

CHARTER OF DEMANDS¹

BY FEMINIST ACTIVISTS AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS IN LEBANON

A GENDERED DISASTER RESPONSE PLAN: LEARNING FROM THE PAST

August 27, 2020

Feminist activists and women's rights organisations in Lebanon, signatories to this Charter, are concerned with the human toll of the explosion of the Beirut port which took place on August 4th, 2020. This has come against a background of severe economic hardship, an unprecedented loss in the value of the local currency, spiking unemployment and a degradation of public services, all of which exacerbated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We have been reeling from the political system, which is sectarian, patriarchal and corrupt and has oppressed women for decades. Even before the explosion, we were under-represented in national political institutions, comprising only 23% of the workforce, and unable to marry/divorce/inherit the way we want to.

To date, and as a result of this violent act that has hit Lebanon, more than 200 people have died, more than 6000 are injured, few became disabled for life, 300,000 have found themselves displaced, and many remain missing. Vast areas in Beirut are totally or partially destroyed, with much of the city's infrastructure having sustained heavy damage. This has left many vital services severely impacted limiting or stopping their ability to function including hospitals, schools, universities, economic centers, public facilities and others.

More than fifteen days after the tragedy, the government of Lebanon, now resigned, has not gone far enough to relieve the distress of the population. Individual citizens and civil society groups have taken it upon themselves to provide critical care and support including saving the injured, rescuing those who are trapped, clearing rubble, providing food, health care (including mental health) and temporary shelters in addition to mapping and assessment of material damage.

Lebanon now has unprecedented media attention. International aid agencies have mobilized quickly, but the signatories to this charter are concerned that this aid cannot and must not go to structures that will continue to marginalize and oppress Lebanese women. During this historic moment, if women groups are not at the heart of the response plan, they will continue paying the price for decades to come. Based on our previous experiences of crises in Lebanon and on how aid has been distributed and spent, we are concerned that well-intended aid will not be spent for necessary and non-discriminatory relief. We, the signatories to this charter, demand that aid be channeled to civil society organizations and delivered in an equitable and just manner for all. Aid must also be distributed in a manner that takes into account the disproportionate effect and impact, both short and long term, of the most vulnerable and historically excluded groups, including women and girls as well as persons with disabilities, migrant and refugee women, women in conflict with the law, lesbian and bisexual women and transgender people, elderly women, sex workers/women in prostitution², and others.

This charter thus represents our concerns and demands for an immediate humanitarian assistance process that recognizes and addresses existing gender inequalities and seeks to ensure that all women and girls' needs and priorities are met and that the process is transparent and subjected to due diligence as well as clear accountability mechanisms.

A. CONDUCT A GENDER ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

We demand that any established mechanism undertakes a gendered assessment of damages, needs and priorities of all women, girls and non-normative gendered identities and the setup of a unified referral system to respond to the identified

¹ This charter was coordinated by UN Women Lebanon, though drafted in full by its signatories and in this represents their words and demands.

² The signatories to this charter disagreed on terminology.

needs. This should be done through empowering and resourcing a body including representatives of women's rights and independent non-government feminist organisations, feminist experts and scholars, UN Women and other related UN bodies, as well as relevant entities within the Lebanese government including the Ministry of Social Affairs and the National Commission for Lebanese Women.

As such, needs assessment processes must consult with and reflect diverse women of all ages and categories; must include disaggregate data by sex, age, disability and nationality; and must explicitly address the capacities and needs of all women and girls in participation, protection and service delivery without over-burdening affected communities with multiple assessments. In close consultation with feminist activists and women's rights organisations, the assessment must also deploy the necessary mechanisms and tools to identify the most vulnerable women, girls and non-normative gender identities and quantify the ways in which they were disproportionately affected by the explosion. The identification of the needs of the most vulnerable women and girls must be done with the active participation of the targeted populations.

B. ENSURE WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION, LEADERSHIP, AND INCLUSION

Recovery, relief and rehabilitation discussions, decisions, compensations, deployment of resources and efforts should fully amplify the voices of all women and marginalized groups (as detailed above) through their effective representation in all leadership and decision-making bodies existing and newly formed for the purposes of this emergency.

National authorities should allow peaceful protests and ensure the protection of journalists and women protestors especially that feminist groups have been in the forefront of the protests and most of field reporters and journalists are women. Access to information about aid, health and environmental risks and justice, including access to the investigative process, should be made available to all. The formation of any new government should ensure an equal representation of men and women.

C. PROVIDE FOOD SECURITY, SHELTER AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Lebanon already ranks low (139 out of 153) on women's economic participation. Women residents of the urban poor communities of the Northern suburb of Beirut hit by the blast are more likely to be unemployed and/or not have legal residence (as a refugee, stateless or migrant). Considering the economic impact of the explosion and the ongoing deep economic crisis, the financial situation of women will most likely worsen with many losing their businesses/income or becoming unemployed. This is especially critical for women-headed households, migrant domestic workers and women with disabilities. Moreover, preliminary assessments show that a significant number of destroyed buildings were occupied by elderly women living alone with no social protection coverage.

The accumulated stresses of the economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the tragic explosions are leading to an exponential rise in the level of need for mental health and psychological care among women especially those directly affected (women with a disappeared or dead family member, women whose home or business is destroyed, women with a chronic mental health disorder, etc...). This need is heightened by rising rates of violence against women and increases in unpaid domestic and care work.

The humanitarian response should therefore ensure equal access to food security, cash assistance, shelter, mental health and psychosocial care and all forms of support for all women especially those identified as most vulnerable and who are at increased risk of food insecurity, poverty, homelessness and therefore abuse. Reconstruction plans should ensure equal chances for women and men to be employed with special focus on supporting the recovery of women's businesses. Cash for work programmes should integrate women equally to men, as should all labour initiatives. Given how few women-owned businesses there are in Lebanon, national authorities should impose (among other measures) the exemption from taxes and legal fees especially when seeking to replace lost or damaged legal and property documents.

Efforts should be made to provide immediate financial support to local women's groups including women's civil society groups and those working with the marginalized communities mentioned above, who are already working with affected people and have the knowledge and resources necessary to rapidly identify and meet the priority needs of all members of the community.

D. PREVENT AND RESPOND TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Displacement, over-crowded temporary shelters, lack of privacy, lack of lighting, homophobia and transphobia, limited and unsegregated wash facilities, and other factors will contribute to violence against women. Moreover, in a country where women state that they had either experienced 'sextortion' (coerced sex in exchange for government services) or knew someone who had, the threats of exploitation and abuse are severe, especially in light of increasing economic vulnerabilities. This will be particularly true for women-headed households, adolescent girls, migrant domestic workers and women with disabilities, and will be exacerbated by law enforcement mechanisms being overwhelmed by the disaster.

As such, the national mechanisms (hotline and other mechanisms) to report incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse should be strengthened and made free of charge in line with the national gender-based violence standard operating procedures. Efforts should be made to ensure women and girls access justice and legal aid and that providers of assistance observe due diligence in relation to safeguarding women and girls from all forms of violence and exploitation.

E. ENSURE ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS

With 50% of Beirut hospitals out of service, access to health care and sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls is jeopardized. Efforts should be made to ensure pregnant and lactating women, lesbian and bisexual women, and adolescent girls are prioritized for support with menstrual hygiene kits, access to contraception, antenatal care, infant food and diapers regardless of age, legal status and race.

Systematic and institutional coordination with feminist activists and women's groups is critical at all stages of the relief and reconstruction efforts, including deliberations on resource mobilization with international and local partners. All categories of women need to be deployed into technical and decision-making roles. As such, the signatories demand the full inclusion in all aspects and processes related to Lebanon's relief and recovery and the implementation of the UN1325 National Action Plan endorsed by the Government of Lebanon.

The signatories:

ABAAD	Helem	Palestinian Women's Humanitarian Organization (PWHO)
Abnaa Saida Al Balad association	Joumana Haddad Freedoms Center	Restart center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture
Al Jalil Organization For Development	Justice Without Frontiers (JWF)	Safadi Foundation
Arab Forum for the rights of people with disabilities	KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation	Soins Infirmiers et Developpement Communautaire (SIDC)
Arab foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE)	Khateera	The Arab Institute for Women (AiW/ LAU)
Arab Institute for Human Rights- Lebanon branch (AIHR)	Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE)	The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Woman (LECORVAW)
Association Najdeh	Lebanese League for Women in Business (LLWB)	The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL)
Center for Inclusive Buisness and Leadership for Women (CIBL.W/ AUB)	Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD)	Women From Lebanon (WNLB)
Collective for Research & Training on Development - Action (CRTDA)	Lebanon Family Planning Association for Development and Empowerment (LFPADÉ)	Women Now For Development
Dar Al Amal	LiHaqqi Feminist Group	Dr. Carmen Geha
DARAJ	Maharat Foundation	Ms. Dima Matta
FE-MALE	Marsa Sexual Health Center	Dr. Guita Hourani
Fiftyfifty	M-Coalition	Dr. Halimé El Kaakour
Global Compact Network Lebanon (GCNL)	Mousawat Organization	Dr. Lina Daouk-Öyry
Haven for Artists	National Association for Disabled Persons (NARD)	Ms. Manar Zeaiter
		Ms. Victoria El- Khoury Zwein