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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON
FOR THE 51ST SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Lebanon (Lebanon) for the 51st session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Lebanon is a country located in the Middle East.¹ The majority of the country is Muslim, with 27% of the population identifying as Shi'i Muslim, 27% as Sunni Muslim, 21% as Maronite, 8% as Greek Orthodox, 5.6% as Druze, 5% as Greek Catholic, and 6.4% as belonging to other faiths.² In its 2025 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Lebanon as the 74th worst country for Christians.³ Since 2023, there has been a notable increase in attacks on Christian holy sites. Additionally, Lebanon has blasphemy laws that criminalize actions viewed as blaspheming God.

3. Lebanon's last review was held on January 18, 2021.⁴ As a result of the review, Lebanon received 297 recommendations, 179 of which it accepted.⁵ It was recommended by Ireland, but only noted by Lebanon, that the government "[d]ecriminalize blasphemy, and fully decriminalize defamation, including insult and criticism of public officials."⁶ It was also recommended by Malta, and supported by Lebanon, that the government "[t]ake measures to further promote interreligious dialogue and tolerance of religious diversity."⁷ It was also recommended by Israel, but only noted by Lebanon, that the government "[i]mmediately implement Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006) by disbanding and disarming all militias and terrorist entities, in particular Hezbollah, so that security and stability can be restored."⁸

Legal Framework

4. Under Article 9 of the Constitution of Lebanon:

¹ William L. Ochsenwald et al., *Lebanon*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lebanon> (last updated July 8, 2025).

² *Id.*

³ *Lebanon: Persecution Dynamics*, OPEN DOORS (Mar. 2025), <https://www.opendoors.org/RESEARCH-REPORTS/COUNTRY-DOSSIERS/WWL-2025-LEBANON-PERSECUTION-DYNAMICS>.

⁴ *Universal Periodic Review – Lebanon*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/lb-index>.

⁵ *Infographic – Lebanon*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/LEBANON_Infographic_37th.pdf (last visited July 10, 2025).

⁶ OHCHR, UPR of Lebanon (3rd Cycle – 37th Session): Thematic List of Recommendations, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Matrice-Recommendations-Lebanon.docx>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

Freedom of conscience is absolute. In assuming the obligations of glorifying God, the Most High, the State respects all religions and creeds and safeguards the freedom of exercising the religious rites under its protection, without disturbing the public order. It also guarantees the respect of the system of personal status and religious interests of the people, regardless of their different creeds.⁹

5. Lebanese law also criminalizes blasphemy. Article 473 of the Penal Code states that “[a]ny individual who publicly commits blasphemy against God shall be subject to imprisonment for a duration of one month to one year.”¹⁰

6. Lebanon is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹¹

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.¹²

Religious Persecution

7. While Lebanon has enacted blasphemy laws, the brunt of the persecution is experienced by converts who are harassed and abused by their own families.¹³ In 2024, 300 Christians were reported to have been physically or mentally abused or received death threats due to their faith.¹⁴ Additionally, in 2024, three Christians were forced to go into hiding and one was forced to leave the country for safety.¹⁵

8. The story of Salim, a Christian convert, highlights the type of persecution that converts face in Lebanon. When Salim converted to Christianity, his family had him fired from his job and some of his relatives followed him overseas to try to physically harm him.¹⁶

⁹ CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON 1926 (rev. 2004), art. 9.

¹⁰ *The Reality of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Lebanon*, BIHORRIYA, <https://www.bihorriya.com/en/violations-of-freedom-of-religion-and-belief-in-lebanon/> (last updated Mar. 2023).

¹¹ *Ratification Status for Lebanon*, OHCHR, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=96&Lang=EN.

¹² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

¹³ *Lebanon: Full Country Dossier*, OPEN DOORS 28 (May 2004), <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/country-dossiers/WWL-2024-Lebanon-Full-Country-Dossier.pdf>.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Lebanon: Persecuted Christian Concerned for Cousin*, THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS (Apr. 23, 2025), <https://www.persecutionsa.org/post/lebanon-persecuted-christian-concerned-for-cousin>.

9. Khaled is another Christian convert who was persecuted by his family after they learned he had converted to Christianity.¹⁷ After Khaled became a Christian, his Muslim family attacked him and locked him in a room in an attempt to make him change his mind and return to Islam.¹⁸ He eventually escaped and returned to his wife who was also displeased about his conversion.¹⁹

10. In addition to the societal persecution Christians face, we are also concerned about Lebanon's blasphemy laws that can be used to target Christians. Blasphemy laws are prevalent in Muslim majority countries. In fact, 90% of countries in the Middle East and North Africa have enacted blasphemy laws.²⁰ Such laws are in contravention of the ICCPR, which states that everyone has the right "either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching." Christianity, along with many other religions, calls upon its adherents to share their faith with others. Under Lebanon's vague blasphemy laws, a Christian's saying that belief in Jesus Christ is the only way to achieve salvation can be construed as committing "blasphemy."²¹ Unfortunately, Lebanon has shown no intent to get rid of its blasphemy laws. This can be seen through Lebanon's failure to support a recommendation calling for the decriminalization of blasphemy laws.²²

11. Since Lebanon's last review, there have also been many cases of churches and Christian holy sites being attacked and vandalized. For example, on November 23, 2024, vandals took the statue of the Baby Jesus from a nativity scene.²³

12. On January 28, 2024, three suspects were arrested for burglarizing and vandalizing ten churches in Beirut and Mount Lebanon.²⁴ Those churches were attacked within two weeks.²⁵

13. On January 9, 2024, a Syrian national destroyed the interior of a 300-year-old church in Lebanon.²⁶ The police also found the nativity and Christian decorations outside destroyed and the altar was completely broken.²⁷

¹⁷ *Christian Convert from Locked Room*, THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS (Feb. 15, 2024), <https://www.persecution.com/stories/christian-convert-escapes-from-locked-room/>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Virginia Villa, *Four-in-Ten Countries and Territories Worldwide had Blasphemy Laws in 2019*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Jan. 25, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/25/four-in-ten-countries-and-territories-worldwide-had-blasphemy-laws-in-2019-2/>.

²¹ *The Reality of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Lebanon*, *supra* note 10.

²² OHCHR, UPR of Lebanon (3rd Cycle – 37th Session): Thematic List of Recommendations, *supra* note 6.

²³ *Vandals Target Nativity Scene In Lebanon*, CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY (Dec. 2, 2024, 8:00 AM), <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/260740/vandals-target-nativity-scene-in-lebanon>.

²⁴ *Three Suspects Arrested for Vandalizing 10 Churches in Beirut and Mount Lebanon*, (Jan. 30, 2024), <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1366258/three-suspects-arrested-for-vandalizing-10-churches-in-beirut-and-mount-lebanon.html>.

²⁵ *Lebanese Security Forces Apprehended Trio Behind Spate of Church Vandalism and Robberies*, SYRIACPRESS (Jan. 31, 2024), <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2024/01/31/lebanese-security-forces-apprehend-trio-behind-spate-of-church-vandalism-and-robberies/>.

²⁶ Alexis Hachem, *Someone Destroyed a 300-Year-Old Church in Lebanon, Here's What We Know*, 961, <https://www.the961.com/908-year-old-church-in-lebanon-destroyed/> (last updated Jan. 10, 2023).

²⁷ *Id.*

14. That same month, Our Lady of Salvation Monastery in Cornet Chahwan was vandalized.²⁸ Thankfully, nothing was stolen.²⁹

15. On May 12, 2023, a Christian cemetery was attacked, and crosses were destroyed in Deir al Ahmar.³⁰

16. On March 31, 2023, several tombs were vandalized in a Maronite Christian cemetery in Saïda.³¹

The Government and Hezbollah

17. The militant group, Hezbollah, operates in Lebanon as a Shiite Muslim political party.³² Hezbollah views itself as a Shiite resistance movement. In its 1985 manifesto, it vowed to fight back against Western powers in Lebanon, advocated for the destruction of Israel, and pledged its allegiance to the supreme leader of Iran.³³ Hezbollah has been declared a terrorist organization by many countries, including the United States of America.³⁴ Further, Hezbollah is supported by Iran³⁵ and has a long history of carrying out terrorist attacks in Israel and across the world.³⁶ It is estimated that Iran provides \$700 million a year in funding to Hezbollah to carry out its operations.³⁷

18. In August 2022, Esmail Ghaani, the Commander of Iran's Quds Forces, stated that "Hezbollah's sons are making plans to bring down the last blow against the Zionist regime . . . and to realize the wish of Imam Khomeini to eradicate Israel from the map and the face of the Earth."³⁸ Then, on October 8, 2023, just over a year after those statements were made, Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel in support of Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.³⁹ Since then, Hezbollah has carried out more than 2,000 attacks against Israel, killing at least forty-one Israelis.⁴⁰ Below we have highlighted a few of the attacks that targeted and killed Israeli civilians.

²⁸ Photo: *Vandalism and Destruction in a Church*, MTV LEBANON (Jan. 23, 2024, 3:44 PM), <https://www.mtv.com.lb/en/news/articles/1419857/photo-vandalism-and-destruction-in-a-church>.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ OPEN DOORS, LEBANON: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER, *supra* note 14; @ChristiansMENA, X (May 13, 2023, 8:54 AM), <https://x.com/ChristiansMENA/status/1657368663291224066>.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *What is Hezbollah?*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah> (last updated Oct. 29, 2024, 9:00 AM).

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Hezbollah: 100 Percent Terrorist Organization*, THE AMERICAN ISRAEL PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, <https://www.aipac.org/resources/hezbollah-100-percent-terrorist-organization-5trfp-8jptm-9jwwp#:~:text=Already%20this%20year%2C%20numerous%20countries,of%20Congress%20from%20both%20parties> (last visited July 10, 2025).

³⁷ Emanuel Fabian, *Gallant: Iran gives Hezbollah \$700m a year, is 'driving force' of current escalation*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Apr. 20, 2023, 9:15 PM), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/gallant-iran-gives-hezbollah-700m-a-year-is-driving-force-of-current-escalation/>.

³⁸ *Commander Says Iran Will Destroy Israel And Attack The US*, IRAN INTERNATIONAL, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202208065484> (last updated Oct. 25, 2023, 5:28 PM).

³⁹ *Israel: Hezbollah's Use of Inherently Inaccurate Weapons to Launch Unlawful Attacks Violates International Law*, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (Dec. 20, 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/israel-hezbollahs-use-of-inherently-inaccurate-weapons-to-launch-unlawful-attacks-violates-international-law/>.

⁴⁰ Mohammed Hussein & Hanna Duggal, *Mapping Over a Year of Cross-Border Attacks Between Israel and Lebanon*, ALJAZEERA, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/13/mapping-one-year-of-cross-border-attacks->

19. In October 2024, Hezbollah launched three rockets targeting civilian areas in Israel, killing eight civilians and injuring sixteen more.⁴¹ According to Amnesty International’s Secretary General, “Hezbollah’s reckless use of unguided rocket salvos has killed and wounded civilians, and destroyed and damaged civilian homes in Israel.”⁴²

20. On October 31, 2024, Hezbollah fired 18 salvos at towns across Israel.⁴³ As a result of the attack, approximately ninety rockets landed inside Israel.⁴⁴ In two of the salvos, seven Israeli civilians were killed.⁴⁵

21. In July 2024, Hezbollah launched rockets into Israel and killed twelve Israeli civilians, including children. Those who were killed were playing soccer when they were struck by a rocket.⁴⁶

Recommendations

22. Lebanon must take steps to ensure that Christians can freely practice their faith without fear of being harassed and threatened by their family and community members. Further, we ask that Lebanon repeal its blasphemy law. Doing so is critical to ensuring that all its citizens are free to practice their religion according to the tenets of their faith.

23. Lebanon must take immediate action to condemn and disband Hezbollah. Hezbollah’s continued reign of terror in the region will only continue if it is not disarmed and disbanded.

between-israel-and-lebanon#:~:text=Some%20Israeli%20leaders%20have%20pledged,Aita%20al%2DShaab%20-%2044%20attacks (last updated Oct. 24, 2024, 9:59 AM).

⁴¹ *Israel: Hezbollah’s Use of Inherently Inaccurate Weapons to Launch Unlawful Attacks Violates International Law*, *supra* note 39.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ Paul Adams et al., *Israel Hits Hezbollah Targets After Football Pitch Strike Kills 12 Young People*, BBC (July 28, 2024), <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c29dydz84ngo>.