Lebanon | In Solidarity with Daraj and Megaphone Amid A Coordinated Campaign

Joint Statements · Lebanon · 29 March 2025

In light of the coordinated campaign targeting Lebanese independent media outlets Daraj and Megaphone, we, the undersigned group of civil society and media organizations from Lebanon and around the world, come together to stand in solidarity against attempts to silence these leading voices. We call on the relevant Lebanese authorities to take clear steps in the face of these defamatory and alarming actions.

Earlier this month, Daraj and Megaphone learned via an article published by Lebanese television channel MTV that a new legal complaint was allegedly being brought against them before the Public Prosecutor's Office, a complaint that both Daraj and Megaphone have yet to be officially notified of or served with. The independent media organizations are reportedly accused of (1) undermining the financial standing of the state, (2) destabilizing confidence in the strength of the national currency and state bonds, (3) inciting depositors to withdraw their funds and sell bonds, and (4) receiving suspicious foreign funds with the aim of launching media campaigns that would shake confidence in Lebanon.

This most recent targeting of Daraj and Megaphone comes alongside a defamatory campaign against both independent media organizations from media outlets, websites, and figures who are linked to Lebanese banker Antoun Sehnaoui. This campaign follows recent similar campaigns targeting Lebanese economists who have put forth recommendations which would threaten the banking lobby's interests and hold them to account. Since February, a similar media defamation campaign linked to Sehnaoui's affiliated-organizations has also targeted Lebanese advocacy group Kulluna Irada following their demands for accountability in relation to the theft of peoples' funds following Lebanon's 2019 financial crisis.

Since Lebanon's financial crisis in 2019, Daraj and Megaphone have been producing news and reports investigating financial mismanagement, corruption, and money laundering, including critical investigations which resulted in multi-country accountability efforts targeting former Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh. Prior to this coordinated campaign, attempts were previously made to silence both Daraj and Megaphone through prior lawsuits.

Lebanon is at a critical moment. The new Lebanese government is actively engaging with the IMF and the World Bank in support of the country's reconstruction and economic recovery and the country is preparing to elect a new Central Bank Governor. Rather than working toward the financial and economic reform that the country and its people desperately need, the Association of Banks in Lebanon is working to ensure their preferred candidate is elected and that restructuring plans are

adopted to shift the burden of repaying depositors away from the banks and onto the government itself. In support of this, they are instrumentalizing Daraj and Megaphone's reporting in a campaign to silence them.

We, the undersigned, call on the relevant Lebanese authorities, specifically, the public prosecutors and judicial authorities, the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Justice and of Information, and the President, to protect independent media outlets and support the country's economic recovery by:

- Stopping the weaponization of baseless charges to silence independent media and stopping the referral of cases involving media outlets and journalists to criminal court.
- Investigating entities that weaponize state tools to silence independent media outlets through SLAPP lawsuits.
- Ensuring a free operating environment for the media and free expression in line with Lebanon's constitutional and international obligations.
- Enacting necessary reforms on media regulation and ensuring state oversight on media funding to prevent conflicts of interest and the control of media by the perpetrators of financial crimes.
- Pursuing meaningful economic reforms which hold financial abusers accountable and which bring the country out of economic crisis.

Signatories

- Access Center For Human Rights (ACHR)
- Access Now
- Al Khatt
- Al-aalem Al-jadeed
- Al-Jumhuriya Collective
- Alhudood
- AMAL
- Arab Reform Initiative
- Arab Watch Coalition
- Arabi Facts Hub
- ARIJ (Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism)
- ARTICLE 19
- Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE)
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
- Cedar Centre for Legal Studies
- Committee to Protect Journalists

- Community Media Network
- Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)
- Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)
- Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
- Electronic Frontier Foundation
- Fair Square
- Fakar Tany
- Febrayer Network
- Forbidden Stories
- From The Periphery
- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- Inkyfada
- INSM
- International Press Institute (IPI)
- Journalisme & Citoyenneté . Les Assises du Journalisme
- Kandoo
- Kawaakibi Foundation
- Lebanese Center for Human Rights
- Mada Network
- Maharat Foundation
- Marie Colvin Journalists' Network
- Matsadaash
- MENA Rights Group
- Middle East Democracy Center (MEDC)
- Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)
- Radio Rozana
- Raseef22
- REDWORD for Human Rights & Freedom of Expression
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- Samir Kassir Foundation
- SMEX
- Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research
- Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)

- Syrians for Truth and Justice – STJ
- Syrian Investigative Reporting for Accountability Journalism (SIRAJ)
- The Alternative Press Syndicate – Lebanon
- The Palestinian Platform for Fact-Checking and Media Literacy- Kashif
- The Solidarity Directory (Daleel Tadamon)
- The Syria Campaign
- The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
- Tech4Peace
- UMAM Documentation & Research
- Wattan Media Network
- Zawia3

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HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement · info@humena.org