

Date: 7 Sept 2020

**A CHARTER OF DEMANDS
FOR A GENDERED RESPONSE TO THE BEIRUT EXPLOSION**

We, the undersigned feminist activists and women's rights organizations in Lebanon, are deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation that Beirut explosion has created, and the inability of the outgoing government to alleviate the hardships of people at these difficult times. We call on the new government to finally break ranks with the old sectarian, patriarchal and corrupt political system, and work to help all impacted people, including women who have been for far too long silenced and underrepresented in the country's economic and political life. We also call on Lebanon's international partners to ensure that their support reach those who need it most, including vulnerable women, in an equitable, neutral and accountable manner.

The blast comes against a backdrop of severe economic hardship, rising unemployment and a degradation of public services, all of which have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and impacted women disproportionately. Even before the explosion, women were under-represented in national political institutions and comprising less than a quarter of the country's workforce.

While we welcome the fast mobilization of international aid agencies to respond to the emergency needs of the impacted people, it is vital that their aid reach those who truly need it. Previous emergency responses in Lebanon have shown that well-intended aid can be diverted away from those who need it. In the absence of an effective response from the outgoing government to provide critical emergency aid after the blast, civil society in Lebanon has stepped in and provided food, healthcare and shelters to people in impacted neighborhoods. To ensure aid is delivered equitably to those who need it most, we call on the new government and its international partners to channel their support to affected communities through independent civil society organizations.

Aid must also be distributed in a manner that takes into account the disproportionate impact of the explosion, both in the short and long terms, on the most vulnerable and historically-excluded groups, including women and girls, persons with disabilities, migrant and refugee women as well as sexual and gender minorities.

Our charter thus represents demands for an immediate humanitarian assistance that recognizes and addresses existing gender inequalities and seeks to ensure that the needs of all, including women and girls, are met and that the process is transparent, neutral and accountable.

1. Aid should be fairly distributed based on assessments disaggregated by sex, age and legal status.

We demand that all aid mechanisms undertake a sex- age- and legal status-disaggregated assessment of damage, needs and priorities of all impacted groups, including women, girls and sexual and gender minorities, migrants and refugees. This should be done through empowering a representative body that includes independent women's rights and feminist organizations, gender experts and scholars, UN Women and relevant governmental entities such as Ministry of Social Affairs and the National Commission for Lebanese Women.

2. Ensure women's representation, leadership, and inclusion in the response

Recovery, relief and rehabilitation deliberations and planning should be inclusive and equitably guided by all components of Lebanese society, including women and marginalized groups, through their meaningful representation in all existing leadership and decision-making bodies and those newly formed to respond to the emergency. The formation of the new government should also ensure an equal representation of men and women.

3. Provide food, shelter and sustainable livelihoods

Women living in poor neighborhoods hardly hit by the blast are more likely to be unemployed and/or not have legal residence. Considering the economic impact of the explosion and the ongoing deep economic crisis, the financial situation of women is likely to worsen with many losing their income. 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. The humanitarian response should therefore ensure equitable access to food, cash assistance, livelihood support, shelter, mental health and psychosocial care to vulnerable women.

4- Prevent and respond to violence against women and girls

Displacement, over-crowded temporary shelters, lack of privacy and adequate lighting, homophobia and transphobia, limited and unsegregated wash facilities and other factors are aggravating violence against women and gender and sexual minorities. Moreover, in a country where a quarter of women have experienced 'sextortion' or knew someone who had, the threats of sexual exploitation and abuse are severe, especially in light of increasing economic vulnerabilities. Efforts should be made to ensure that women and girls have access to justice and legal support against such crimes, and that they are protected from exploitation at the hands of service and aid providers.

5- Ensure women's access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health services.

With half of Beirut's 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 in accessing menstrual hygiene kits, contraception, antenatal care, infant food and diapers regardless of age, legal status and race.

To read the full charter, please click [here](#)