



Statement

by

H.E. Dr. **Amal Mudallali**
Permanent Representative of **Lebanon**
to the **United Nations**

at the
Third Committee
general **debate**

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Mr. Chair,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your election as chair of the Third Committee. I assure you and the members of the bureau of our full support. Please allow me as well to express our appreciation for the Chair of the last session. We also thank the Secretary-General for the reports under the various agenda items.

Mr. Chair,

Almost two years into Covid-19 pandemic, every corner of the world has felt its devastating impact. Frontline workers, people with disabilities, older people, women and girls, human rights defenders, journalists and media workers, have been especially hit hard.

In a matter of months, progress on gender equality has slowed or stalled. The General Debate of the High-Level week highlighted once again that progress is unacceptably slow, with only 18 women out of 194 speakers addressing the General Assembly this year.

Unfortunately, in some places, due to political turmoil or/and social unrest, the progress has been completely brushed off. In Afghanistan for example, it took just days for twenty years of progress on women rights to collapse.

This backlash is not acceptable, especially that women have been fighting everywhere in every sphere to advance gender equality. They were and still are the first responders in hospitals and clinics. They are leading the way in science, researching vaccines and pioneering treatments. They are at the frontlines of every domain, inter alia politics, peace, climate, and security.

Women journalists and media workers have been also particularly targeted. In a recent comparative study of violence against female reporters and male reporters during Lebanon's 2019 protest movement, UN Women highlighted that female reporters covering the protests were disproportionately targeted with more, and more intense, physical, and online violence than their male counterparts. While both female and male reporters were targets of in-person and online violence, female reporters experienced more attacks that tended to be more sexual in nature.

Violence against journalists, and media workers, civil society activists, and reporters should not be tolerated or accepted. Journalists, reporters, publishers, and all media actors should be protected in order to work in a free and safe environment.

Mr. Chair,

Covid-19 pandemic has also taken a devastating toll on our children's education. UNICEF's installation "*No Time to Lose*" here at the United Nations reminded us of what the pandemic has done to education: COVID has cost our children over 1.8 trillion of in-class hours.

In Lebanon, while schools and universities are preparing to open their doors after the summer break, the new academic year is far from a fresh start. The devaluation of the Lebanese currency by more than 90% since 2019 has hit teachers' salaries hard. At the same time, many parents are unable to cover education cost anymore.

Education is front and center for all our children and youth especially for our young women and girls, who are always the first to be left behind. The right to education is sacred and we must ensure that an entire generation does not fall behind.

Mr. Chair,

The other pandemic that hit Lebanon the past two years is the mental health pandemic with its invisible wounds and psychological scars. Beirut's tragic port blast and the unprecedented economic and financial collapse have left most of the Lebanese people with trauma, and mental and emotional scars.

As Dr. **Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, Director General of WHO described it during his visit to Beirut last week: *"This is heavy. This is very heavy. I don't know if there is any country in such a situation, which is very dire"*.

Mental health needs in Lebanon are greater than ever before, and the ongoing crises continue to create additional challenges for both the health sector and communities alike. Only by investing now and building mental health into all our responses and recovery plans, we can build back better.

Mr. Chair,

As our economic and financial crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top 3, most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century, Lebanon remains the country hosting the largest number of displaced per capita, with over 1.5 million Syrian displaced on its territory.

Unfortunately, the multiple crises have spelled disastrous implications for everyone, Lebanese citizens and Syrian displaced. According to the latest UN survey: 9 out of 10 Syrian refugees are falling below the extreme poverty line – a 60 % increase since 2019. We stress once again that Lebanon can no longer bear the brunt of the displacement crisis, especially in these unprecedented times. We reiterate our repeated calls for the safe and dignified return of the displaced, and we stress that Lebanon is not an asylum country and that our Constitution rejects any form of settlement or integration.

Mr. Chair,

Throughout our history, we, as Lebanese, have been known as resilient. Yet even in the laws of physics, a resilient object can be deformed if enough pressure was applied to it.

As Henry Laurens explained recently:

"Cette résilience doit être considérée comme limitée. Aujourd'hui, les Libanais sont totalement épuisés. Ce sont leurs espoirs de vie qui sont en cause."

"This resilience must be considered limited. Today the Lebanese are completely exhausted. It is their life hopes that are at stake."

I thank you.