Lebanon Supports Key Civic Space Recommendations at the UPR, but Implementation Remains the Real Test

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Several recommendations supported by Lebanon reflect issues HuMENA advanced through its UPR advocacy, from freedom of expression and the protection of journalists and human rights defenders to digital rights and refugee protection. However, key recommendations on criminal defamation, military courts, Article 534, explicit protection for LGBTQI+ individuals, and Palestinian refugees' rights to work and property remain outside full support.

Lebanon has submitted its official response to the recommendations it received during its fourth Universal Periodic Review. The outcome creates concrete openings for follow-up on civic space, freedom of expression, media freedom, the protection of journalists and human rights defenders, torture prevention, digital rights, and refugee protection.

HuMENA engaged in the Lebanon UPR process through two connected phases: the pre-session in Geneva from 25 to 28 November 2025, followed by the formal review and side event on 19 January 2026. Its work focused on strengthening the civic space track within a broader effort led by Lebanese, regional, and international organizations. The issues raised included freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, freedom of association, digital rights, and the protection of human rights defenders. HuMENA also connected these concerns to wider human rights issues, including torture, non-refoulement, access to justice, refugee protection, and risks faced by marginalized groups.

Throughout the process, HuMENA and its partners shared recommendations and advocacy materials with diplomatic missions and international stakeholders. HuMENA's materials focused on civic space in Lebanon, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, freedom of association, protection of human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists, and digital rights. Partner materials also addressed digital rights, torture, military courts, enforced disappearance, refugee protection, children's rights, and the rights of Palestinian refugees. Bilateral engagement included, among others, the European Union, the Netherlands, Costa Rica, Switzerland, Belgium, Romania, Spain, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Norway.

Several of these priorities were taken up by Member States in recommendations to Lebanon. France recommended guaranteeing freedom of expression and press freedom through a national framework to protect journalists and media independence. Bulgaria recommended adopting and implementing protocols to protect journalists. Czechia recommended ensuring a safe, stable, and enabling environment for civil society, including human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists.

Greece recommended further measures to ensure media freedom and the safety of journalists and media workers. Lebanon supported these recommendations, including recommendations 111, 112, 113, and 114.

On freedom of expression and media law, Switzerland recommended ending unlawful summonses, intimidation, and harassment against journalists and dissenting voices, and reforming Article 317 of the Penal Code. The Netherlands recommended ensuring that the draft media law complies with international standards, including the decriminalization of publication and expression-related offences. The United Kingdom recommended adopting a new media law aligned with international standards and civil society-endorsed reforms, including decriminalizing freedom of expression-related offences and ensuring transparency of media ownership. Lebanon supported these recommendations, including recommendations 119, 120, and 121.

Lebanon did not, however, support all recommendations linked to freedom of expression. It noted Canada's recommendation 124, which called for abolishing criminal defamation and other related provisions in the Penal Code, including specific articles, to protect freedom of expression and the media. It also noted recommendation 126 on strengthening the protection of fundamental freedoms. This leaves a clear gap between support for general media reform and a full commitment to decriminalizing expression.

On the protection of civil society and human rights defenders, Lebanon supported important recommendations, including Czechia's recommendation on a safe and enabling environment for civil society, defenders, lawyers, and journalists, and Latvia's recommendation to facilitate a safe and enabling environment, online and offline, for civil society, journalists, and human rights defenders. These recommendations are directly connected to issues HuMENA followed during the advocacy process, particularly restrictions on civic space, judicial and administrative intimidation, and the targeting of civil society actors, journalists, and rights defenders.

On torture and detention, Lebanon supported recommendations to ensure that the National Human Rights Commission, including the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture, has full, permanent, and unhindered access to places of deprivation of liberty, as recommended by Denmark. Lebanon also supported Switzerland's recommendation to amend Anti-Torture Law No. 65/2017 to provide a comprehensive legal framework in line with the Convention against Torture, and South Africa's recommendation to ensure that detention conditions comply with the Nelson Mandela Rules.

On military courts, Lebanon's position remained limited. It partially supported recommendation 92, but noted the part calling for all criminal proceedings affecting civilians, including minors, to be conducted exclusively before civilian courts. This means that a key fair trial issue raised by civil society, the trial of civilians before military courts, did not receive full state support.

On digital rights, Lebanon supported relevant recommendations, including Estonia's recommendation to work with stakeholders under the national digital transformation strategy to bridge the gender digital divide, and Belgium's recommendation to strengthen the legal framework

and enforcement capacity to prevent all forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including by prosecuting perpetrators and providing support to victims. These recommendations intersect with the work of HuMENA and its partners on digital rights, surveillance, cyber legislation, online targeting, and the protection of civic actors in digital spaces.

On refugees and non-refoulement, Lebanon supported a significant set of recommendations. These included Germany's recommendation to ensure that returns of refugees to Syria are voluntary, safe, and dignified while protecting their basic rights in Lebanon; the United Kingdom's recommendation to protect the rights of refugees and uphold the principle of non-refoulement; and Mozambique's recommendation to strengthen protection for refugees and asylum seekers and ensure full respect for the principle of non-refoulement. Lebanon also supported other recommendations on refugee protection and the improvement of refugees' living conditions.

By contrast, Lebanon did not support important recommendations concerning the rights of Palestinian refugees. It noted recommendation 275 on facilitating Palestinian refugees' access to employment by removing discriminatory restrictions on professions, and recommendation 276 on lifting restrictions that prevent Palestinian refugees from owning property and practising professions. It did support recommendation 277 on continuing to improve conditions and basic services for Palestinians in camps.

On gender and sexual rights, Lebanon's position remained constrained. It partially supported recommendation 25, while noting the part on abolishing Article 534 of the Penal Code, which is used to criminalize homosexuality. It also partially supported recommendation 186, while noting the part on explicit protection for LGBTQI+ persons.

What does this mean for HuMENA?

For HuMENA, the supported recommendations do not close the process. They open a more focused phase of follow-up. Lebanon's support for recommendations on freedom of expression, protection of journalists and human rights defenders, a safe environment for civil society, torture prevention, digital rights, and refugee protection creates a basis for accountability over the coming years.

The recommendations that were noted or only partially supported show the limits of Lebanon's official position. The main gaps remain criminal defamation, military courts, Article 534, explicit protection for LGBTQI+ individuals , and Palestinian refugees' rights to work and property ownership.

The real test is implementation, not the formal recording of support. This means reforming the media law in line with international standards; ending intimidation and unlawful summonses against journalists and dissenting voices; protecting human rights defenders and civil society online and offline; ensuring access by the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture to places of detention; protecting refugees from refoulement; and addressing the gaps Lebanon left outside full support.

What did Lebanon support, and what did it not support?

Note: recommendation numbers refer to the Working Group report on Lebanon, A/HRC/62/5. Lebanon's positions are recorded in A/HRC/62/5/Add.1.

Issue Recommendation(s) by Lebanon's position Press freedom and protection of journalists France, Bulgaria, Greece Supported Safe environment for civil society, human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists Czechia, Latvia Supported Media law reform and freedom of expression Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Romania, Germany Supported Full abolition of criminal defamation Canada Noted Torture prevention and detention conditions Denmark, Switzerland, South Africa Supported Trying civilians exclusively before civilian courts Costa Rica Partially supported Digital rights and technology-facilitated violence Estonia, Belgium Supported Refugee protection and non-refoulement Germany, the United Kingdom, Mozambique, Türkiye, Costa Rica Supported Palestinian refugees' rights to work and property ownership Sweden, Norway Noted Abolition of Article 534 and explicit protection for LGBTQI+ individuals Several states Partially supported / core elements noted

Links and references

- Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Lebanon, A/HRC/62/5 (PDF)
- Lebanon's official response to the UPR recommendations, A/HRC/62/5/Add.1
- OHCHR page for reports of the 62nd session of the Human Rights Council
- UPR Info page on Lebanon

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