

Solidarity Statement with the People of Lebanon and a Call to Action

October 2021

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, with appreciation for your efforts and ecclesial service,

It is necessary that we shed light on what has become of the humanitarian situation in Lebanon as a result of the economic crisis. The situation portends of great social unrest, beginning with the increase in migration among young men and women, university students and graduates, and the youth's loss of hope in the future. We are fast moving towards the possibility of a social explosion. Therefore, and out of concern for the students, especially the Christians among them, we find it crucial to come together in solidarity and make calls to action.

Context

Over two years have passed since the onset of the October 17 revolution of 2019, where millions of people took to the streets to protest the state's corruption. However, attempts at creating meaningful change have proven largely unsuccessful, leading the majority of people to succumb to the situation. The ones responsible for managing the country deflect blame and outbid each other in a very charged atmosphere. They have also proven unable to form a "rescue government." The Lebanese banks, in collusion with the state, have depleted the savings of millions of people and have announced that they will not be releasing the people's money in foreign currency. The Lebanese Lira has lost more than 90% of its value and parallel black markets have emerged for Lira-USD exchange. Inflation increases at an alarming rate. Prices skyrocket and people's living conditions rapidly deteriorate, with minimum wage reaching as low as 20 US Dollars. These rampant prices have led many families to experience food insecurity. Medicines are out of stock or hidden for the purpose of making illicit profit, while adults and children suffer from the lack of treatment, including cancer patients for whom medicine is no longer available. Hospitals are at risk of shutting their doors due to fuel shortages. The academic year holds no prospects and the youth's ambitions are being stifled. People wait long hours in queues in front of gas stations in the hopes of acquiring a few liters of benzene. The situation with the electricity has grown dire and the country drowns in darkness because of the increased rationing by generator owners and the insanely high cost of getting electricity. A number of stores and corporations have closed their doors because of the financial meltdown. Not to mention the authorities' neglect that led to the Beirut port explosion on August 4, 2020, which destroyed half the capital and left 218 dead, 7,000 injured, and 300,000 displaced. The event is cause for newfound trauma. Add to it all the monopolization and smuggling activities—illicit activities that have been linked to the recent explosion of a benzene warehouse in North Lebanon that led to the death of over 33 people and the serious injury of over 70.

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In conclusion, and with the added dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country is completely paralyzed and is steadily progressing towards collapse. The authorities are watching, unwilling to take the necessary measures to lift the country from despair. Fear and terror occupy the hearts of the people. Their most basic rights to life and safety are being violated, while sectarian rhetoric is used to fuel fear and hatred, putting the country at further security risk.

Given all this information, the World Student Christian Federation in the Middle East cannot stand idly by. Therefore, we call upon actors in the local and international communities to take action with regards to the pressing matter of Lebanon and the humanitarian crisis that targets the very fabric of Lebanese society, affecting all people generally but youth and students especially. Consideration must be made about the impact that this will have on the future of the Middle East. To that end, we make the following requests:

To the local community, including churches and SCMs:

1. Reject the sectarian rhetoric that threatens to further divide the nation by raising religious awareness and promoting ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.
2. Raise political and rights awareness, combatting the loyalty that the traditional parties amass through clientelism and divisive rhetoric.
3. Address underlying issues, such as civil war trauma and mass migration.
4. Reject the calls to place Lebanon under foreign custody and all else that threatens Lebanon's sovereignty.
5. Support local judicial efforts in the investigation of the Beirut port explosion, rejecting political attempts at intervention.
6. Mobilize the Lebanese diaspora for aid and support of the people back home.
7. Encourage youth to participate in local community-building and humanitarian initiatives to inspire a sense of patriotism and unity.

To the international community, including organizations and youth movements:

1. Stand in solidarity with the people of Lebanon and pray for the country, its people, its Church, our youth, and our students.
2. Assist financially the SCMs in Lebanon, as they are in most need of your support.
3. Support our youth through programs that will build their capacities in different fields.
4. Embrace our students who have left Lebanese soil and support them abroad, and within the capacity of SCMs.

We amplify this human outcry through the federation so that it might be heard, and in the hopes of receiving a response of sympathy for the oppressed Lebanese people, the disadvantaged students, and desperate youth.

We ask God Almighty to bless our service in witnessing to the message of Christ—a message of love and mercy—granting us an abundance of His blessings. Let us keep in our thoughts and prayers Lebanon and the Arab countries that suffer from strife, violence, and war. Let us take it upon ourselves to keep our voices raised in support of humanitarian causes.

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The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) is a worldwide youth and student organization that brings together more than 107 affiliated and associated student movements in more than 90 countries.

As a Federation of student movements, the WSCF empowers and connects activist youth and students around the world on their journey towards the transformation of the future. The WSCF fosters a democratic culture for the mobilization of proactive youth in society, promoting positive change through dialogue and action among different traditions and cultures.

The WSCF is a Non-Governmental Organization with Special Consultative Status with the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).