

Advocacy dossier

Lara Bitar

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At liberty **Lebanon**

Lara Bitar is the founding editor and editor-in-chief of The Public Source, an independent publication in Beirut. In March 2023 the Cybercrime Bureau summoned her over an investigation into toxic waste after a complaint by the Lebanese Forces party; the case was moved to the Publications Court and was last reported pending.

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The case at a glance

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Status **At liberty**	Country **Lebanon**
Charges Defamation complaint filed by the Lebanese Forces party over an August 2022 article (no formal charge reported)	

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Drop all charges against Lara Bitar related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

02 End the judicial harassment of Lara Bitar and guarantee a fair process meanwhile.

03 Guarantee that Lara Bitar faces no arrest, travel restriction or other reprisal for peaceful human rights work.

02

How the case unfolded

4 August 2022

Other act

The Public Source publishes investigation into toxic waste at Beirut port

The Public Source published an investigative article on toxic waste dumped at the port of Beirut over decades, examining the role of the Lebanese Forces, then a militia, in bringing toxic waste into Lebanon in the 1980s during the civil war.

31 March 2023

Summons

Summoned by the Cybercrime Bureau after a Lebanese Forces complaint

The Cybercrime and Intellectual Property Protection Bureau summoned Lara Bitar, editor-in-chief of The Public Source, to appear on 6 April 2023 over the August 2022 article, following a complaint filed by the Lebanese Forces party. The bureau at first declined to name the complainant.

6 April 2023

Other act

Declines questioning by the bureau; lawyer contests its jurisdiction

Lara Bitar did not submit to questioning by the Cybercrime Bureau, arguing that journalists should be examined under the publications law by the specialised court and not by security agencies. Her lawyer, Ali Swaidan, responded on her behalf and objected to the bureau's authority to question journalists. Supporters gathered outside the bureau in solidarity with her.

6 April 2023

Other act

Twenty-four organisations condemn the summonses of Bitar and Jean Kassir

The Committee to Protect Journalists joined 23 civil society and media organisations in a statement condemning the summoning of Lara Bitar and of Jean Kassir, co-founder of the outlet Megaphone, by security bodies.

7 April 2023

Other act

Case transferred to the Publications Court

The minister of information told Lara Bitar that her case had been moved from the Cybercrime Bureau to the Publications Court, the court that normally hears such cases.

19 April 2023

Other act

Human Rights Watch reports the case still pending

Human Rights Watch listed the summons of Lara Bitar among several moves against journalists and lawyers in Lebanon in spring 2023, and reported that her case, by then before the Publications Court, remained pending. No later development has been reported by the sources consulted.

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The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Lara Bitar remains free and continues to lead The Public Source. The defamation complaint brought against her by the Lebanese Forces party was transferred to the Publications Court in April 2023; the most recent reports found describe it as pending, and no hearing or ruling has been reported since.

Background and Work

Lara Bitar is a Lebanese journalist and the founding editor and editor-in-chief of The Public Source, an independent, women-led publication based in Beirut and founded in 2020. The outlet publishes investigative and analytical journalism in English and Arabic on political, economic and environmental questions in Lebanon.

On 4 August 2022, The Public Source published an investigation into what it described as environmental time bombs: toxic waste dumped at the port of Beirut over decades. The article examined the role of the Lebanese Forces, at the time a militia and now a political party represented in parliament, in bringing toxic waste into Lebanon in the 1980s, during the civil war.

The Case

On 31 March 2023, the Cybercrime and Intellectual Property Protection Bureau summoned Lara Bitar to appear on 6 April 2023 over the article. According to her account to the Samir Kassir Eyes Center (SKeyes), the bureau at first declined to tell her who had filed the complaint and, after she insisted, said that it came from the Lebanese Forces. The New Arab reported that the party was suing her for defamation; a party spokesperson told the outlet that the article had not met basic standards of journalism.

The summons came a day after the General Directorate of State Security summoned Jean Kassir, co-founder of the independent outlet Megaphone, over a post on the outlet's pages. In the same period, the Beirut Bar Association summoned the lawyer Nizar Saghieh, head of the Legal Agenda, over his public objection to a decision of the association. Human Rights Watch reported these cases in the same statement.

Legal Proceedings

Lara Bitar declined to be questioned by the Cybercrime Bureau. She and The Public Source argued that the bureau, a security body, had no jurisdiction over journalists, whose work falls under the publications law and the Publications Court. On 6 April 2023 her lawyer, Ali Swaidan, responded on her behalf and objected to the bureau's authority to question journalists, while supporters gathered outside the bureau in solidarity with her.

On 7 April 2023, the minister of information informed her that the case had been moved to the Publications Court. Human Rights Watch reported on 19 April 2023 that the case remained pending. Speaking to the Coalition For Women in Journalism, she described the transfer as a gain, but said the case could drag on for years or be dropped, as the court was not then operating. The CIVICUS Monitor recorded the transfer in September 2023. The sources consulted report no hearing, charge or ruling since then.

International Response

On 6 April 2023, the Committee to Protect Journalists joined 23 civil society and media organisations in a statement condemning the summoning of Lara Bitar and Jean Kassir. The Coalition For Women in Journalism described the summons as illegal and called on the bureau to stop using its powers to intimidate journalists. WHRD MENA said the outlet was being criminalised through institutions without the legal capacity to do so. SKeyes and SMEX also reported the case and the objections to the use of the Cybercrime Bureau against journalists, and Human Rights Watch cited the case in its April 2023 report on the summoning of Nizar Saghieh.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/lara-bitar/

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