include the national dialogue table initiated by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri in 2006, which aimed to tackle pressing issues and foster stability in Lebanon. Alongside formal dialogues, civil campaigns have emerged, warning against sectarian divisions and the potential recurrence of war. Prominent examples include the "Salvation" campaign and the "Our unity is our salvation" campaign, both of which arose in 2008 due to deteriorating conditions that raised concerns about the possibility of a civil war. Moreover, various dialogue tables have been established, such as the youth dialogue table launched in 2012 by the Permanent Peace Movement, aimed at highlighting the role of young people in preserving civil peace. Similarly, the civil society dialogue table in 2014, among other initiatives, campaigns, and positions, has sought to fortify Muslim-Christian coexistence through dialogue.

Importantly, religious institutions from both Christian and Islamic traditions have actively participated in these dialogues, as well as educated elites represented by organizations like the Arab Team for Islamic-Christian Dialogue. Their contributions have further enriched the discourse and promoted understanding and cooperation between different religious communities. Consequently, "Dialogue and Coexistence" in Lebanon have been at the heart of the message of every leader and movement which has enabled peace in Lebanon, whether in religious, political, cultural, social, or even the artistic field. An example is the oath sworn by the assassinated MP Gebran Al-Twaini in Martyrs' Square, in which he stated: "We swear by Almighty God, Muslims, and Christians, to remain united in defense of the great Lebanon". Despite polarizing moments and discourse that emerges at the political level, overall, Lebanese society has always relied on this emphasis on the language of dialogue, rejecting violence, and promoting coexistence.

Finally, it is worth acknowledging that most religious dialogues in Lebanon, much like in the broader region, are influenced by political contexts, even when addressing general national concerns. The statements issued and the discussions held by religious figures often revolve around political matters. Additionally, the visits of prominent international religious authorities to Lebanon and neighboring countries can be seen as efforts to promote Islamic-Christian dialogue. One noteworthy example is the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Lebanon on May 10, 1997. During his visit, he referred to Lebanon as "the country of the message." This statement highlights the significance attributed to Lebanon as a place of symbolic importance for religious harmony and coexistence.

Conclusion

Wider civil society, beyond the religious sects, must be brought into political dialogues in order for Lebanon to move towards creating a civil state with respect for secularism based on human rights, including the right to freedom of religious belief and practice. Lebanon's current political system, which was based on protecting and preserving the sects, has not achieved the goal of a fully stable society. With the emergence of new challenges in the era of globalization in which we live today, Lebanon requires the development of another political culture based on citizenship and rights. It thus requires the growth and development of non-sectarian parties, trade unions, schools, media, and non-sectarian associations that work for human rights and nothing else. It needs new national, regional, and international alliances to be able to face the challenges of globalization in all its forms, not the least of which are the consequences of climate change, and the need to strengthen the connection of all citizens to the land and the need to preserve our environment.

We need a new regime, open to human rights values based on tolerance and respect for all citizens, not sectarian discrimination, a legislative authority that works to meet people's aspirations with modern legislation and is vigilant in monitoring the implementation of laws, and independent judicial authority that is capable of accountability, laws that are in line with international human rights law, and in harmony with other international values, such as the goals of sustainable development, human security, and ensuring the participation of women and youth in all processes of progress, social development, and public life.

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Freedom of Religion and Belief, Citizenship, and Identity

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Status Quo: the Entanglement of Politics and Religion in Hindering the Emergence of a National Identity

The political situation in post-war Lebanon is characterized by perpetual cycles of conflict and instability, evident in successive political stalemates, leadership vacuums, and social upheavals. This pattern of stalemate is not only indicative of faltering democratic institutions but also of the withering values and rationale that underpin the 'National Pact' and the consociational system in place (Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab and Mikaelian 2015). Although the sectarian system was established to cater for religious diversity and ensure inclusivity, it was marred with flaws and inconsistencies in implementation that actually engendered inequalities and contributed to the 15- year civil war. The Taif agreement stipulated the abolishment of the confessional system and the creation of a Senate to safeguard religious diversity and the rights of all religious groups (Makdisi and El Khalil 2016). Though it has not been applied, its stipulation acknowledges the sectarian system's shortcomings, its inherent tendency to cause deadlock and dysfunctionality, entrench clientelism and corruption and possibly lead to further conflict. More recently, the economic meltdown, the 2019 popular uprising and the successive political and socio-economic crises highlight the urgent need for structural political reform and establishing a new social and political pact conducive to effective citizenship capable of governing religious diversity without politicizing religion.

The elements of the Lebanese sectarian system, from sectarian quotas in state institutions and official jobs to sectarian laws and political 'settlements', have effectively led to the emergence of sub-loyalties to the sects, religions or sectarian leaders which are governed by networks of patronage that provide social services. These networks override state authority and further weaken its institutions (Assi 2022). These elements have also led to sectarian and political polarization - often disguised in religious divisions- that preclude any process of forming a common national identity and drain the culture of conviviality. While acknowledging the effects of neighboring wars and regional turmoil, the sectarian system also inherently lends itself to external interventions (Makdisi and El Khalil 2016). The more a constituency finds itself capable of changing reality due to its demographic growth, organizational ability, or external support, the more it tries to change the status quo or impose its agenda based on its political interests. This critical power struggle has often led to sporadic clashes and wars in Lebanon since its independence, where different groups fight based on competing ideologies, be it political (left wing vs. right wing) or sectarian (Muslim vs. Christian followed by Sunni vs. Shias). Although some sectarian ideologies seek justification for violence in religious interpretations, the grievances underpinning the violence are often rooted in a lack of social justice, political and social marginalization, and economic deprivation (Simpson and Slavova 2018).

Identity Crisis and Lack of Citizenship as a Vulnerability Factor to Violent Extremism

Effective citizenship goes beyond state-citizen relationships to include forming relations among citizens themselves. The development of such relationships is an ongoing process closely connected to various aspects of societal formations impacted by social, cultural, and religious norms in Lebanon (UNDP 2009). The institutionalization of religion within the sectarian system consecrated a mentality that links the Lebanese identity to sectarian rather than national belonging, perpetuating fear of the 'other' and an existential competition at the expense of state-building and identity formation (Azzam, El Sammak and Salloum 2022). Some literature on violent extremism establishes a link between the emergence of violent extremist ideologies

and the lack of citizenship and national identity, particularly among the youth. This is based on the premise that adolescence is a period of identity search and that a sense of threat or marginalization of one's group identity can create openness to extremism. The extreme ideas provide a sense of certainty around what one believes, and the extreme groups provide a sense of belonging through a clear group identity. In turn, this often leads to a conflict between the religious and national identities. From this perspective, a social context in which certain group identities are demonized, marginalized, or lack status, is argued to create openness to extremist groups or ideas as a source of social identity (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2021, 350).

For instance, an exhaustive research project, the PAVE (2020-23) collected evidence-based knowledge on radicalization and violent extremism trends in the Middle East, North Africa (MENA), and Western Balkans. Empirical data was gathered in seven case study countries through various qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches and compared across selected communities and/or towns that are unevenly affected by violent extremism. Factors of vulnerability and resilience were identified at the meso-level of community dynamics and actors, based on three thematic clusters: the interface between religious, political, and ethnic/sectarian extremisms; the interaction between religious and public institutions; and the interplay between online and offline narratives on (de)radicalization.

The issue of national identity versus ethnic or religious identity figured highly in case studies in both regions. The research findings show that societies in the Balkans, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, are more vulnerable to ethno-political radicalization. At the same time, those in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Tunisia, and Lebanon (among other case studies), are more vulnerable to religious radicalization. This means that deradicalization in the Balkans should tackle ethnic differences and conflicts. In contrast, in the MENA region, it should tackle religious differences and conflicts, among other aspects, to limit the phenomenon of 'othering' (Ilazi and Ardit 2022).

The findings also highlighted limited political participation as the most complex long-term challenge contributing to Tunisia and Lebanon's radicalization. The impotence of both states in extending their authority and governing in remote regions translated into citizens' unequal opportunities and access to public services, reducing confidence in political leaders, and ultimately resulting in a tendency to refrain from political participation. Other factors limiting political participation include governance weaknesses such as nepotism, favoritism, corruption and a biased judiciary (Ilazi and Ardit 2022, 11). The lack of good governance and accountability creates a vacuum in public services at the community level, leaving room for other actors to fill (Ilazi and Ardit 2022, 13).

On the other hand, cities and towns in both regions that did not witness radicalization (but share similar socio-economic and ethnic/religious characteristics with neighboring towns that did witness radicalization) were studied in order to identify resilience factors to radicalization and violent extremism. The Beqaai town of Kherbet Rouha in Lebanon and the town of Podujeva in Kosovo are two such examples. Both towns stood out for the limited manifestation of violent extremism inspired by religion or ethno-politics, despite its multi-ethnic composition and some poverty, due to active citizenship and the role of religious communities who mobilized voluntarily against violent extremism (Ilazi and Ardit 2022, 8).

Within the broader 'national identity and citizenship' resilience factors against radicalization, the prevalence of societal norms and community traditions were key pillars of community resilience towards radicalization in the Balkans and MENA. The fieldwork in Kosovo and Lebanon suggests that areas with more robust traditions are more resilient toward radicalization (Ilazi and Ardit 2022). Traditions in this context largely refer to social

norms in the community, such as respect for the elderly and approach to the practice of religion.

For instance, in Kherbet Rouha in Lebanon, community disagreements (including over participation in Jihad or not) were brought before elders whose opinions are respected, whereby they are asked to deliberate on the issue. The moral authority of the town's Imam in Kherbet Rouha has been a major factor in uniting the religious ideology and general narratives and preventing any partisan ideologies (political or religious) from infiltrating the town. This was made possible by constantly holding coordination meetings with the most distinguished people in the town at the mosque or by establishing bodies that oversee religious speech. Therefore, 'social immunity' at Kherbet Rouha is the fruit of comprehensive cooperation among residents, newcomers, local authorities, prominent, influential figures, and expatriates.

In the same way, in Kosovo, communities with a solid commitment to social norms and religious traditions of practice have been more resilient toward radicalization. In both Podujeva and Kherbet Rouha, religiously inspired radicalization was seen as an external intrusion aimed at changing the religious traditions or how their community practiced and observed religion. As a result the community opposed such tendencies. In Kherbet Rouha, the Sufi tradition has been a vital resilience factor in fighting extremist preaching narratives. In parallel, in the Western Balkan states of North Macedonia and Kosovo, loyalty among Albanians to their shared language, culture, and traditions have been an essential factor of resilience towards radicalization, especially since the Albanian community itself is religiously diverse (Ilazi and Ardit 2022).

How Can Effective Citizenship Avert the Appeal to Violent Extremism?

Radicalization often occurs at the intersection of an enabling (structural and political) environment characterized by factors such as deprivation, exclusion, an experience of perceived injustice and an identity crisis. Accordingly, religious ideology is not considered the sole driver of violent extremism, as several case studies in the PAVE project worldwide have shown. Therefore, preventing radicalization and violent extremism through promoting citizenship and fostering a sense of national identity should be part of the broader discussion on state-building and reform of the governance system.

The literature on PVE in this regard builds on the underlying assumption that the attraction of an extremist ideology or group can be appeased through holding to a stronger, alternative framework of values, namely the notion of citizenship and human rights. It is suggested that human rights education and the "values of citizenship and diversity" provide a values framework that equips young people to speak against extremism (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2021, 346-361). This focus on human rights is generally linked to developing the skills of critical thinking in which human rights would provide the underlying framework on which this critical thought can be built (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2021, 346-361).

Further, religious leaders in Lebanon can anchor these values in religious texts based on numerous examples and interpretations. In this regard, it is also essential for religious institutions and leaders to strengthen dialogue in their communities between different schools of thought within the same religion. Based on the idea that the youth experience a disconnect between a national identity and a religious identity or particular ideology within a religious identity, giving space to explore and address identity-related questions is often proposed as a preventative measure (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2021, 346-361). This includes creating safe spaces to explore perceptions of identity and community and multiple identities and how to prioritize them.
In addition, joint workshops and training among the youth on religious identity and respect for diversity within each religion and between religions in Lebanon could help foster conviviality and overcome prejudices.

Such safe spaces can explore and address fundamental questions of who one is and what one believes and can potentially reduce the appeal to extremist groups or ideas as a source of answers to these questions (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2021, 350).

Moreover, the logic that underlies such an approach to prevention is that extreme views or perspectives can be overcome through an "acknowledgment of a certain legitimacy behind these views, and an opportunity to discuss, question and explore these views—that in doing so the mind is opened to alternative ways of viewing the situation. It seems to be suggested that being able to air these views openly serves to defuse their power" (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2021, 351).

On a more practical level, youth engagement in political action through attending protests and other forms of civic and political engagement enables young people to exercise moral agency and serves as a venue for developing resilience to radicalization (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2021, 346-361). For instance, the October 17, 2019, protests witnessed cross-confessional and cross-sectoral participation that included diverse religious communities and leaders. The protesters' demands included social justice, accountability, and system reform, with some religious communities going as far as demanding the overthrow of the sectarian regime (Karam and Majed 2022). Although the uprising lost momentum due to the successive financial, political, and health crises in the country, the fervor and hope that brought the Lebanese together are indicative of youth activism-in-waiting, growing awareness of the politicization of religion and the joint need for a system of governance that builds on this brief moment of shared identity and flourishing of the ideals of citizenship.

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Role of Youth in Promoting FoRB

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Introduction

Lebanon is known for its diverse population, with individuals of various religions and beliefs. However, the country has a complicated history of conflicts and tensions among different religious communities. The conflicts, tensions, and violence that have shaken Lebanon since the 1970s have their roots in ethnic and religious tensions that stretch back several hundred years. Lebanon was a semi-autonomous part of the Ottoman Empire starting in the sixteenth century, and the Ottoman rulers manipulated local religious elites to secure their power. Lebanon remained nominally under Ottoman control until the breakup of the Ottoman Empire after World War One. Following the war, France was given the area now comprising Lebanon and Syria by the League of Nations as part of its post-Ottoman mandate. France slowly moved Lebanon to independence, with a constitution in 1926 and a follow-on census in 1932 that would serve as a point of reference over subsequent decades. The Constitution created a parliamentary regime coupled with proportional representation along confessional lines. By the late 1960s, cracks began to emerge in the National Pact, and Lebanon was influenced by regional instability. By the early 1970s, the system broke down, leading to the civil war. After fifteen years of war (1975-1990), at least 100,000 Lebanese were dead, tens of thousands had emigrated abroad, and an estimated 900,000 civilians were internally displaced. Since the Taif Accord, an uneasy internal peace has held but religious tension, sectarian competition, and external involvement all still fracture Lebanese politics.[117]

Despite these challenges, young people's efforts in Lebanon have been crucial in addressing discrimination, intolerance, and hate speech, and fostering a more inclusive and tolerant society. Social media platforms, among other tools and methods, have played a significant role in their efforts to promote freedom of religion and belief. Young people have been using these platforms to share their stories, raise awareness about religious freedom issues, and advocate for change. They have also been using social media to challenge hate speech, intolerance, and discrimination, promoting a culture of respect and acceptance.

What Makes Promoting FoRB a Focus for Youth?

Youth inclusion, FoRB, and conflict transformation are interconnected; there will be no lasting peace without addressing all three. Conflict and fragile settings are rife with FoRB violations, which act both as drivers and consequences of violence. Though young people are essential actors in these contexts, formal religious institutions and leadership are primarily controlled by older generations without effective youth participation. Youth are not present in decision-making for various reasons, including socio-cultural and religious norms, being perceived as absolutely inexperienced, and specific vulnerabilities. At the same time, these challenges and the youth's often innovative responses can point us to where targeted action would enable them to thrive, leading their communities toward greater understanding and respect for freedom of religion or belief.[118]

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[117] Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs; August 2013: https://s3.amazonaws.com/berkley- center/130801BCLebanonPersistenceSectarianConflict.pdf

[118] Search for Common Ground; Rachel Forster; Briefing Paper Region: www.sfcg.org/wp- content/uploads/2023/03/Issue-Brief-Towards-youth-leadership-on-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-FoRB-EN.pdf; March 2023.

To promote FoRB, civic spaces are a crucial starting point, as they are the main factor in building a common ground among young people and breaking down imaginary barriers between them through various means such as sports, culture, education, digital engagement, and art. These means and others have led to the creation of spaces for young people to communicate, express themselves more freely, and build communication bridges among them, allowing greater freedom and acceptance of each other, regardless of their beliefs or religions. Most importantly, in most cases, these civic spaces have proven to be the safest spaces for the youth.

The existence of a safe space (such as Peace of Art (PoA)) creates traction and sparks interest among young people across the community – highlighting the need for such spaces and the importance of such spaces to young people across the region. As one male participant who had heard about PoA but had not taken part in their activities confirms: *"I was able to see how Peace of Art was helping individuals grow and work on themselves, and I hoped to be able to do the same as well."*[119]

Peace of Art conducted youth-perspective-based research under the 'Hear Us Now: Youth Voices Create Public Transparency and Strengthen Accountability in North Beqaa' research project[120], which targeted 191 marginalized Lebanese Sunni, Shiite, Christian and Syrian Sunni refugee youth, males and females of ages between 14 and 25 years from Baalbeck area (Al Fakiha, Al Ain, Arsal, Al Zaytoun, Jdeideh, Nabi-Othman). This research adopted a mixed methods approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The data collection phase of the project included: (1) Detailed document and literature review; (2) Surveys to understand the characteristics and opinions of the research group; (3) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and (4) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The aforementioned types of data collection enabled the research team to grasp an in-depth understanding of the research participants' perceptions and opinions on the freedom of expression, beliefs, ideologies, self-expression, social dynamics as well as cultural barriers. The results were published on the organization's social media platforms, and the findings were as follows:

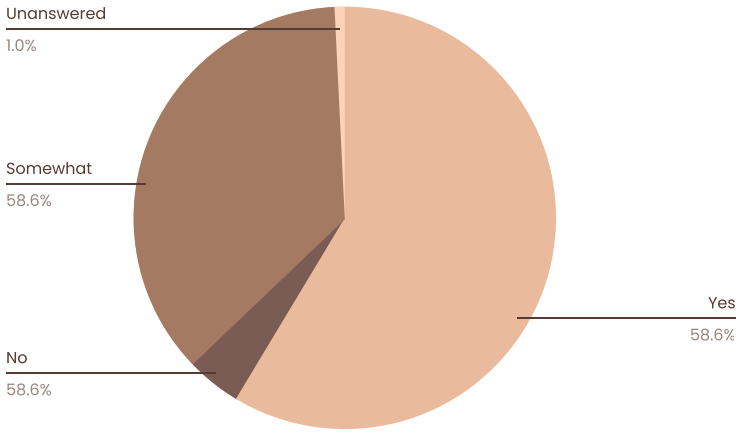

Figure1. Expression with the Family Environment

[119] By Peace of Art; Prepared by Dr. Jasmine Diab; Created 01/04/2022; Research Paper: www.peaceofartinternational.org/

[120] By Peace of Art; Prepared by Dr. Jasmine Diab; Created 01/04/2022; Research Paper: www.peaceofartinternational.org/

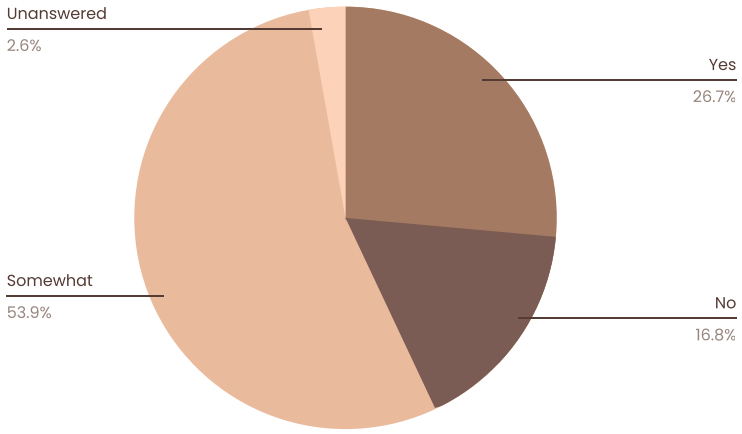

Figure2. Expression within the Wider Community

To understand the barriers that impede youths' expression, the survey explored the extent to which respondents feel safe expressing themselves in two primary contexts: their family environments and the wider community. Although just above half of the population feels that they are able to express themselves honestly in their family environments, the shift in the response rate is immense when it comes to the wider community context. The percentage of respondents who feel they can express themselves fully in the wider community drops from 59% to 27%, indicating the many barriers and challenges the youths face regarding self-expression in the North Bekaa region in Lebanon. Some of those barriers pertain to the traditional values that society upholds, belittling their opinions or simply not providing a suitable space for them to express themselves.

This is why building open and safe spaces for the youth to express their opinions freely and openly is crucial.

Young people are a powerful force for change, and youth activism is on the rise, with many young people taking action for social transformation. Youth are engaging with their communities and making their voices heard. This activism is being carried out through various media and is conducted differently in nearly every country. Young people can choose to hold rallies and protests on the streets, attend public hearings, or even organize grassroots movements within their communities. Since the Internet is used by 65% of the world's population,[121] it has also become a preferred tool for young people to foster positive change. Social media is one of the most effective tools for bringing people together and catalyzing positive change. It has proven to be an effective tool for youth activists[122], mainly when tasked as a tool for youth to engage in FoRB discussions and exchanges.

The youth demographic possesses significant capabilities as a human resource, including skilled and open-minded trainers and enthusiastic young men and women committed to improving the concept of FoRB within their communities, particularly in the Middle East.

[121] Data Portal: "Global Digital Insights"; https://datareportal.com/reports/digigal-2022-lebanon; (Accessed 20 June 2023).
[122] United Nations: "Are Twittering Youth Agents of Positive Change?", 2010: https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/are-twittering-youth-agents-positive-change

This is forming a sense of responsibility among young people to refuse past approaches and dynamics and start thinking about having more open conversations and discussions, which value is found in the absence of an overarching curriculum since young Lebanese are growing up with scant knowledge of the country's history. Young people want to understand what happened and how the situation has come to what it is today so that they can address the legacy of divisions and face the continuing violence and ever-present danger of renewed sectarian fighting.[123] Therefore, to help build their awareness and create common ground to encourage open dialogue between young people, innovative approaches to addressing history and promoting multiple perspectives are essential, especially with FoRB.

Where are the weak points in relation to FoRB?

There are several weaknesses in the meaningful engagement of youth in promoting FoRB in Lebanon. One significant issue is the weak relationship dynamic between young people of different religions and sects based on the structural barriers within the Lebanese context. As a result, many young people are forced to stay within their respective communities, limiting their ability to engage with each other and build bridges of understanding and respect. The main reason behind this is the lack of education on diversity among educational institutions in different regions of Lebanon.[124] This lack of interaction undermines the potential for youth-led initiatives to promote FoRB. Another reason is the structural isolation of the different areas of Lebanon in terms of distance, services, and social dynamics, hindering the young people's abilities to engage and participate on different levels.

Secondly, the Ministry of Youth and Sports is crucial in supporting youth work on FoRB. However, the ongoing economic crisis since 2019, coupled with the state's failure to approve a budget, have weakened the ministry's ability to provide the necessary support to youth initiatives in this area. Further, the ministry must support, endorse, and encourage youth-led initiatives. Without sufficient funding and resources, it becomes challenging for the ministry to facilitate youth-led initiatives that promote FoRB.

Thirdly, even if many existing individual initiatives are working towards promoting FoRB in Lebanon, many of these initiatives need more capacity and resources to achieve their goals. As a result, their impact is often limited, and they struggle to reach a broader audience. This is why civic spaces play a crucial role in promoting the role of youth in FoRB. However, such spaces are scarce in Lebanon, particularly in remote and marginalized areas. This scarcity limits the opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful dialogue and exchange ideas and perspectives, hindering progress toward a more inclusive and tolerant society.
Fourthly, most of the time, youth are still underestimated and not seen as key players in decision- making in relation to FoRB, where such roles are still limited to that of religious leaders. This undermines their agency and ability to contribute meaningfully. Youth must be empowered to lead in promoting FoRB, as they have a unique perspective and ability to connect with their peers across religious and sectarian divides.

[123] International Center for Transitional Justice: "Grappling with a Violent Past, Lebanese Youth Help Preserve Truth and Memory"; https://www.ictj.org/latest-news/grappling-violent-past-lebanese-youth-help-preserve-truth- and-memory; 2022
[124] ALEF-Act for Human Rights: "Citizenship and Diversity: A Selective Teaching of Notions"; https://alefliban.org/publications/diversity-citizenship-a-selective-teaching-of-notions/; 2021.

Finally, the ongoing sectarian political and religious affiliations is a significant obstacle to progress toward FoRB in Lebanon. Political clientelism used by current ruling powers has led to the perpetuation of sectarian divisions, which hinders efforts toward promoting FoRB. Addressing these weaknesses will require concerted efforts from the government, civil society, and religious leaders to empower young people and create a more inclusive and tolerant society away from politics and corruption.

What Stands as a Barrier to Fostering FoRB?

Many young people today are greatly influenced by hate speech, which is mostly a tool politicians seek to achieve their goals. The reason behind this is a lack of awareness of the dangers of hate speech, especially at the religious and ideological levels, which weakens the concept of freedom of religion and belief, especially in marginalized areas with an isolated social composition due to geographical distances, particularly in the Bekaa region. This has separated many areas from the state's influence, and citizens are isolated, resulting in a regional mindset.

Further, recent security incidents, such as terrorist attacks since the beginning of the Syrian war, the wars with ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), and the large displacement of Syrian families to border areas, have exacerbated an already-tense situation. After the recent attacks that targeted these areas, the people resorted to providing their own security to protect their regions, in the absence of state protection for their religious practices. This has created a situation filled with animosity and hatred between the people of the same country, with severe implications for social cohesion. In addition, the lack of awareness about the risks of hate speech, particularly at the religious and ideological level, has significantly impacted young people, who have become a tool for politicians to achieve their goals. Another point is that the exclusion of young religious figures from decision-making by politicians in power only engaging with recognized religious leaders, who are predominantly older, is a common practice. As a result, the youth are often seen as instruments for street pressure rather than actual decision-makers. This is due to two reasons: firstly, the lack of full awareness of FoRB among young people, and secondly, the public policy that aims to maintain the current religious system and reinforce the ruling power rather than bring about change.

Consequence: Resistance to listening to young change-making leaders.

What Actions Should Be Taken?

The ways forward to address and mitigate violence and transform the conflict in the Baalbeck- Hermel area, where the Peace of Art organization works, starts with raising awareness among young people about the importance of non-violent culture, raising awareness among young people about stereotypes and their dangers, building a common ground among young people today to break down regional, sectarian, and religious barriers, building a collective memory among young people in the community, to promote greater social harmony, and increasing dynamic engagement between religious leaders and youth through roundtable discussions, dialogues, and others. This can be done through designed programs with the young people that focus on creating a platform for the youth to meet and open discussions with other youth from different backgrounds and with religious leaders and experts.

The Importance of Arts in FoRB Approaches

Of the many approaches that have proven successful in promoting change, art plays a significant role in

providing societies with the space to communicate and amplify their voices and get their messages across. It is a safety net that allows for preserving local identities and protecting the uniqueness of the people, especially the minorities, by helping provide the platform and create an audience. Arts have also played an important role historically and in the present to advocate for human rights, fight injustices, and call out violations, including pushing for changes on grassroots, inter-community, and legislative and policy-making levels.

Art's most crucial role within a community is creating bridges and bonding the communities through creating common and mutual values and interests that help build acceptance and communication even in conflict-affected areas. In Northern Bekaa, Peace of Art has successfully worked on bridging the communities and creating open and safe spaces for the youth of diverse religious beliefs, opinions, nationalities, villages, and social statuses to come together and communicate through fine arts, filmmaking, collaborative community murals, photography and exhibitions, theatrical works, music performances, and bands...

One of the current programs implemented by Peace of Art was the Musawat project in partnership with PAX for Peace and which included training sessions for a group of young people on laws, resolutions, FoRB, accepting diversity, multilateralism, and hate speech. The program also included presentation and storytelling skills, body language, and debate training. Debates were later launched between youth under this program, youth from the local community, and roundtables between young people and religious leaders from diverse sects and religious backgrounds. An integral part of the implementation was the interactive music and theater sessions with young people, which culminated with theater performances that reflected the FoRB situation in the local community from the young people's perspectives.

Mohammad Saddik, the theater trainer, shared his insights on the program: "The theater training was beneficial for the youth to break the fear of expressing themselves with ease and to be themselves. It also helped them free their bodies, voices, and movements. However, the most important part of the theater training was that the participants wrote, improvised, and created a play themselves that looks like the local community and reality on the ground between the different religious sects, in a place where everybody goes to "A Bakery." This play highlighted to the audience the reality and how interreligious dialogue should look, from the lens of the young people".

Figure 3. Religious Leaders' Open Discussion Sessions within Peace of Art's space

Figure 4. Interreligious Round Table Sessions between Religious Leaders and Young People within Peace of Art's space, November 2022

Figure 5. Young People Performing Theater Performance of Interreligious Dialogue within Peace of Art's space, March 2023

A survey was sent out to 191 respondents across different regions in the Baalbeck area (Al Fakiha, Al Ain, Arsal, Al Zaytoun, Jdeideh, Nabi-Othman) under the 'Hear Us Now: Youth Voices Create Public Transparency and Strengthen Accountability in North Beqaa' research project run by Peace of Art organization, to learn about their freedom of expression and their sense of safety in regards to it. When asked about the different platforms through which they feel most comfortable expressing themselves, more than half of the respondents identified Art and Music, while just below a quarter indicated that Social Media enables them to express themselves. The remainder were more or less equally distributed between theater, journalism and writing, and other modes of expression, including photography, dance, sports, and healthy conversations (with oneself or others).

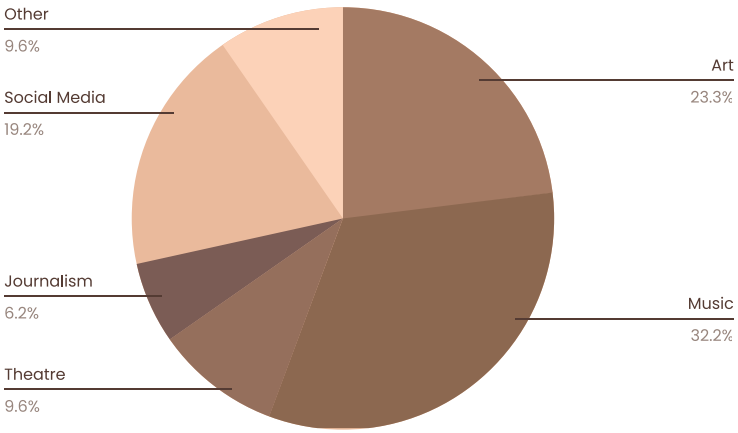

Figure 6. Self-expression Tools

The reliance on art as a safe way of expressing oneself highlights the critical role that PoA plays with the youth in the region. When previous PoA participants were asked whether PoA activities have impacted them positively and whether the program had helped them express themselves better, a striking majority of 97% and 96% answered "Yes" to both questions, respectively. In addition, 99% agreed that PoA fosters an environment where they feel safe. In comparison to the 73% that do not or somewhat feel able to express themselves in the broader community, this striking majority that finds itself able to express itself in a safe space like PoA highlights the importance and role of the civic space in fostering the youths' healthy development of self-expression in the area.

This only underlines the importance of opening spaces that promote expression for youth at grassroots levels, primarily through the use of art as a medium and platform to amplify these voices and reduce the use of violence caused by conflicts. Our role is enabling young people to visualize an accepting community built on mutual values, co-designed with the young people themselves, recognizing art, education, and culture as being at the heart of promoting FoRB.

Conclusion:

Social cohesion and Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) are promoted by repairing social, religious, and sectarian divides as local communities become aware of the rights and duties of citizenship with equal rights. This should be done with authorities, including local and religious stakeholders, to lessen discrimination based on religion or belief. And as social media is an integral part of communication and networking today, it must contribute to reducing hate, violence, and conflict, and instead build more mutual, constructive exchange and dialogue between young women and men. All this cannot be done without the space for young people to participate in the FoRB interventions, including through debate about the legal frameworks regarding freedom of religion and belief and equal rights. On the national and regional scale, the exchange between politicians, religious leaders and young people is essential. Staff, partners, experts, and youth group exchanges on topics of joint relevance, lead to more effective, inspired, and informed activities, contributing to the promotion and fostering of FoRB for the whole of Lebanese society.

XV. Vulnerable Groups

The Situation of the National, Cultural, and Ethnic Components in Lebanon (Kurds, Syriac, Assyrians)
Author: Newroz Association

Introduction

Lebanon has a rich history marked by a diversity of sects who migrated to the country, searching for freedom and escaping persecution. As a result, the country has witnessed the arrival of various national, religious, and ethnic minorities over different periods. The freedom to practice religious and social rituals has been critical in attracting and retaining these groups in Lebanon.

However, it is essential to note that the Lebanese government has not registered the records of certain minorities, including the Kurds, Syriacs, and Assyrians, despite their long-standing presence in the country. While the reason for this non-registration is yet to be determined, manu linked to the fear of creating further "unbalance" in the demography or the shattering of the monopoly of religious authorities in the country. Consequently, this led to a significant number of Kurds remaining unregistered or holding a document called "nationality under study"[125] until 1994 when some were finally granted citizenship. The lack of official statistics and registration poses challenges for these minorities in Lebanon. This section explores the diversity of sects in Lebanon, the significance of religious and social rituals, and the status of these minorities in the country.
Study the cases of some components of Lebanese society: the Kurds, Syriacs, and Assyrian

The Kurds

History, Language, and Political Participation

In Lebanese society, a notable group of families with Kurdish origins has greatly influenced the history of Lebanon. Over the course of different periods, these Kurdish families migrated to Lebanon with distinct motivations. One notable migration occurred during the Ayyubid era, when Kurdish families arrived to safeguard the coastal areas. Additionally, in the early fourteenth century, certain Kurdish families settled in Tripoli and the Chouf region. Noteworthy families that have significantly shaped Lebanon's history include the Ayyubids,[126] the Sifa family, the Maraaba, the Jumblatites, and the Amadis.

[125] A special title given to individuals who could not be registered in Lebanon, different from stateless. They were registered as "nationality under study", meaning that they had the right to live in Lebanon, under this title, until their fate was decided.
[126] In Lebanon, the Ayyubids were led by Saladin, also known as Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi, who was a prominent Ayyubid ruler. Saladin gained fame for his military campaigns against the Crusaders and successfully recaptured

Most of the Kurds in Lebanon trace their origins back to the early twentieth century when they fled Mardin and Botan, cities in Turkish Kurdistan. Their migration was driven by the persecution and injustices inflicted upon them by the Turkish state. Unfortunately, an accurate census of the Kurdish population in Lebanon remains unavailable to this day, although estimates place their numbers between 100,000 and 120,000.

Further, regarding the Kurdish language, it's important to note its belonging to the group of Indo- European languages. Indeed, only a small percentage of the Kurds in Lebanon are fluent in Kurdish, constituting only around 19%, they are also known as the "Kurmanj". Further, the Kurmanji dialect spoken by most of the Kurds as the Kurdish language has two main dialects, Kurmanji and Sorani.

On the political front, the Lebanese Kurds hold substantial influence as a notable voting bloc within the country, particularly in the Beirut II constituency. Throughout historical Lebanese political development, the Kurds have always been known for their electoral loyalty to the Sunni leaders, for their proximity with the leaders of that sect, politically and religiously. However, despite the numerous promises made during each parliamentary election, the Kurds have never succeeded in securing a dedicated seat in the legislative authority solely representing their community. Instead, their representation is encompassed within a broader "minorities" seat in Beirut II, which remains susceptible to being influenced by the majority. Therefore, the Kurds do not have any political representation at the Parliament level, despite more than twenty-five thousand voters in Beirut. Even at the level of public office, no Kurdish person has been appointed to the public administration. A vital breakthrough to mention is that in 2018, Mrs. Hanan Othman, the president of the Newroz Association, ran for the parliamentary elections. It was the first time that the Kurds voted for their candidate. It was also the first political experience for the Kurds to participate in political activity, but it was not enough to have their candidate succeed.

Social and Economic Situation of Kurds in Lebanon

The places of residence of the Kurds since the beginning of their arrival were and still are distributed in the following areas: Al-Mazraa, Al-Marfaa, Al-Bashoura, Zuqaq Al-Blat, Al- Musaytbeh, and Ras Beirut.

The Kurdish minority struggled with marginalization and the Lebanese state's injustice. At first, the state did not recognize them, and they were not naturalized. They were therefore prevented from entering public schools due to their lack of nationality. It deprived them of the right to education and decent work. Consequently, their social condition did not improve; many did not even own the homes they lived in, as they were not allowed to buy property during a certain period.

Despite their presence in Lebanon since the 1920s, the Kurds were not granted Lebanese citizenship, as with other minorities and sects, such as the Syriac Catholics, the Orthodox, the Assyrians, and the nomadic Arabs. It was only in 1956 that Lebanese citizenship was granted to some Kurdish families, without any explanation, with a document called "under study."

Jerusalem in 1187. He extended his influence beyond Syria and Egypt, including parts of Lebanon.During the Ayyubid period, there were Ayyubid governors and local rulers in various parts of Lebanon, including Tripoli, Sidon, and the Beqaa Valley. They played a role in shaping the political landscape of the region and defending against Crusader invasions.

Among the most prominent figures who stood by the Kurdish minority was the leader and thinker Kamal Jumblatt, who was of Kurdish origin, as he contributed to granting them Lebanese nationality and a license to the "Kurdish Charitable Association"[127] when he was then Minister of the Interior.

In the past, the Kurds had no developed commercial or vocational work, nor did they have a role within the industrial or commercial sector. Their field of work was limited to agriculture and laborious professions; they do not go to the industrial or commercial sector because they do not possess Lebanese nationality, as they are not entitled to own property or to be registered in the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, as they are foreigners. What worsened their economic, social, working, and living conditions was that they were not subject to the Lebanese Labor Law, which deprived them of the right to enjoy social security and the benefit of end-of-service compensation.

Given the extreme poverty and the poor material conditions that the immigrant Kurds were subjected to, individuals reported many cases where a group of families was forced to live in one residential house, they did not have a residence, and they were deprived of the simplest means of living, such as water and electricity, which made them in an unenviable social situation. The phenomenon of poverty was common among about 70% of the Kurdish community, in addition to their lack of education, as they did not have the opportunity to educate their children due to all the reasons mentioned above. As a result, some families were content with memorizing the Qur'an for their children or sending them to Sheikh Ali Berri School in Al-Basta Al-Tahta in 1937.

Freedom of Religion and Belief

The holy book of Zoroastrianism is Zindavesta. There are also Christians and Jews among the Kurds, in a small percentage, but most Lebanese Kurds are Muslims, following the Sunni sect.

Because of their practices and beleiefs, Kurdish consider and qualify themselves as spreading peace and love. They believe this comes from the Zoroastrian religion,[128] which is the ancient religion of the Kurds. Among its principles and teachings is reverence for the four elements (water, air, fire, and earth), and it does not justify profaning them in any way. That is why the fire was the emblem and symbol of Zarathustra himself. It was not permissible to desecrate stagnant or running water or bury the dead in the soil for purification. The basis of his doctrine is the reverence for two gods: the God of Good and the God of Evil. The Zoroastrians worship the god of goodness (Ahuramazda) because he represents all that is good. And they fear the second (Ahriman) because in him lies all that is harmful to man, so they raise prayers for him to avoid his evils.

[127] The first association in Lebanon, working on protecting Kurdish culture and advocating for their rights as a minority.

[128] The oldest religion the Kurds embraced is the Zoroastrian religion, which lay in Persia and Media for six centuries BC. Its remnants still exist among many Kurds.

Syriacs

History, Language, and Culture

The modern presence of Syriacs in Lebanon was after the massacres of Sifo 1915[129]; the Syriacs arriving in two waves, settled in three areas in Lebanon: the first Msaytbeh in Beirut and Ashrafieh and the third Zahle. The second wave was during the 1960s. They came to Metn, Mount Lebanon, as work-seekers. Syriacs roots go back to the late Middle Ages when a significant number of people took refuge in "Bcharre" in Northern Lebanon following the Mongol invasion. The Maronites greatly influenced the succeeding Catholic patriarchate among the Syriacs. Further, some Syriacs who converted to Catholicism resided in Deir al-Shorfa in Lebanon. Gradually, this small presence became more significant, as they were joined by many of those attracted by economic conditions to this location of the Ottoman Empire and other Anatolian refugees fleeing massacres and prosecution.

Since they migrated to Lebanon, they established schools, educational institutions, and scouts. Further, the Syriac Association[130] was founded in 1975 and owns a publishing house. In an interview with Mr. Habib Afram, the Head of the Syriac cultural association in Lebanon, he confirmed that they "consider that Lebanon and Syria are twins. Even the names of cities and villages are Syriac, "Labnoun" means the heart of God, and Beirut means the house of wells."

The Syriac language witnessed a significant decline from the seventeenth century, despite the many attempts made by some activists in associations and schools to preserve the heritage and the Syriac language through teaching, lecturing, issuing pamphlets, and printing books. To maintain the language, there is the Society of "Friends of the Syriac Language," which teaches the language to people from the community born in Lebanon and interested in learning the language of their ancestors.

The number of Syriac Lebanese Orthodox and Catholics is estimated to be between fifty and fifty- five thousand. Their decrease is due to two main factors: migration, especially during the civil war and beyond, and economic and livelihood reasons.

Political Participation

As stated by Mr. Habib Afram,[131] the big challenge Syriacs face in Lebanon is their political presence "because the major sects are the ones who get everything, such as the Maronites, Sunnis, and Shiites, but the other sects are considered second class, or remnants of a political or administrative presence." Therefore, "Syriacs could not dream of being Minister in Lebanon," he added.

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[129] The massacres of Sayfo, occurred in 1915-1918 during World War I in the Ottoman Empire (modern-day Turkey). It targeted the Assyrian and Chaldean Christian populations, as well as other minority groups such as the Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic communities. The Ottoman government, under the rule of the Young Turks, launched a systematic campaign to eliminate these minority groups, considering them a threat due to their perceived support for the Russian Empire. The massacres involved widespread killings, deportations, forced conversions, and other forms of persecution.

130 The first association in Lebanon, working on protecting Syriac culture and advocating for their rights as a minority.

According to many Syriacs, there is a form of racism in Lebanon against them. Like other minorities deprived of Lebanese nationality, in 1994, they were reinstated under Decree No. 5247. The election laws, since 1920, noted one seat in the city of Beirut to represent minorities, including the Syriac community (Orthodox and Catholic). Three Syriac Orthodox deputies occupied the minority seat in the House of Representatives, respectively: Asmar Asmar, Jamil Shammas, and Antoine Bano / For the first time, this seat was occupied by Mrs. Cynthia Zarazir for the Syriac Catholic in the session (2022-2026)

Assyrians

History

The villages and cities of the Assyrians in the mountains of Hakkari province, between Turkey and northern Iraq, were exterminated by the Ottomans in 1915. After the displacement of those who remained in Iraq and Syria, and then subjected to another massacre in the Iraqi region of Sahmila in 1933, most of the Assyrians were forced to seek refuge in Syria and then Lebanon, where they were distributed between the areas of Zahle, Sad Al-Baouchriyeh, Ashrafieh and the town of Hadath. As a result, Assyrians reached about a thousand before 1975. However, only 15,000 remain due to the civil war, most residing in Sad al-Baouchriyeh. About 90 percent of them are Lebanese, according to the 1932 census, and the rest acquired Lebanese nationality under the naturalization decree issued in 1994.

Political Representation

According to the parliamentary election laws before independence, no parliamentary seat was allocated to the Eastern Assyrian community. Instead, they were represented among the minority seats in Beirut I. However, no Assyrian in the history of independent Lebanon has ever held this seat. Also, no Assyrians have been appointed to successive governments since before independence until today.

Social Situation of Assyrians in Lebanon

In Lebanon, Assyrians have a long and rich history. They have been present in the region since ancient times and have contributed significantly to its culture and heritage in the early 20th century. Further, Assyrians have established their communities and cultural institutions, such as churches and schools. They have also contributed to the country's political and social life, with several Assyrians serving as politicians, activists, and community leaders.

However, like many other minorities in Lebanon, Assyrians have faced discrimination and marginalization at times throughout their history. For example, during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), Assyrians were among the groups targeted by militias and other armed factions.

Today, some Assyrian associations work in the social and humanitarian fields, intending to provide them with knowledge, culture, food, and a healthy environment. Other associations seek to preserve the Assyrian heritage, traditions, and language. In brief, the Assyrians also suffer from difficult social, cultural, and living

[131] President of the Syriac League of Lebanon, university lecturer, writer, and advocate for minority rights.

conditions due to the marginalization they are exposed to. That is why we see large numbers of Assyrians migrating to other countries to obtain stability and better living opportunities.

Miscellaneous Points to Mention

As a result of the interviews conducted with several individuals who belong to these minorities, it was found that the difficulties are almost the same in terms of deprivation of public and military jobs and employment opportunities, in addition to the marginalization of their role in public life at the representative level, whether in parliament or local councils, predominantly the Kurdish minority.

The interviewees unanimously agreed that the sectarian system in Lebanon leads to inequality among the Lebanese citizens, which leads to the lack of citizenship at the expense of religious and sectarian affiliation, and that the laws and regulations in force in Lebanon have partially protected them in rights, jobs and other public domains. However, marginalization is not limited to parliamentary representation. Still, it is also present in Lebanese universities when assigning directors to branches and faculties built on sectarian bases.

Conclusion

The Lebanese state has not passed legislation to protect minorities. Minorities still have their national, ethnic, cultural, and religious identity threatened rather than promoted, taught, and respected. The Lebanese government must make more effort to guarantee the right of effective participation of these groups at the national level. In addition, the Lebanese government has still not adopted public policies to preserve the rights of minorities and take appropriate measures to ensure that persons belonging to minorities can fully participate in their respective societies from the social, economic, legal, developmental, and functional aspects.

Although the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities stipulates that they have the "right to participate at the national level," the Lebanese state has not adopted a strategy to achieve this participation. Therefore, recommendations resulting from this report's work include the belief that it is necessary to contribute to promoting the rights of minorities in Lebanon. This can only happen when we no longer address these groups as "minorities," and we certainly stop looking at them as such.

Finally, the amendment of all legal texts to ensure better protection for minorities is crucial and imminent. It must be accompanied by uniting efforts of social and cultural associations that represent minorities, increasing coordination among them, and developing joint work programs to preserve the cultural and moral heritage of these historical and ancient peoples, rooted in the depth of history.

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Access to Religion for People Deprived of their Liberty in Lebanon
Author: ALEF – Act for Human Rights

As per the constitution's preamble (paragraph b), the government shall embody human rights principles in all fields and areas without exception, which should automatically and typically include the rights of individuals deprived of their liberty. Thus, people deprived of liberty should still have human rights and be able to practice their right to freedom of religion and belief and practice their religion in detention centers.

Furthermore, under international human rights law, "everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion." This applies equally to detainees and means that they have the right to choose and change their religion and the opportunity to manifest their religion in worship, observance, practice, and teaching in detention. Therefore, religious indoctrination and forcible religious conversion of detainees contradict and violate the freedom of religion in prisons.[132]

Several international agreements and conventions protect the right to liberty and fair trial in Lebanon. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights [articles 3, 8, 9, and 10] and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) [articles 2(3), 4, 5, 9, 10(1), and 14 (1)] are most commonly referred to, when discussing guarantees of the rights to liberty and fair trial. The state of Lebanon has ratified the UDHR and ICCPR and subsequently reflected them in Lebanon's laws. In practice, however, Lebanese criminal justice practices have not always functioned accordingly.

Article 10 of the ICCPR requires detainees to be treated with humanity and respect. Furthermore, the UN General Assembly Resolution 70/175 – also known as the Nelson Mandela Rules – establishes standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners to ensure humane conditions of detention and is binding for Lebanon as customary international law.

Prisoners in Lebanon have the right to access to religion. However, the situation of prisons in the country is perilous. Many prisoners are deprived of their rights. In an LBCI report (The Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International) discussing the situation of the prisoners in Al Qobbeh prison for Women, some cases revealed that detainees were subject to many human rights violations. Moreover, many prisoners are facing many legal problems. Thus, the freedom of religion for detainees in Lebanon is more at risk.[133]

According to FoRB's principles and the Lebanese constitution, detainees in prison in Lebanon have the right to practice their religion freely. There should be no discrimination based on religion, and detainees have the right not to subscribe to a religion equally. Prison authorities should ensure that detainees adhering to religion can participate in private and collective prayer, have visits from religious representatives, and possess religious objects, signs, and materials. Detainees should also be able to observe their religion's requirements (for example, relating to food, clothing, hygiene, and grooming). Furthermore, the right to religion in prisons

[132] Religion : key element. https://www.apt.ch/en/knowledge-hub/detention-focus-database/life-prison-regime-and- activities/religion
[133] Detainees in Lebanon: the reality of their rights https://www.rightsobserver.org/blog/detainees-in-lebanon:-the- reality-of-their-rights

applies to all recognized religions. Yet, detainees of minority religions may face barriers to exercising this right because of discrimination and/or a lack of awareness. Unfortunately, they are also vulnerable to religious indoctrination or forced conversions through recognized programs by other detainees.[134]

Migrant Workers in Lebanon

Author: ALEF – Act for Human Rights

The employment of migrant domestic workers has become popular in its current form after the 1975 Lebanese Civil War. A domestic worker is a person who works within the employer's household to provide care and complete chores.[135] In Lebanon, most migrant domestic workers are women from African and Southeast Asian countries, including Ethiopia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.[136]

Migrant domestic workers confront numerous obstacles, particularly in terms of their rights. They are not covered by the Lebanese Labor Law, they are not allowed to create or join trade unions, and their status in the country is governed by the Kafala system, which is a restricted immigration regime that ties migrant workers' legal status to their employers and that has been linked to modern slavery. These violations of their fundamental human rights impact other rights, such as freedom of religion and belief, as human rights are interdependent. For example, limitations imposed on the freedom of movement of migrant domestic workers prohibit them from visiting places of worship or gathering to practice religious rituals. The unlimited working days and hours also create a challenge for migrant domestic workers to have time to practice their religious rights. Additionally, the state's lack of protection for this group makes it easier for employers to harass migrant domestic workers based on their beliefs and to force them to adhere to the employer's beliefs.

Furthermore, migrant workers whose religious beliefs and practices are not acknowledged by the Lebanese state are discriminated against. Since most migrant domestic workers come from African and Southeast Asian countries, some do not belong to any of the 18 recognized religious groups. Thus, these groups do not have defined religious spaces to practice their faith. Additionally, in the absence of a civil court, they also do not have access to a wide range of rights. Any religious group not among the 18 recognized groups in Lebanon does not have the same right to freedom of religion and belief as the recognized religious groups. The sectarian mechanism set in place results in the absence of many basic rights for individuals who belong to unrecognized groups. For instance, they have no space for worship or a place to manifest, practice, or teach their religion. They also cannot marry, divorce or inherit according to the rules of their religion or a civil law for lack of its existence.

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[134] Religion : key element. https://www.apt.ch/en/knowledge-hub/detention-focus-database/life-prison-regime-and- activities/religion

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XVI. Freedom of Belief and Women's Rights in Lebanon: What are the Obstacles to a Civil Personal Status Law?

Author: Kulluna Irada

Introduction

More than a century after the establishment of the State of Lebanon, the features of inclusive Lebanese citizenship have not yet been completed considering the failure to adopt a civil personal status law that guarantees respect for freedom of belief and achieves equality between all citizens regardless of their sectarian affiliations on the one hand, and equality between men and women on the other. At a time when well-established personal status systems are significant as they are the cornerstone in regulating individual and family relations in any society -as they work to regulate relations between citizens within the family- the historical collusion between religious institutions and sectarian political forces has prevented the establishment of the rule of law where citizens are equal in exercising their right to marry and establish a family.

The political system of Lebanon, established along sectarian lines, has enforced adherence to personal status laws based on sectarian beliefs since its inception. This has resulted in the denial of rights guaranteed by the Lebanese constitution. Presently, there are 15 personal status laws in Lebanon, each respective to the 18 recognized sects in the country. This system perpetuates inequality among Lebanese citizens and mainly affects women, as religious courts specific to each denomination govern their rights.

All of that gradually enshrines a legal reality that denies the citizens the right to invoke the rules of civil law in personal status, whether they do not belong to a sect, want to leave their sectarian affiliation, or wish to marry according to civil law despite their religious affiliation, which is a clear violation of the absolute freedom of belief, and the principle of equality protected by the Constitution.

The ruling parties have managed to derail the efforts to reform the personal status system by conflating it to eliminate political sectarianism outlined in Article 95 of the Lebanese constitution, despite no explicit connection between them. Although a roadmap for ending political sectarianism is specified in the Constitution, the political establishment has shown no intention of implementing it. **It must be noted that adopting a civil personal status law is a constitutional obligation and is not contingent upon the abolition of political sectarianism.**

Although the debate about civil marriage, in particular in Lebanon, is not new but instead began in the fifties of the last century, it remains that this debate is, in essence, a political, social, and human rights debate of great importance, as it relates to respect for public freedoms and fundamental rights and the arrangement of the tripartite relationship between the citizen and the state, and its sects. It is also linked to the state's duty to respect the principle of equality, which cannot be completed without a civil personal status law.

The Existing Reality in Lebanon Constitutes a Violation of Freedom of Belief and the Principle of Equality Enshrined in the Constitution

1- Article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution protects the civil nature of the state, ensuring complete freedom of belief while guaranteeing respect for the personal status system without bias towards any particular sect. Lebanon is a secular state in which religion and state are separate entities, and the state is neutral towards all religions and denominations, upholding equality among them. The state does not seek to elevate any particular religion above others or grant it legal privileges superior to those of other religions. Despite its respect for religions, the Lebanese state remains, on paper, non-religious and non-sectarian.

2- Article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution not only upholds freedom of belief but also recognizes sects as independent moral entities with the right to manage their religious affairs and interests and ensures respect for their personal status system. This recognition of sects as autonomous entities is a legacy of the Ottoman Sultanate's duality of legislation, which separated modern civil legislation applied by state courts from religious legislation restricted to the domain of personal status and administered by religious courts. The establishment of Greater Lebanon under the French Mandate in 1920 created a complex relationship between the state and the sects, marked by ambiguity and uncertainty.

3- Contrary to common belief, Article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution places the utmost importance on "absolute freedom of belief," granting it a status not afforded to any other right. The article's opening statement asserts the principle of absolute freedom of belief before addressing the rights of sects, which remain subject to constitutional provisions, laws, public order, and state oversight. The essence of Article 9 lies in its first sentence, and the subsequent statements serve to supplement it, affirming that freedom of belief extends not only to "the freedom to change religion or sect" but also to the freedom not to profess any religion or sect and not to declare one's religious affiliation. However, successive political leaders have failed to implement this principle thoroughly.

4- Resolution 60/L.R., issued in 1936, aligns with the Lebanese Constitution by respecting the autonomy of sects in Lebanon while guaranteeing fundamental rights, particularly freedom of belief. The resolution also grants every citizen the right to join or leave a sect. However, it fails to address the rights of a group of Lebanese who do not belong to any historical sects recognized in the resolution, subjecting them to personal status laws instead of civil law since none has been approved until now.

This decision came to nurture the relationship between the state and religious sects. It also affirmed that the legislative power is a sovereign, original, absolute, and comprehensive right confined to the parliament, which alone has the power to enact laws and to amend or cancel them so that these laws remain restricted by the provisions of the constitution, law, and public order, and subject to the oversight of the public authority, which confirms the supremacy of the legal rules issued by the State over the rules hallowed in the personal status laws of sects.

5-Despite what was previously mentioned, the state has not engaged since Resolution 60L.R. in drafting a civil personal status law, which impedes the right to marry and establish a family for anyone who does not belong to a sect, wishes to leave his sectarian affiliation, or wishes to submit to civil marriage despite his religious affiliation. Thus, it is failing in its most important obligations and violating the constitution and international covenants that it is bound by, especially the principle of equal enjoyment of civil and political rights in Article 7 of the Constitution.

The historical legacy of special personal status systems inherited from the Ottoman era has caused confusion in Lebanon regarding the relationship between the state and religious sects. This confusion began under the French Mandate and was exacerbated by the prevailing social and political forces that prioritized the rights of sects over constitutional rights and the rule of law.

If the balance between absolute freedom of belief and guarantees for sects had been enshrined in the constitutional and legal texts, the sectarian political course in Lebanon would have shifted. However, the current system has prevented progress toward respecting the concept of a civil state, individual freedom of belief, and equality. Instead, the sectarian political course has prioritized the rights of sects over individual freedom of religion, leading to a lack of progress in consolidating the rule of law.

The sectarian political system has worked to exploit legal ambiguities to prevent citizens from accessing their basic rights to resort to civil rules in personal status and to disrupt the effects of the constitutional text and the orientation established by Resolution 60 L.R., so that practices remain far removed from the essence of the Lebanese constitution, which protects "absolute freedom of belief." Further, the practice has proven the ability of sects to control family legislation or women's affairs. As a result, the state has retreated behind the negative legal neutrality that has been going on for decades and has handed over the matter of personal status issues to the sects.

The State's Reluctance to Approve the Civil Code of Personal Status Led to the Violation of the Basic Rights of Citizens in General and Women in Particular

Politicians and religious leaders in Lebanon have consistently opposed attempts to reform the personal status system, even when it involves optional civil personal status laws. Moreover, the Council of Ministers and Parliament, dominated by sectarian interests, have obstructed the enactment of any civil personal status law. This reluctance of the state to adopt a civil law has resulted in the loss of many fundamental rights for citizens, particularly women.

First: A Violation of Freedom of Religion and Belief and Restriction of the Lebanese through Sectarian Institutions and Laws

The ongoing obstruction by political and sectarian forces has hindered any advancement towards reinstating the right to follow civil laws, resulting in continued infringement of freedom of belief and the rights of Lebanese families in sectarian institutions. A clear example is the obstruction to registering civil marriages in Lebanon, primarily marriages between individuals who do not belong to any recognized sect.

The constitution, international agreements, and domestic laws in Lebanon protect the right of civil marriage between individuals who do not belong to any of the recognized sects. This right is further reinforced by Resolution 60 L.R., which acknowledges Lebanese citizens who do not identify with any denomination and subjects them to civil law in personal status matters. However, despite the legal protection of civil marriage, the political and sectarian forces have hindered its official recognition, leading citizens to remove their sect from official documents to facilitate civil marriage through a notary. By removing their sect from official records, citizens legally exclude themselves from their sect and establish a civil reference for their marriage. Although civil marriage between non-sectarian individuals is not prohibited by law, the obstruction by political and sectarian forces has prevented its official recognition. Nonetheless, citizens have found a legal workaround to exercise their right to civil marriage, highlighting the need for further reform and progress toward a more

inclusive and equitable legal system in Lebanon.

In devotion to this path, at the end of 2012, two people who had crossed out the sect registration documented their civil marriage contract in Lebanon at the Office of Notary Joseph Bishara. After the General Directorate of Personal Status in the Ministry of the Interior received the permit for the marriage to take place, it refused to give the contract its effects pursuant to Article 22 of the Personal Status documents registration law. In 2013, the Higher Commission for Consultations approved the registration of a civil marriage contracted in Lebanon between two spouses who had concealed their sectarian registration from their civil records. With the union's registration on April 25, this marriage became the first civil marriage held on Lebanese territory.

Despite the validity of the approved legal path, the pressure exerted by the sectarian political system led to the Ministry of Interior's refusal to register civil marriage contracts that took place in Lebanon with the notary public and not to register children born to persons married to civil marriages in Lebanon, which forced some married couples to return to their sects to register their marriages and thus waive their constitutional and legal rights to leave their sects and choose to resort to civil law.

Second: Systemic Discrimination Against Women in Personal Status Laws

All personal status laws in Lebanon, without exception, are discriminatory against women, as they do not guarantee women's basic rights, place barriers for women when they wish to initiate divorce proceedings, and do not guarantee custody rights or their financial rights, as well as inequality in matters of inheritance, property, and others.

A report by Human Rights Watch in 2015, entitled "No Protection, No Equality: Women's Rights in the Lebanese Personal Status Laws," has clearly exposed the existence of systematic discrimination against women, including shortcomings in their access to divorce and financial burdens resulting from court procedures, which raise barriers before them when terminating the marriage, in addition to the lack of recognition of joint custody and granting it to the mother until a certain age; this conclusion came after studying some 447 judicial rulings issued by Islamic and Christian religious courts in cases of divorce, custody, spousal and child alimony.

For instance, in both the Sunni and Shiite sects, men are allowed to marry up to four women in cases of polygamy. Additionally, Shiite women are not permitted to include a clause in their marriage contract that forbids their spouse from marrying other women. In both sects, men have the right to unilateral divorce without restrictions. Concerning inheritance, both Sunni and Shiite women inherit half the male share. As for the legal age of marriage, Shiites determine it by establishing legal puberty for girls, which means a girl as young as nine years old could be married. Regarding custody, in six Catholic denominations (Maronites, Syriac Catholics, Roman Catholics, Chaldeans, and Armenian Catholics), the mother has the right of custody until the child reaches two years of age at the end of breastfeeding. After that, however, the spiritual court has discretionary power to determine the custodian in the child's interest. Similarly, a Shiite woman loses custody of her children if she marries someone of a different religion or if she is of a different religion than the father. In the Sunni community, custody of the mother expires when the child turns five years old if she is of a different religion than the father or if she remarries. In the Druze community, the mother forfeits her right of custody if she remarries.

Third: Perpetuating Inequality Among Citizens

The comparison of the different rights applicable according to sects shows the extent to which the Lebanese Personal status Laws impedes national cohesion due to the multiplicity of provisions on marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody, not to mention the legal complexities faced by individuals who decide to marry abroad according to civil laws.

Although the Lebanese law recognizes the effects of a civil marriage contracted abroad, which constitutes a solution for mixed marriages. For those wishing not to resort to sectarian systems, this is accompanied by multiple obstacles, especially in the case of disputes, following marriage. The most important of these obstacles are:

- Article 79 of the Code of Civil Procedure distinguishes between Lebanese Muslims and non-Muslims, as civil marriage contracts concluded abroad if the spouses are from the Muslim sects and at least one of them is Lebanese are subject to the jurisdiction of the religious courts affiliated to these sects.
- For non-Muslims, if the Lebanese couple celebrates their marriage in both the civil and religious forms, the law applicable to marriage and its effects is the religious law. However, the Lebanese courts differ in terms of applying this rule. Some courts consider themselves competent and apply civil law to this case.
- Applying foreign legal rules in Lebanese courts to settle disputes between citizens of the same country residing in Lebanon has created an inappropriate situation. Moreover, this practice fragments the concept of the state's obligation to provide equal access to justice to all citizens. Today, we have a legal system in which the laws of sects and foreign personal status regulations are applied simultaneously, and no civil legislation specifically addresses personal status.
- In addition, other complications arise when the Lebanese courts consider disputes arising from civil marriages contracted abroad, as judges and disputants alike do not necessarily have sufficient knowledge of foreign laws and their application, especially when the marriage contract takes place in countries whose legal and judicial systems are fundamentally different from Lebanese regimes.
- In addition, the Lebanese judge's application of foreign law, without having the option of applying an internal civil law, constitutes a fundamental violation of the rule of law within the state's borders. The principle of internal sovereignty is that the authority applies national laws on its territory and its citizens. It is possible to apply foreign law when a foreign person is present in the relationship (according to the rules of private international law and conflict of laws). However, how can a Lebanese judge apply foreign rules alien to his legal system to the relationship between Lebanese citizens? From here, we imminently conclude the urgent need to pass a civil personal status law.

Fourth: Preventing the Development of Legal Bases for Laws Specific to Sects and Judicial Rulings Issued by Sectarian Courts

Giving sectarian courts the right to apply religious rules related to personal status and not subjecting them to the oversight of the judicial judiciary has prevented the development of these systems, especially since the judges in these courts are clerics, not state judges. In most cases, they are not holders of a law degree, which reinforces conservative approaches and patriarchal morality, resorting to the strictest jurisprudential interpretations at the expense of the human rights approach that the state judge would have.
Since there is no imminent prospect of enacting a civil law that addresses issues related to personal status,

women's rights organizations and associations have taken it upon themselves to address violations and daily challenges women and children face. Consequently, their efforts have been directed toward correcting practices within religious courts. These organizations employ human rights approaches and jurisprudential religious arguments to challenge the claims of religious courts, especially within Islamic sects. To this end, these associations often refer to jurisprudential rules derived from the hadiths of the Prophet, his companions, and his household. Their objective is to mitigate the effects of the absence of civil law on personal status until its eventual adoption.

The pressure from civil society, especially women's organizations, and associations, has succeeded in imposing an amendment to the custody age for many sects, even if the change was not at the level of activists' expectations and demands. Concerning Islamic sects, the age of custody in the Sunni community was set at 7 years for males and 9 years for females before pressure succeeded in amending it and raising it to 12 years for males and females in 2014. As for the Druze, the age of custody for males has been set at 12 years and for females at 14 years, after it was set at 7 years for males and 9 years for females. As for the Shiite, the age of custody is the minimum, as it was set at two years for males and 7 years for females. However, the religious authorities have so far refused, despite all campaigns, any attempt to amend or review it.

Although some sectarian rulings have undergone certain developments, their impact remains limited and requires several years before tangible results can be seen. The amendment of laws in the parliament depends on a political moment that is still uncertain. Consequently, civil society's efforts to endorse the Civil Code of Personal Status should not conflict with the gradual reform of laws related to sects that have not kept up with the developments witnessed in many Arab countries. This is particularly important since women affected by these laws need solutions to their problems without having to wait for the amendment of laws, as, in some cases, it has been proven effective in bringing about change from within the framework of existing laws.

Recommendations: Reforming the personal status system in Lebanon as a mandatory entry point to consecrate freedom of belief and equality among citizens

To ensure a consistent reform process, certain foundational principles must be established. Firstly, the current ambiguity surrounding the rights outlined in the Lebanese constitution must be addressed so that all citizens are held accountable under the same laws and judicial system. This includes upholding the values of freedom of belief, equal treatment of citizens, and the obligation to adhere to public order while ensuring that sectarian personal status laws are subject to the same standards.

Furthermore, Article 9 of the constitution necessitates the adoption of a civil personal status law by the state while safeguarding the rights of those who choose to follow the personal status laws of their respective sects.

First: Approval of the Civil Code of Personal Status

The right to adopt a civil personal status law stems from the constitutional and legal duty entrusted to the legislator towards the citizens, due to the civil character of the Lebanese state and legislative sovereignty over issues related to the organization of society and the family and the consecration of the rights mentioned in Articles 7 and 9 of the Constitution, and as long as the legislative power is in the hand of the state, driving from its recognized sovereign aspect, and that derives its source from the people and is exercised by the state through its constitutional institutions, the adoption of the civil law of personal status guarantees the balance stipulated in Article 9 of the constitution by leaving the freedom of choice to individuals who wish to

resort to either the civil law of personal status or their respective sect's law.

The adoption of the Civil Code of Personal Status, which includes provisions that cover all aspects of familial relations, would remove the obstacle to the individual's legally enshrined right not to belong legally and administratively to a sect and to start a family outside the framework of sectarian scopes and rules.

Regarding provisions, the law must stipulate general principles that must be respected in all areas related to the organization of family affairs, starting with the administrative and formal conditions and procedures for concluding a marriage contract, its effects and impediments, the provisions of divorce and the effects of the dissolution of the contract, especially alimony, the rights of the child and the guardianship of the parents and the conditions of custody, inheritance and probate rules.

The inclusion of these universally applicable legal principles in the civil law would advance the notion that sectarian and civil systems should be subordinated to the idea of public order and commitment to a set of general principles derived from Lebanese societal heritage to serve as the fundamental building blocks of family rules.

It remains that defining the general and detailed framework of the personal status system is not an easy matter, as it needs to define a package of normative principles and values that are in line with or express the form of the family and social relations, and which are referred to and emulated when entering into the details of drafting the provisions of the law. In Western countries, for example, Christian values were initially followed when approving civil laws of personal status, even if these laws aimed to break with the religious, ecclesiastical nature of marriage in the societies at the time, before returning and introducing personal status law later in a liberal path linked to the transformations in those societies in the middle of Twentieth century. The cultural and social influence of the Christian religion made, for example, the divorce rulings complex at the beginning of the approval of civil marriage in European countries.

In Lebanon, and in light of the multiplicity of legal principles that govern the applied religious personal status laws, the issue seems more complicated than imagined. What values and standards should be invoked when formulating marriage, divorce, inheritance, and will provisions? Non- marginal social differences characterized Personal status Law in Lebanon for a long time and affected the values and standards of Lebanese society concerning general or detailed provisions.

To extract a clear package of clear common principles and standards that can be drawn upon when drafting the civil personal status law, social studies must be carried out in order to define common standards while also taking into account the legal gaps and the judicial and procedural complexities that govern to clarify the position of the Lebanese society as a whole about the issues that will be included in this law. It's also important to note that the results of these social studies should not be the only source for formulating these principles and values. The law must be based on a number of fundamental rights that transcend the results of social studies, especially when it is necessary to eliminate reactionary and discriminatory values and ensure respect for women's and children's basic rights.

Finally, the issue of subjecting personal status systems to the obligation of respecting public order can only be done through a gradual path, starting with the text of the Civil Code of Personal Status itself, which must be included in it several general legal principles of a mandatory nature and applicable to all citizens. Those who are subject to the ordinary personal status system (i.e., civil) or one of the special systems (sectarian) as

a guarantee of respect for equality among all citizens, as well as ensuring a gradual and quiet transformation by leaving the task to the judiciary and accumulating its diligence in the medium and long term.

Second: Expanding the Scope of the Judiciary's Oversight of Judgments and Decisions Issued by Religious Courts

Highlighting the subordination of personal status laws to the authority of the state must apply to the decisions and judgments issued by religious courts so that the civil courts have a broad authority to monitor the extent to which decisions issued by religious courts respect the basic rights stipulated in the constitution or the laws. This amendment would subject judgments issued by religious courts to the oversight of courts of justice through the possibility of nullifying any judgment issued by a religious court that would conflict with basic rights, ensure transparency, and allow for accountability, especially in terms of respecting the principles followed by the principles of a fair trial.

Article 95 of the Code of Civil Procedure was set to emphasize the neutral role of the state and its institutions towards the sects and their supremacy in resolving disputes. It stipulates that the general body of the Court of Cassation be empowered to consider some cases and requests related to judgments issued by religious courts. Although this text subjected the rulings of Sharia and sectarian courts to the supervision of the Court of Cassation, the legislator has narrowed the scope of this supervision, confining it to jurisdiction issues and violating the fundamental principles of public order. Therefore, there is a need to subject the decisions of religious courts to the supervision of the Court of Cassation, which would ensure the equality enshrined in the Constitution and respect for the rights protected in international laws and treaties in case they conflict with the laws and rulings issued by religious courts.

Historically, the court has taken a restrictive view of public order, which has resulted in the exclusion of conflicts between fundamental rights, personal status laws, and judgments of religious courts from its purview. Several court decisions have demonstrated the narrow scope of the Court of Cassation's oversight over the rulings of Sharia and sectarian courts. As per Article 95, the defense of lack of interest or capacity, for instance, is not considered to fall within the realm of substantial claims and, therefore, lies beyond the court's jurisdiction.

Therefore, it is necessary to work on amending Article 95 of the Code of Civil Procedure in order to expand the jurisdiction of the Court of Cassation to include the power to consider all final decisions issued by sectarian courts when they violate the individuals' basic rights, which allows these principles to take precedence over legal rules. And the jurisprudence that governs the decisions of religious courts.[137]

137 Marie-Claude Najm, "Statut personnel et droits fondamentaux: "L'Etat assume-t-il ses engagements constitutionnels et internationaux?", in Le statut personnel libanais. Approche évolutive, Conférences du CERODERMA, Faculté de droit et des sciences politiques (USJ), 2012. In this article, Marie Clause Najem suggests adding a case of annulment of the decisions of the religious courts by the Plenary Assembly of the Court of Cassation, namely "the serious and characterized violation of a fundamental right of the individual enshrined in the Constitution".

Enhancing the powers and role of the Civil Court of Cassation requires amending the fourth paragraph of Article 95 in the direction of:
- Allowing for appeals against decisions issued by religious courts, even if the decision has not yet been finalized.
- Expanding the grounds for appealing against decisions issued by religious courts because they violate fundamental principles, even if this is not related to public order, as well as the possibility of appealing by way of cassation in the event of a contradiction in the ruling clause of the decision or omission of a decision on one of the demands or in the event of a judgment that was not requested by the litigants or more than what they requested or distorting the content of the documents by mentioning facts contrary to what is stated therein.

Third: Work to Reform the Personal Status Laws of the Sects

The Lebanese state's abandonment of its legal sovereignty in the civil recognition of personal status coincided with its abandonment of monitoring the legislation and legal rules applied by the sects and their compatibility with constitutional rules and relevant international obligations, especially international human rights standards and the abolition of all forms of discrimination against women signed by the government, including CEDAW Convention, to which it expressed reservations about some of its clauses, particularly Articles 2, 9 and 16 related to equal granting of nationality and equal rights and responsibilities during marriage and its dissolution and in family life due to their explicit contradiction with the personal status laws of sects.

The Lebanese state's abandonment of its constitutional and international obligations in matters of personal status has deepened the discrimination gap between women and men.

The state assumes responsibility and commitment to respect human rights through the implementation of the constitution and international covenants and works to ensure equality by abolishing all forms of discrimination in sectarian personal status laws, especially since these laws protect women and discriminate against them.

Therefore, the adoption of a civil personal status law must be accompanied by the opening of a debate within religious institutions and the introduction of amendments to the personal status laws of sects in order to abolish several discriminatory provisions against women and respect equality between men and women in the family, through conducting a reform workshop at the legislative level and reviewing systems Concerning religious sects and amending them in accordance with the Lebanese constitution, Lebanon's international human rights obligations, and a set of general principles that guarantee justice and equality within the family.

Fourth: Abolish all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Ensure their Protection from all Forms of Violence

The sects did not stop at the limits of preventing the adoption of the Civil Personal Status Law, but also imposed their rules on the laws and the civil judiciary. The legal discrimination that Lebanese women face is not limited to personal status laws but is linked to a legislative structure that still discriminates against women in favor of men. Consequently, discrimination is still present in many civil laws that exclusively fall within the powers of the state's public authorities.

Practice has demonstrated the ability of sects to obstruct not only legislation pertaining to the family or women's issues but rather to prevent any legislative reform that protects women and guarantees full equality.

So that its authority was not limited to matters of marriage and inheritance, but instead went beyond it to prevent the state from enacting legislation compatible with the interests of its citizens and its international obligations.

It is imperative to revise all legislative provisions that contradict the constitution or international human rights obligations regarding gender equality. This revision must extend to all legislative frameworks, including but not limited to amending the Lebanese Nationality Law to ensure gender parity in granting nationality to their children. Additionally, the laws governing personal status records must be amended to eliminate all discriminatory clauses based on patriarchal structures that designate men as the head of the family, binding women and children to him and in his name. Furthermore, it is essential to remove all forms of discrimination against women in labor and social security laws and adopt temporary special measures to improve women's participation in public political life, guaranteeing a greater representation of women in representative bodies such as parliament, municipal councils and municipal unions, and public institution boards of directors.

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XVII. Religious Extremism and Freedom of Religion and Belief Status Law?

Author: Dr. Marie Kortam

Introduction

Human rights, including freedom of religion and belief, are essential to the prosperity of a society and must therefore be integrated into all measures taken in response to conflict or violence, whether they are aimed at combating its causes, protecting its victims, or limiting its damages.

In Lebanon, the root causes of violent extremism are fundamentally related, on the one hand, to the weakness of the state, and on the other, to its sectarian system. In this case, violent extremism is not an unprecedented socio-political phenomenon. Instead of qualifying violent extremism as political or religious extremism, which would reduce extremism to its religious or political aspect, I consider violent extremism in the Lebanese case to be sectarian. In other words, it includes both a political and religious dimension.

The Lebanese society has been shaped by its sectarian citizenship ever since the modern Lebanese state was created in the 1920s (Salibi, 1966). The sectarian regime (Henley, 2016) did not allow the Lebanese communities to agree on one national narrative. On the contrary, each community produced its own version of the Lebanese national narrative. Thus, since the end of the civil war, sectarian tensions never stopped, and many of these conflicts rhythmed the Lebanese political scene. From the Taif agreement in 1990 to the present day in which, almost all political leaders warn of a potential new civil war to come.

On the constitutional level, "the Taif Agreement granted the religious authorities the right to refer to the constitutional council (the supreme jurisdiction) for any law or regulation that they consider to encroach on the personal status managed by their community, the freedom of religion and conscience and the freedom of religious education and teaching" (Dagher, 2002: 197). Consequently, the Lebanese society is still ideologically and politically polarized and suffers from the legacies of the civil war, which continue to fuel sectarian polarization through divergent interpretations of history and the national narrative, selective forms of remembrance, different and contested notions of victimhood (Bahous, Nabhani and Rabo 2013; Abouchedid and Nasser 2000; Bashshur 2005). Impoverished citizens were, and are, fed with narratives of victimization of their religious group throughout the media – often controlled by the community elites.

This paper argues that the FoRB is an essential resilience driver in C/PVE. On the one hand, even if sectarian leaders could instrumentalize religion in defusing animosity and spreading violent extremism, FoRB plays a role in preventing and countering violent extremism on the other. This paper is divided into two parts; the first presents the weakness of religion as a vulnerability driver, and the second discusses religion as a resilience driver.

Based on my work on religious and institutional leaders in Lebanon and violent extremism, I chose to stress education as the most vulnerable driver in Lebanon. FoRB, as a resilience driver, explains how religion helps to build identities, shared culture and canalizes violence by rites.

FoRB: Between the Individual and the Community

The working group collaboratively developed and adopted a shared definition of FoRB which includes: "The freedom to adopt or not to adopt (conscientious objection), to change any religion or belief, to worship individually or in a group, to establish and maintain premises for these purposes, to create, acquire, and use materials, symbols, and objects related to the rites or customs of a religion or belief. In addition, FoRB protects a person's freedom to write, issue, and distribute publications and teach religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes. Further, it includes the right to legal recognition of every individual, no matter their beliefs, the right to establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions, and for that purpose, to solicit and receive voluntary contributions, financial or otherwise, from individuals and institutions, locally, regionally, and internationally. In more formal settings, it is the freedom to form, appoint, elect, or assign suitable leaders as may be needed to meet the requirements and standards of any religion or belief, to set rest days, celebrate holidays, and perform rituals following the teachings of a person's religion or belief, without being subject to any form of discrimination" (National Working Group Joint Analysis Document, November 2022).

However, FoRB is not organized for the benefit of individuals but rather according to the rights of religious communities (Messerra, 1999: 937). Indeed, religious leaders exercise authority over members because of their financial means and the services they can offer to community members, thus creating a kind of dependency from which it is challenging to escape. In fact, religious leaders intervene in all areas and at all times when the country's future is at stake and in every law/decree/decision that threatens to reduce their privileges and power, as in the case of civil marriage.

As previously mentioned in other chapters, the Lebanese Constitution recognizes the authority of religious communities in different aspects of the individual's life. Further, religious institutions enjoy tax exemption in addition to receiving grants for their institutions and personnel (Al- Haddad, 2020). The general budget annually witnesses sectarian allocations that exceeded more than 28 billion Lebanese Liras in 2012 (Al-Haddad, 2020). It is donated in terms of salaries, wages, allowances, management, supplies, support, family benefits, social protection, equipment, and office building maintenance, to the Fatwa and the Sharia courts, Supreme Islamic Sharia Council (Sunni), the Supreme Islamic Shia Council, Ja'fari Sharia courts, Sheikh Aql of the Unitarian Druze Community, the Druze religious courts and the Druze Council of the Unitarian Druze Community. Moreover, religious institutions enjoy "special treatment" regarding austerity policies. They are not subjected to any decrease in their allocations, and their revenues collected from religious community group members do not undergo auditing. They are not monitored and excluded from paying taxes; their health, social, and cultural care budget is discounted from the ministries of health, education, and cultural budgets.

Indeed, while Article 9 of the Constitution generally protects FoRB, international law distinguishes between freedom of conscience, religion, and opinion. Still, at the same time, this right encompasses religious freedom within the freedom of conscience (Mouannès, 2011: 4). In Lebanon, freedom of conscience has always been interpreted as freedom of religion, as if a human being could not exist without faith or religious adherence. Indeed, in Lebanon, religion is not considered a universal value; on the contrary, religion is regarded as a "supreme good [which] is merged with the Human, the person, and the citizen. An individual without faith is not socially, morally and therefore politically considered. Religion is at the heart of everyone and everything" (Mouannès, 2011: 4).

Moreover, despite the several articles of the Constitution that regulate religions and their institutions in Lebanon, additionally to law 60/1936 L.R., the power of religious leaders has expanded. Their role has been transformed from that of a religious leader who deals with the spiritual aspect and the faith of his followers to that of a key player on the political, social, and legal scene, which the State cannot do without, especially at times of socio-political crises and conflicts.

By these articles, the State no longer has full exclusivity in legislative and legal matters, such as in managing personal status, which is reserved exclusively for the communities, and in accessing citizens to public functions, where there is a community quota. In the case of Lebanon, freedom of religion was always exclusively for communities, which created excessive effects on individuals, but also on the state. By protecting the communities' freedom of religion, the state has suppressed the freedom of conscience of individuals, and they find themselves on the margins of society without any recognition of their rights as citizens who do not adhere to the community's logic. Further, by granting supremacy to the communities in matters of personal status, the individual will be attached all his life to the religion given to him at birth, strictly dictating his duties and rights.

In the following part, I will develop the takeover of religion by communities which could be vulnerable to violent extremism.

Sectarianism as a Vulnerability Driver of Violent Extremism

The relationship between religion and violence is complex and defies any neat account of direct causation. In some cases of violent extremism, religion is not a primary driver; in others, it may be more prominent. Therefore, efforts to prevent or counter radicalization and extremism need to "right-size" religion as both a contributing factor and part of the solution (Park, 2016).

During the Lebanese War (Volk, 2008), the religious criterion was exploited, and the militia knew how to instrumentalize the religious individuals by transforming, at a certain moment, the political conflict into a religious conflict and by creating cantons reserved for certain communities. As a result, the role of the religious leaders was modified at the same pace as the events, including alliances and very close relations with the community political leaders, thus becoming the protectors of the religious identity and the representatives par excellence of the community.

As a way to imbue a higher or eternal purpose, religion can intensify and raise the stakes of a conflict. In this paper, Religion is defined as a form of the sacred; it adds powerful brakes to any innovation's uncertainties and natural inhibitions.

To emphasize the importance of action, sectarian leaders may instrumentalize religious narratives to transform a conflict arising from conventional political factors into something that needs to be understood as having grand and transhistorical—perhaps even eschatological—significance. The most important channel to this instrumentalization is through education. For this reason, I advance that general and religious education is the most important vulnerability factor of VE in Lebanon.

In Lebanon, history education is a political matter. Paul J. Yoder argues: "education has served as a vital means of controlling and disseminating information" (2015: 140). History education has served as a means against national social cohesion and integration and thus against the idea of one national narrative (Yoder,

2015). Three main factors are responsible for this weakness (Yoder, 2015). First, the uninterrupted presence of denominational schools since the existence of the Ottoman empire (Abouchedid and Nasser, 2000; Bashshur, 2005). According to Frayha (2003) and Jalbout (2015), 60% of students attend private religious schools which are run by the Lebanese sectarian communities (Yoder, 2015; Abouchedid & Nasser, 2000; Bahous, Nabhani, & Rabo, 2013). Therefore, the loyalties of these schools are directed towards their own sectarian groups (Abouchedid and Nasser, 2000; Bashshur, 2005) rather than the Lebanese state. Second, the incapacity of the state to produce, impose and diffuse a national curriculum, while it was one of the main tasks of the Educational Center for Research and Development after the Taif accords (Frayha, 2003; Volk, 2008). Third, the interference of political parties on history teaching programs, which participate in the political gridlock.

In his analysis, Bashshur (2005) adds another factor, before the education system, which undermines the production of one national narrative. In fact, the sectarian manner in teaching history is based on transmitting a sectarian memory and, thus, a sectarian narrative. This legacy is not only present in schools before that in families, neighborhoods, towns, etc., that all have a story to tell about their relations with the other sectarian communities and thus participate in transmitting a memory of animosity towards the other components of the Lebanese social fabric.

In the Lebanese context, the sectarian legacy of relations between the sectarian communities exists in every layer of society. Therefore, my paper does not take education in its narrow sense but rather in the broad sense of the term when each interaction is an occasion of education and a space of memory transfer. Consequently, the contradictory historical narratives' (Bashshur, 2005) phenomenon goes beyond schools in the Lebanese sectarian system, based on its recent history of conflicts between Lebanese sects.

As previously explained, the Constitution of Lebanon makes religious institutions and endowments legitimate. The financial support these institutions receive allows them to be independent and to play their part in organizing people's daily lives without State interference. As the State failed to penetrate all the levels of society because it failed to tackle poverty, modernize its electoral system, and bypass sectarian affiliation, these institutions have replaced the state's roles. They, therefore, can act without being bothered by the state's obtrusion.

Due to poor governance and the failure of the rule of law, these institutions can convey messages that do not meet the interests of the state and therefore participate in producing radicalization. The conflicting political climate based on the ongoing sectarian divide in Lebanon also does not help de-radicalization. Rather, it facilitates the recruitment of extremists in proxy wars in Lebanon and abroad.

While the religious references specific to each society are transformed, sometimes weakened, and give rise to violent or extremist behavior in the absence of rituals and religious norms, the term "religion" itself is that of "linked," where the idea of creating links is present (Beller in Chaumont, Ménéghini, 2005:56).

In the following paragraph, I will develop how FoRB, as individual freedom, can be a resilience driver for violent extremism.

Religion administers the sacred through rituals; it is the basis of any system aiming to use violence to counter it. While the sacred is the violence that exceeds the individual, ambiguous violence simultaneously releases positive and negative forces. In fact, the sacred is a reservoir of energy that can be used to create or destroy. For believers, God commits himself to accompany, even to give an "answer," to the one who "swears to tell

the whole truth" within a community of believers that surrounds him (Derrida, 1996:48). Patience towards misfortunes is the remedy of the individual who subscribes to this religious belief. Confronted with their anxieties, people have more and more recourse to religion as an anxiety-avoidance behavior to avoid behaviors deemed as extremist or violent, or both.

FoRB as a Resilience Driver of Violent Extremism

Contemporary religious phenomena combine personal, social, and political factors. They are at the crossroads of beliefs that directly affect individuals, institutions, movements, and religious networks that seek to produce, institutionalize, and manipulate meaning. Through his beliefs, an individual assumes the particularity of his vision of the world. He/she thus asserts his/her subjectivity. But at the same time, they draw the elements of this worldview from the set of possibilities provided by their environment, i.e., from the beliefs available to satisfy his/her need to believe.

By appropriating the signifiers offered by culture in a specific way, they originally structure their imagination while accepting an order that goes beyond him/her, that of language and social organization. Thus, beliefs represent an inscription in the culture of the subject who adopts them (Lemieux, 1992). Culture, in turn, plays a facilitating role in the identity process. It gives meaning and socially shared values allowing a universe of reference in which identity is constructed (Camilleri, 1993: 24).

In Lebanon, religion is an integral part of this culture. The latter is essential in the identification of reference, which is based on the categorical assignment that inscribes individuality in a community. The latter mainly influences social practices since it refers to a broader community and global allegiances such as origin, religion, and nation, "the three historical orders of community reference" (Galissot, 1987: 18-21). Indeed, the history of collective formations, or the identity of reference, is primarily based on community membership. For this, the secular camp has been fighting for years for global pluralism, which goes beyond the mere freedom of religion to reach the freedom of conscience, equivalent to moral pluralism, where individuals can have conceptions of life or value systems diverging from the community.

Thus, the religious freedom of individuals always functions in relation to the community to which they belong. As a result, the community's laws automatically apply to its members in all circumstances, whether or not they agree with their religious convictions since the margin for contestation is almost non-existent. In the Lebanese sectarian pluralistic model, the right to be different does not very much exist. Individual rights are always oppressed in favor of the community and the religious leaders who monopolize all aspects of their members' lives, leaving room for questioning the democratic basis of the state.

However, FoRB contributes to mutual respect, trust, understanding, and equality between people of different religions and beliefs. As such, it can contribute to the resilience of societies to security challenges. Religion ritualizes individual and collective violence in the world through religious rites. Indeed, rites refer to the imaginary that binds the community: the worldview and coherence it commonly recognizes. But the scope of the rite can never be reduced to this collective dimension alone. It also concerns, as is the case with all symbolic production, subjectivity, i.e., a subject's own desire to inhabit the world with others. In their practice of rites, a subject integrates the world, signifies their place in it, and inscribes their singularity in it.

Rites thus keep active the relationship to the construction of identities in this vital risk taken by each individual. This identity only becomes possible to the extent that it integrates meaning in the appropriation of a

coherent scene given to the world. Rites translate an affective integration of common sense (affective since it is manifested through affects). Despite their logical excesses, and often thanks to them, they cement life together (Lemieux, 1999).

Protecting FoRB by protecting religion and beliefs by laws and government ensures that security- related measures target behavior, not opinions or beliefs.

Recommendations

- Develop a unified and inclusive religious curriculum for private and public schools.
- Unify history education and curriculum in an inclusive and multi-partial manner.
- Strengthen the role of the Ministry of Education and Culture in fighting delinquency and establishing reintegration programs for the youth.
- Establish a clear separation between the religious institutions' religious and political roles in order to rebuild trust between religious institutions and local communities, thereby allowing religious institutions to take a proactive role in PVE.
- Foster de-confessionalization of the Lebanese sectarian system as a way to create a common national identity, strengthen the state and weaken the clientelist system and reduce the exploitation of religion for political ends.
- Support grassroots civil society initiatives and provide opportunities to the youth, women and marginalized groups within society in order to create space for the production of alternative and non-sectarian elites.
- Engage and invest in progressive religious intellectuals.

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XVIII. Freedom of Religion and Belief and other Human Rights

Author: ALEF – Act for Human Rights

FoRB v. Freedom of Expression in Lebanon

Lebanon is thought to enjoy a certain degree of freedom of expression, more prominent than other countries in the MENA region. However, there remain a considerable number of limitations regarding freedom of speech. Attacks on freedom of expression have been increasing lately, especially since the beginning of the 2019 protests. Amid a profoundly polarized community and political system, deeply rooted in and engrained with sectarianism, religious discourse is clearly present and quickly turns into hate speech whenever conflict intensifies. Fueled by social media and news outlets, hate speech culture has flourished in Lebanon.

Hate speech rooted in sectarian tension is unfortunately rampant and even sometimes escalates into censorship or death threats in some instances. For example, in July 2020, religious figures and citizens attacked the band Mashrou' Leila for a photo they uploaded on Facebook 4 years ago. The picture was a photoshopped image of Madonna's face on the Virgin Mary, which many took as offensive to the Christian community. The band suffered a lot of hate and death threats and was investigated, then forced to delete the post and remove 2 of their songs that people claimed had religious connotations. Religious figures ignited much hate speech about the band, as the comments and threats were mainly homophobic or religious. Mashrou' Leila's concert at Byblos International Festival was later canceled.[138] The decision violated the band's freedom of expression and was even more harmful in encouraging hate speech.

There have been many instances of censorship since the DGGS censors cultural, musical, and media works and publications. They ban the work from being sold or displayed or even intimidate the owners into self-censorship. Many works have been prohibited under the pretext that they were considered to create sectarian strife or insult public or state figures. The religious authorities have excessively influenced the DGGS's evaluation of cultural works. There have been widespread complaints about the interference of the religious leaders in this process but to no avail.

Concerts, movies, songs, and art have all been censored based on the opinion of fundamentalist religious figures. In 2022, movies like "Minions: The Rise of Gru" were banned for depicting "an evil nun" and for having same-sex kissing scenes, which religious figures do not tolerate. Pixar's "Lightyear" was also banned because two females kiss in the movie.

[138] The Guardian (2019, July 31). Mashrou' Leila concert cancelled after 'homophobic' pressure from Christian groups. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jul/31/mashrou-leila-byblos-festival-concert- cancelled-after-pressure-from-christian-groups

FoRB v. Freedom of Assembly

In Lebanon, the sectarian system adopted in government and public service has ensured that power-sharing among the different religious groups in the country also stretches to security agencies. Indeed, by custom, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) is headed by a Sunni Muslim, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) by a Maronite Christian, the Directorate General of General Security (DGGS) by a Shiite Muslim, and the State Security by a Catholic Christian.

The power-sharing model of the security agencies established a stronghold for each agency in specific areas where the majority of citizens share the same religious affiliation as the head of the institution. This has also led to sectarian tensions when an institution interferes in an area where citizens do not share the same religious background as the agency's head. For instance, the ISF, headed by a Sunni Muslim, is more capable of cracking down on crimes, protests, and fights in Sunni regions than any other security agency. The same logic applies to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. As such, during the protests that began in 2019, security agencies' actions against protesters quickly led to tensions between different religious groups. In November 2019, protestor Alaa Abou Faker was shot and killed after the LAF used force to clamp down on a demonstration near Beirut. Abou Fakher was a member of the Progressive Socialist Party, the political party associated with the Druze religious denomination. His death flared tensions and widespread anger and necessitated political and religious interference to diffuse tensions.

Most prominently, the use of force by the security agencies dsuring protests held in December 2019 and another on August 8, 2020, was not just excessive but at times lethal as well, using a disproportionate amount of tear gas, throwing stones, firing rubber bullets or metal pellets, or even live ammunition against mostly peaceful demonstrators and reporters. While both the ISF and the Parliament Police denied these allegations, the ISF said that the Parliament Police did use such weapons during the August 8 protest. Other high-level government and security officials held the Parliament Police responsible for violations against protesters in December 2019.[139]

The crackdown of the Parliament Police on protesters was quick in leading to tensions between the Shiite community and others. The ISF's accusations not only caused tensions with the Parliament Police but with the political parties supporting each institution too. Sectarian tensions also rose between Sunnis and Shiites, who view each agency as the grantor of their security.

Sectarian tensions and the lack of social cohesion among different religious groups in Lebanon are issues affecting both freedoms of religion and belief and freedom of peaceful assembly and association. The use of force by security agencies in assemblies and protests has always had a religious angle and religious impact in the Lebanese context.

[138] The Guardian (2019, July 31). Mashrou' Leila concert cancelled after 'homophobic' pressure from Christian groups. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jul/31/mashrou-leila-byblos-festival-concert- cancelled-after-pressure-from-christian-groups

FoRB and LGBTQ+ Rights in Lebanon

The LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon faces widespread discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code criminalizes "any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature."[140] Thus, the community is susceptible to discrimination and exclusion in Lebanon. The religious community has often condemned the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, in September 2019, because of the influence of religious communities, the Beirut Pride opening night was canceled.[141]

Religious groups have also found multiple different ways to discriminate against the community. In June of 2022, during Pride Month, a billboard was put up with flowers creating a rainbow flag on it. Ashrafieh Christian group "Jnoud el Rab" or "Soldiers of God" vandalized the billboard and claimed that the LGBTQ+ community has satanic intentions and so they threaten their Christian beliefs.[142]

Moreover, transgender women have specifically faced a lot of discrimination and violence. They have been hindered from accessing health care and essential services.

Religious figures and religious "professionals" believe that such treatments can "cure" someone from their homosexuality, but it has left many scarred for life. Taleb, a Jaafari (Shiite) mufti, told L'Orient le Jour, "They know that God will punish them with hellfire if they keep doing this."[143] Similar statements exist in conversion camps where "exorcisms"[144] are practiced. Many are pushed into these conversion camps by their religious families, which is why many end up cutting ties with their families or decide not to come out in the first place. Conversion therapies are not prohibited by law and remain unregulated. A conference entitled "Mish Tabieh" (Not Normal) was organized in Saida, in August 2022 to highlight the dangers of "sexual deviance and perversion". Medical professionals performed illegal surgeries and treatments. Medical practitioner Fouad Ghaziri said to L'Orient le Jour that he "cure them — with hormone treatments or reconstructive surgery."

[140] The Daily Star (2019, April 19). LGBTQ protections, progressing in courts – not in Parliament. Retrieved from https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Apr-19/481495-lgbtq-protections-progressing-in-courts- not-parliament.ashx

[141] BBC (2019, September 26). Beirut Pride: Organizers say clerics forced cancellation of opening concert. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-49838193

[142] France 24 (2022, July 14). In Lebanon, 'Soldiers of God' threaten the LGBT community and condemn civil marriage. Retrieved from https://observers.france24.com/en/middle-east/20220715-in-lebanon-soldiers-of-god- threaten-the-lgbt-community-and-condemn-civil-marriage

[143] L'Orient le Jour (2022, December 15). Lebanon's LGBTQ+ suffer impacts of discredited 'conversion therapy'. Retrieved from https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1321698/lebanons-lgbtq-suffer-impacts-of-discredited- conversion-therapy.html

[144] Ibid.

XIX. Projects in Lebanon about Freedom of Religion and Belief 2020 – 2022

Author: Search for Common Ground

Advancing FoRB - Relevance and experiences

Throughout the last ten years, many initiatives have been implemented to promote Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) in Lebanon, in the region, and around the world. In Lebanon in 2022- 2023, the national working group on FoRB identified several lenses through which to approach FoRB and which echo the work that has been done on the topic to date. Some areas of intervention leveraged by those interventions include human rights (focusing on existing legal frameworks, women's rights, and minority rights), peacebuilding, reconciliation, education, social stability, inter-religious dialogue, social cohesion, and transitional justice.

The interventions presented below also leverage several tools and approaches. Central approaches include religious leader engagement and interfaith dialogue. Engaging faith actors of diverse religions and sects and interreligious dialogue are common strategies to advance and promote shared values of understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Interfaith dialogue refers to the positive and cooperative interaction between people of different religions, faiths, or spiritual beliefs, intending to promote understanding between different religions to increase acceptance and tolerance. These programs foster empathy, help participants form genuine relationships, and develop a more complex and sophisticated understanding of each other.

Supporting FoRB in Lebanon - Why does it matter?

Projects promoting religious freedom and tolerance are essential in creating a more stable, peaceful, and prosperous environment. This is particularly relevant to Lebanon and its tradition of religious pluralism. Officially, Lebanon recognizes 18 different religious sects but also hosts many unrecognized religious communities. Among these are the Baha'is, Mormons, Hindus, and Buddhists. Religious freedom is enshrined in Article 9 of the country's constitution, which provides for freedom of conscience and guarantees the free exercise of all religious rites within the general framework of public order. However, implementing this constitutional clause has not always been fair, and discrimination against minority religious groups still occurs.

This is partly because Lebanon's legal framework is ill-equipped to ensure the respect of individual rights and beliefs. This is notably due to the absence of a personal status law, which leads citizens to refer to their respective religious laws and institutions for matters of personal significance, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Amongst many limitations to rights and individual freedoms, this takes away the rights of non-religious citizens and forces them to abide by the laws of their religious community. Moreover, it is particularly discriminatory towards women, who are often not protected under faith-based regulatory frameworks. In this context, supporting FoRB and the development of an adapted legal framework is essential to protecting other fundamental human rights, achieving social justice in Lebanon, and protecting religious and non-religious minorities.

In addition, faith-related conversations in the country are often tainted by the country's recent ethnic, political,

and religious conflict. The resolution of the war through the Taif agreement, which constitutionalizes shared religious representation across institutions, has further politicized religious affiliation, fueled by narratives of fear shared by the country's political and war leaders, to conserve their grasp on the country's leadership. The national protests of October 2019, advocating for a fairer and more inclusive country, are a vivid example of Lebanon's power should those dividing lines and narratives be overcome. By promoting tolerance and understanding among different religious groups, as well as educating on FoRB as a human right, thus deconflicting faith from political and historical grievances, projects related to freedom of religion and belief can contribute to reconciliation and help prevent future conflicts by exploring approaches to deal with the past and establish a national healed memory. They also contribute to more democratic and inclusive governance and society in Lebanon.

Finally, Lebanon also hosts a sizable noncitizen population, which includes refugees and migrant workers. Those communities continue to face legislative restrictions and social exclusion that severely limit their access to employment, freedom of movement, and other fundamental rights. They are also often representatives of minority-recognized and non-recognized religious sects, further marginalizing them and increasing their vulnerability. Supporting FoRB is a vital entry point through which the visibility and prevention of abuse towards those groups can be ensured and pursued.

In conclusion, Lebanon is a unique environment of religious cohabitation, despite the limitations in rights and freedoms imposed on its inhabitants. In this unique position, advancing FoRB in Lebanon is ever so important as it can directly impact broader regional dynamics and showcase positive advances towards efficient and inclusive models of pluralism and democracy in a very authoritarian region. In this section, the present report attempted to identify current experiences relevant to promoting and protecting FoRB. The initiatives have been organized by scopes and entry points and are presented chronologically by starting date in the sub-sections below.

Key experiences

Interfaith Dialogue

- ALEF implemented project Musawat (December 2019 - April 2023) – Act for Human Rights, and DLR - Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation in Lebanon, funded by PAX for Peace. The project engaged more than 50 Sunni Muslim, Alawite Muslim, Maronite Christian, and Orthodox Christian religious leaders and representatives from other religious denominations in the region in four interfaith dialogues designed to advance FoRB in Lebanon. Findings of these conversations were gathered in a report which presents fundamental dynamics, good practices, and recommendations moving forward.

- Danmission, in partnership with the Forum for Development Culture and Dialogue, Al Amal Iraqi Association, and with the support of the European Union, launched a regional conference on "Interfaith Dialogue and living together." The conference highlighted the practical and preemptive role of educational, religious as well as civil society institutions in the promotion of mutual understanding and social cohesion in a spirit of mutual respect, equal citizenship, and living together to prevent extremism; it also called for the elaboration of a shared vision that would result in a document or code of conduct\charter consecrating "mutual respect and interfaith understanding" paving the way for future cooperation between participants in the framework of local community initiatives.

- Leaders For Interreligious Understanding (LIU) is a partnership program between Danmission and four of our partner organizations in the Middle East: the Egyptian Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), The Jordanian Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) and Lebanese Forum for Development and Culture (FDCD) of Adyan. Since its start in 2011, over a hundred young leaders have completed the year-long interreligious dialogue training program. The program also notably led to the development that contextualizes religious extremism and offers tools and ideas for preventative initiatives.

- Network for Religious Christian and Muslim Faculties and Institutes in the Arab World: This project, launched in 2017 and led by the International Dialogue Centre and in cooperation with the Diyar consortium, Palestine, aims to create a large community of religious leaders, teachers, and students from various theology and Sharia faculties and institutes in the Arab region. The Network supports the development of education tools that foster religious and cultural diversity and promote peace, coexistence, and reconciliation. Participants included 25 key figures from the region, from deans to senior lecturers at various Muslim and Christian faculties and institutes in the Arab region. The participants recognized their responsibility in their institutions and their core role in the educational material they provide to their fellows. They valued their inclusion to reflect on their institutes' crucial role in promoting a deeper understanding and collaboration among people of diverse religious, cultural, and ideological convictions, considering their high respect for each other's religion and beliefs. Participants also developed a strategic, three- year working plan to initiate a joint course, exchange expertise, and organize joint activities reflecting the core values of social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, diversity, and respecting the Other.

Peace Education

- Established in 1977, the Institute of Muslim-Christian Studies is attached to the USJ Faculty of Religious Studies in Beirut (Lebanon). It aims to deepen the mutual understanding between Muslims and Christians. The two religious traditions present in Lebanon today, in all their diversity and facing the challenges of modernity, seek to answer the vital questions of the contemporary man. For this purpose, the Institute provides a teaching process based on an objective and interdisciplinary method. Today, dialogue is a requirement between Muslims and Christians. Therefore, the Institute proposes to offer spaces for meetings, common courses of action, and awareness or training programs for intercultural mediation.

- In 2010, Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation (DLR) launched its Inter-Religious Academy, which aims to foster interaction and dialogue while learning about each other's differences and ways of life. For two weeks, students are engaged in workshops and conversations about various religious and cultural backgrounds, learning about their differences and how to appreciate them. At the end of the program, the youth are engaged in collaborative activities. Afterward, the participants return to their universities and deliver the content they received to their peers.

- In 2015, Adyan launched the "Islam, Diversity and Peacebuilding" study program - a curriculum of 12 credits through two online courses and two face-to-face seminars extending over six months. It is intended for young leaders who want to build their capacities, acquire the knowledge and skills needed to address extremism, and enhance social resilience and cohesion within their societies.

Legal Framework and Human Rights

- Danmission and Adyan, with support from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Office for Freedom of Religion or Belief, implemented a project in Lebanon to strengthen women's rights and prevent religiously-dependent inequality for women – among both Christians and Muslims (2019-2022). The project built new networks and alliances between religious leaders, civil society actors, and policymakers, which can influence the religiously-dependent structures that contribute to fostering and ensuring individual rights – especially for women. In addition, a large awareness campaign was launched to engage the public on the same issues.

- In 2021-2022, the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR), together with the Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace (LFPCP), implemented the "Fostering Human Rights in Lebanese Religious Courts" project to initiate a cross-religious conversation about human rights in the religious courts and investigate the need for human rights capacity building among court actors. Since then, 12 research papers from six different courts have been produced, and a range of dialogue meetings have been facilitated.

- IN 2023, the NCHR continued its work with the religious courts and led research uncovering gaps in the human rights standards in the Sunni-, Shi'ite-, Druze-, Maronite-, Orthodox-, and Catholic courts of Lebanon. The research showed a need – and a wish – for human rights capacity building and cross-religious meetings among the court actors. Following this, representatives from the six courts drafted a roadmap, identifying challenges and objectives for improving the human rights standards of the courts. The heads of the courts endorsed this roadmap, and plans have been made for accomplishing the ambitious goals.

Social Cohesion

- DLR established the 'Let's Play project' with four Muslim and Christian schools. At each school, ten students are selected to participate in playing football. As a first step, the students from the different schools play against each other, but later the teams change, allowing students from different schools to play on the same team. The duration and training of those students last for several months to ensure sustainability and provide the students with the ability to form friendships while doing sports together. The intention and reasoning behind this project is to move the spirit of young people forward from being and living near each other to being with each other.

Cross-cutting

- Since 2020, Search for Common Ground (Search) has implemented the "Religious Roundtable" project to promote religious tolerance and human rights in the Middle East and South and Central Asia through diverse religious actors' inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable engagement. The project, closing in 2023, targets key stakeholders through religious coexistence and tolerance in Lebanon and engaging online and social media audiences through collective advocacy campaigns.