

**Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights:** Marta Hurtado

**Location:** Geneva

**Date:** 21 January 2020

**Subject:** Lebanon

We are concerned by the increasing number of violent clashes between protesters and security forces in Lebanon in recent days. Some demonstrators have resorted to using violence to express their grievances, and security forces have responded, at times, with unnecessary or disproportionate use of force.

Over the weekend, protesters in Beirut tried to invade the Parliament building; and threw rocks, traffic signs, firecrackers, and other debris at Internal Security Forces (ISF). Several ATMs, bank offices and shops were vandalised and public property destroyed.

Officers from the ISF responded with tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets. Several reports of use of force violations were received. According to reliable sources, at least four young men were shot at close range with rubber bullets leading to severe and irreversible damage to their eyes.

According to combined data of the Lebanese Red Cross and Civil Defence, at least 377 people - 142 of whom were law enforcement officers - were injured on Saturday, 18 January. A further 90 people were injured the following day.

Law enforcement officers have an obligation to abide by international norms and standards on the use of force, particularly the principles of legality and proportionality\*. We welcome the statement by the commander of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) who acknowledged the importance of acting with restraint when confronting violent protesters, and of the need to protect journalists and peaceful protesters.

People have the right to participate in public affairs and shape all decisions that affect their lives, including by peacefully assembling to express their concerns. The rights to freedom of expression and opinion – including the right to give and receive information – to peaceful assembly and to participate are fundamental pillars of a democratic society. We recall, however, that demonstrators should exercise this right peacefully and assemble without resorting to violence.

Information received by the UN Human Rights Regional Office in the Middle East and North Africa indicates that there were 45 arrested individuals over the weekend, most of

whom have been released. Some protesters said they were severely beaten at the time of their arrest and during subsequent interrogation.

We call on actors to do their utmost to de-escalate the situation and upon authorities to deploy efforts to establish a meaningful and inclusive dialogue with all segments of society. We also call on the authorities to conduct prompt, thorough, independent, transparent and impartial investigations into alleged use of force violations committed during the latest outbreaks of violence and ill-treatment during arrest and detention. The victims and their families have a right to justice, truth and reparations.

We encourage the political actors to respond to the legitimate aspirations of the people, to speed up their efforts to form a stable, all-inclusive and respected Government able to address the grievances and demands of the population who are suffering the effects of a severe and deepening economic crisis.

\*<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/useofforceandfirearms.aspx>

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