EVAP Ep. 57_ Mai El-Sadany

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SPEAKERS

Mai El-Sadany, Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:11

Welcome to Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. I'm Jaclyn Streitfeld- Hall, Deputy Executive Director at the Global Centre. This podcast features one-on-one conversations with practitioners from the fields of human rights, conflict prevention, and atrocity prevention. These conversations will give us a glimpse of the personal and professional side of how practitioners approach human rights protection and atrocity prevention, allowing us to explore challenges, identify best practices and share lessons learned on how we can protect populations more effectively.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:47

For today's episode, I spoke with Mai El- Sadany, a human rights lawyer who is Executive Director of the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. During our episode, Mai and I discuss the evolving situation in Lebanon. It should be noted that we spoke on June 23, 2026, three days prior to the signing of the trilateral framework between Israel, Lebanon, and the United States. Any reference to the pending agreement and to casualty tolls should bear that date in mind. Thank you for joining us today, Mai.

M Mai El-Sadany 01:20

Thanks for having me, Jackie.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 01:22

Can you give our listeners an overview of what the Tahrir Institute does and your own work in the Middle East and North Africa?

M Mai El-Sadany 01:31

Sure. So the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, or TIMEP , as we say for short, was born out of what many people may remember in 2011 as the Arab Spring. The idea was actually our founders were on the ground in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, where protests were picking up, and he, our main founder, really saw just how much, how many brilliant ideas there were in response to decades of status quo. There were ideas on the ground in response to economic challenges, political challenges, social challenges, and despite the fact that these ideas existed, these ideas were not making it to mainstream policy discussions in places like Washington D.C., Brussels, Geneva. But even at home in the region, the reality was there was this huge disconnect between people on the ground who imagined a better region and policymakers. And so, our founder decided that he wanted to create a space where the ideas, input, vision of people from and in the region, experts who brought their lived experiences into the work, could actually better connect with decision-makers and inform the policymaking process. In doing so, bring about a policy discourse that actually responded to root causes on the ground, realities on the ground, and mainstreamed those who were most impacted. In simple words, the idea between the Tahrir Institute derives actually from the disability rights movement concept of "nothing about us without us." Really, there shouldn't be conversations happening on the MENA region without the voices and insights of people from and in the MENA region. A nd so, more than 13 years later, since we've been founded, the Tahrir Institute is now a global organization that has a footprint in Washington D.C., in Europe, and in the MENA region, and we create a space for advocates and experts to better inform the policymaking process. We do this by amplifying their great ideas in the form of analysis, by bringing them together in events to have discussions and dialogue about certain issues, by working with certain communities, for example, people who work on the economy to produce better inclusive economic outcomes, or lawyers who are challenging kind of decades of impunity and carving out a path to accountability, and the idea is that by investing in these communities and bringing them together across country, across region, across theme, we are then strengthening the community that's best positioned to inform the policy discourse. We work on the region as a whole, but we do have priority countries, and currently we're working quite a bit on Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, Syria, and, of course, Lebanon, which I know we'll be discussing later today.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 04:08

And what initially drew you personally to working in this field of human rights and to joining TIMEP?

M Mai El-Sadany 04:16

So I am Egyptian myself. I was born in Egypt. We moved to the U.S. when I was nearly two, and I grew up between both worlds. I loved a lot of what the U.S. had to offer me, but I was also an immigrant myself, a young child immigrant, but of course, that was a big part of my experience: I grew up going to Egypt, I was a native Arabic speaker, in fact, fun fact: I didn't learn English until I was five years old, and so even in Louisville, Kentucky, where I was, I was speaking Arabic at home, which is a story for another day. But because of that, I was so deeply connected to the region and to the people and to my family, and grew up really loving the region, wanting to give back to it, while also seeing that I did have a value add and that I spoke English, I was connected to this other world, I was seeing what was happening in places of power like Washington D.C. And so I was also a child that grew up a Muslim American, visibly so, I started wearing the hijab at age 14, and I grew up in the shadow of 9/11, which was a very difficult time, of course, for people directly impacted in New York and otherwise, but also for Muslim Americans who grew up in the shadow of that. We grew up right with the War on Terror and everything, Patriot Act and everything that was happening, Guantanamo. There were these big questions being had about the role of the U.S. and how the U.S. should balance national security concerns with human rights issues. And so that was definitely a defining moment for me. It's what encouraged me in high school to work with Amnesty International and organize and read up and kind of develop this interest in social justice issues. It's why my first job was as a journalist at a local newspaper. It was just very kind of caring very much about the fact that the country that I loved, my adopted country, was grappling with these really difficult questions, and often falling on the wrong side of the issue when it comes to national security and counterterrorism and human rights considerations. And so with that, I decided to study political science. And just around that time, as I was studying political science and getting to know the space, et cetera, I began to be involved more in kind of studying the Middle East from an academic perspective. I got the chance to do an honors thesis and went back to Egypt and studied at the time the Bush Freedom Agenda and how that was impacting, you know, democracy and human rights at the time and the discourse and all of that, and, you know, things were pretty status quo at that time, and just as I was preparing to graduate, the Arab Spring happens in 2011, and that was the other big pillar in my life that shook how I viewed the region. For so long, I had been kind of watching what was happening to the region, and then in this remarkable moment in which people first took to the streets in Tunisia, and then they took to the streets in Egypt, and of course, that continued to spread. My people were having their moment. They were going out into the streets, and they were rejecting decades of status quo and saying there is a better way. We don't, it doesn't have to be a false choice between economic progress and political openness. There is this third way, and in that moment, I knew that I was on the right track, and I wanted to dedicate my career to working on issues in the Middle East. And as the Arab Spring began to unfold, I began to notice that one of the things that was really missing from the discourse was law and accountability. I felt that we were beginning to see governments in the region respond to the Arab Spring by weaponizing laws. For example, countries were passing problematic protest laws in order to restrict the right to protest, or, you know, later what would become problematic NGO laws or problematic cybercrime laws as the technology evolved. And there was no one really standing in response to challenge these laws.

M Mai El-Sadany 08:01

There were, of course, lawyers on the ground doing incredible litigation and organizing work, but when it came to policy discussions, very little was being discussed on the law, and even less so when it came to issues of accountability. And so, after working in the think tank space for a little bit, I decided to go back to law school, study international law, and develop the toolkit that I felt I would need to be able to meet this moment, to really turn the law into a tool of positive change for the MENA region and see how we could use the law, not only to improve legislation and improve outcomes on the ground, but also to carve a path to accountability, whether in individual cases or larger cases as well. And that path, kind of, this, I began to occupy these two worlds, which sometimes collided and sometimes interacted: the world of policy and the world of human rights law. And ultimately, that landed me at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, where I joined full-time in 2018 to establish the institute's legal unit, which is now an independent department that has thankfully picked up and is run by my wonderful colleague, who's a Syrian human rights lawyer, and they continue to do work within the larger context of the institute.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 09:10

That's such a fascinating path, and I've like it touches on something I've always been interested in: protests and protest movements like the Arab Spring are such an opportunity to change a country and really seize a moment for opening up space for human rights, but it's also, you know, the immediate aftermath is frequently such a clampdown and just incredible violations of law at the same time, even if it eventually leads to some breakthroughs.

M Mai El-Sadany 09:44

Yeah. Now, I mean, this year we marked 15 years since the Arab Spring, which is scary how quickly time goes. But when I look back, and I ask my friends this often, in fact, it's given the state of the region today, right? There is genocide in Gaza; there is severe violations of international human rights law elsewhere; the region itself is not doing well. Even countries that thought they went the path of economic progress at the expense of political freedoms did not deliver on economic outcomes, which is not the shock to me, nor many of the other advocates who are saying the two need to be married. But of course, the region does not look good in short, but the one thing that these governments could not take away from us, and these counter-revolutionary movements could not take away from us, is one: the fact that we found each other. One of the most beautiful parts of the Arab Spring is that it allowed advocates across borders to find people who shared the same values as them. It didn't matter which ethnicity they were from, if they weren't from a minority group or not, or what their training was, but the reality was, in the midst of a very difficult climate, these were people who believed in the impossible, who believed change was possible, and who believed that their people deserved better. And this sort of shared community-sorry, that's developing around shared values is something that's been so special in the Arab Spring, and it's been at the heart of every success that we've had in the time since. You look, for example, at the, you know, many years later, we would see Pegasus, the spyware, being used to target activists around the region, and the reason Pegasus was ever brought to court is because people found each other. Journalists, lawyers, documentarians came together, and they said, "Hey, we all work in different countries, and we all have different pieces of the puzzle, how can we challenge this problematic set of practices by this company and really kind of hold them to account?" That type of cross-country, cross-industry, cross-border collaboration has been really, really powerful, and that's something that governments are still terrified about till this day. Even the name Tahrir in our organization is, of course, named after Tahrir Square, where people gathered in Egypt. If you look at the Tahrir Square today, the Tahrir Square, the Egyptian authorities have built a sort of monument there in order to prevent people from being able to gather. It's a very literal kind of message being sent to the people that we allowed this to happen once; it will not happen again. And there's this active erasure of the revolution. And so, even the effort that we've been doing this year to honor the 15-year anniversary of these revolutions with all of their challenges is something that flies in the face of what governments are trying to do. But again, that's something they can't take away from us: the people, the community, the shared values, our people power.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 12:37

Absolutely, I want to turn now to the situation in Lebanon, which you had highlighted as one of the countries that TIMEP is working closely on. Days after Israel and the U.S. launched strikes on Iran, Lebanon was once again pulled into a broader regional escalation. This is coming as the country, and particularly communities in the south, was already reeling from the effects of Israel's prior military offensive and the November 2024 ceasefire agreement between Lebanon and Israel, after which widespread and large-scale violations continued to be documented. So, how has this cycle of escalation, displacement, and destruction affected communities in Lebanon, and what are the broader implications of this in the region?

M Mai El-Sadany 13:24

So, like you said, on March 2, Lebanon got pulled into the regional war after Hezbollah had fired a rocket and drone attack at a military site in Haifa, and it was the first time that Hezbollah had attacked Israel since the November 2024 ceasefire. Israel, of course, responded with a massive campaign that targeted not only South Lebanon, but also suburbs of Beirut, Beirut, and the Beqaa, which is in the east of the country. By March 16, there was also this ground invasion component of the war, and ultimately we had this devastating aggression by Israel. In that period alone, that kind of period between March 2nd and April 16th, which is ultimately when the first ceasefire was agreed on, there was widespread devastation. There was at least 2,294 Lebanese were killed in that short period of time: among them, 100 rescue and healthcare workers. There was 1.2 million people displaced from their homes. Just to put that into context, that's almost a fifth of the population of already a very small country. And like you said, it intersects with series of displacements that have happened before. And it's critical to say that since the November 2024 ceasefire, Israel had violated the ceasefire on almost a near-daily basis. At least 10,000 violations were recorded, but it's expected that those numbers are higher. And so you have this context in which Lebanese people are not able to live in safety and security, and in which things are happening to them, right. They're being deprived of the opportunity to rebuild their country. Before all of this happened, Lebanon was at a critical point. There was a new government that was committed to reform that spoke about financial accountability in the face of a horrible 2019 economic crisis that spoke about the importance of accountability. There was this potential really in the country, and then you have this devastating war that targets an area that's already been disproportionately targeted, like the south, but also that sends the entire country into shambles. The unfortunate truth is that since the April 16, 2026, 10-day ceasefire, which was announced between Lebanon and Israel and that has continued to be extended in many different ways since, including as the MOU with Iran has been agreed to, Israel has continued to strike the Lebanese people. There have been almost 1,898 new deaths in the period of time since the first April 16 ceasefire to the present day. There was an updated death toll just a few hours ago, and that makes it that this war, since March 2, we've had over 4,192 Lebanese killed. That's not to say how many people have been displaced, and when these people are displaced, sometimes if they're lucky, they're going, they're finding places to stay with their family members in Beirut, or they're finding safety, but many times they're going into shelters, and other times they're sleeping on the streets. And so this is devastating for a country that already came out of crisis upon crisis, from the 2019 economic crisis to the 2020 Beirut port explosion, which is the world's largest non-nuclear explosion in history, believed to be to the aggressions that have followed. This is a country that's already reeling, a people that's already reeling, and you can imagine how impacted communities, marginalized persons, people who've been displaced. At this point, some of these folks have been displaced three or four times over. So just extreme levels of devastation, all the while we're seeing a complete deterioration and destruction and tearing apart of international law. We're seeing disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, on residential areas. Often, when you see the news, you read headlines, and it feels like it's a war between Israel and Hezbollah, but the reality is the vast majority of people killed in Lebanon have been civilians. Every day you see photos of children, of elderly people. You hear stories about rescuers who are going to after a strike happens. They go to kind of rush in, of course, and see who they can save, and then Israel conducts something called a double tap attack, double tap strike, and that's really intended to cause the maximum amount of harm. The people who are going in, the rescuers, the healthcare workers, civil defense, they are being targeted after they go in in an attempt to save people.

M Mai El-Sadany 17:56

And so even these double tap strikes, which are truly horrific, we've had at least 30 of them since March, if not more. There's very little distinguishing between civilians and combatants. Israel has used illegal white phosphorus in residential areas, which, of course, is a restricted weapon that's not meant to be used. There's destruction of infrastructure, so people are not even able sometimes to leave. Depending on where they are in the country, there have been targeting of bridges, which makes it so that it's very difficult, if not impossible, in some cases, for humanitarian aid, food, and healthcare to make it. Also, Lebanese are living under immense psychological tensions. Right, there are drones buzzing over their heads at times, Israel has dropped leaflets over homes, effectively telling people to report on their neighbors if they assume that they might be Hezbollah or Hezbollah affiliated. There's also been leaflets invoking Gaza as a threat. Imagine living in Lebanon and being told over and over by these leaflets or by statements made by Israeli officials that you might be next. That's a form of psychological terror that makes it really, really, really hard to live, let alone survive.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 19:11

Thank you for that. I mean, there's so much I want to ask about there, but I think you know, coming off of your last point around the leaflets and the psychological terror. You know, over the last three months, we've increasingly seen Israeli forces either replicate in Lebanon, tactics they've been using in Palestinian territory or threatening to, whether it be the destruction of civilian infrastructure, collective punishment, mass displacement, and so forth. How has the failure to ensure accountability for violations in Occupied Palestinian Territory and during prior hostilities with Lebanon contributed to the most recent crisis and sort of the way that it's playing out?

M Mai El-Sadany 19:57

Listen, there's a through line, unfortunately, between our failure to exercise international law as a tool to stop Israeli aggression in Gaza and increasingly now in the West Bank, and what we're seeing in places like Lebanon, but also around the world. Frankly, this is also happening in a global moment in which governments are destroying what remains, if anything, from the post-World War II order, and with it the kind of core protections that, you know, collectively as a society we had agreed to: everyone is deserving of human rights, international law, something good, something we believe in, and we're seeing that completely obliterated and disrespected. There's a through line between what's happened in Gaza, to what happens in Lebanon, to even what's happened elsewhere in other places like Venezuela or what have you. You have these real, real questions about respect for international law. You see a through line between IDF training and ICE training here in the U.S. So, no one is immune from being part of this global conversation in this global moment on what the destruction of international law has looked like. In Lebanon specifically, you see a couple of different tactics replicated once more. Like we said, of course, the indiscriminate targeting of civilians and residential areas, the targeting of protected persons. Like I said, you've had a very high number of rescue workers, healthcare workers targeted. You've had attacks on medics and ambulances. You've also had killing of journalists. You may recall from the headlines that there's a journalist named Amal Khalil was killed intentionally by Israel in the south. The car in front of - she was reporting in the south, and the car in front of her was targeted by an IDF strike. And then it was known that she was seeking shelter, and Israel obstructed the ability of the Red Cross to reach her. She remained alive, holding on to dear life for many hours, and she ultimately succumbed to her wounds. And you have unfortunately many stories like this where the person-it's known that they're a journalist-and there is that targeting. You also have, of course, the crime of forced displacement. 1.2 million people displaced from their homes, and we saw record numbers of displacement in Gaza as well. Often, as a result of these evacuation notices that Israel is issuing in the middle of the night, it's extremely difficult for people to leave their home, pack up their stuff, and leave in the middle of the night. Perhaps they're not even awake. How would they even know to check, you know, where do you even start? And in some cases, these evacuation notices had been issued shortly before the strikes happened, rendering it impossible for people to be able to leave in the first place. You also have a lot, of course, and we haven't gotten yet to Israeli occupation in Lebanon, which is a new and developing and alarming aspect, but certainly that's something we're starting to see as well that mirrors some of the conversation in other parts of the region.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 22:52

Absolutely, and I think one of the other through lines beyond this kind of violations one, and lack of accountability is also, you know, something you referenced earlier with regards to, you know, there was a ceasefire from 2024 that was routinely violated, and now, you know, there was a ceasefire in April that's been extended many times, but military strikes, displacement orders, territorial encroachment, and attacks on civilians continue. So, you know, to what extent do you think this reflects normalization of a kind of distorted definition of ceasefire, one that maybe no longer implies meaningful cessation of hostilities or civilian protection at all?

M Mai El-Sadany 23:43

I fear that this whole situation in Lebanon and in other contexts, and Gaza as well, the ceasefire has continued to be violated, really renders the concept of a ceasefire meaningless. What does it mean? What does a ceasefire mean if we see this level of strikes and destruction? We're talking about a period of time since November 2024, when there were daily violations of the ceasefire until Lebanon got pulled into the war once again in March of this year. And again, since this April 16 ceasefire that's been extended, at least 1,898 new deaths in an alleged ceasefire period. Let's not even talk about the whole period. Israel and Hezbollah were said to have reached a ceasefire on Sunday, and today, just before I hopped on, Israel violated the ceasefire once more. So they couldn't even keep a ceasefire hold for just two days. They targeted an area; two people were killed, and those two people were believed to be there clearing roads and picking up bodies of people who had died before them, and so it's really alarming on a conceptual level. The definition of a ceasefire losing its meaning, it makes it impossible for people to be able to regulate their behavior. In Lebanon, when ceasefires have been announced, people have excitedly packed up their things and tried to return home. What does that mean when just hours later or days later they are then targeted with strikes, drones, other forms of attacks? It creates immense civilian harm. The promise of a ceasefire that actually is not implementable. It also raises serious questions about the parties that are meant to broker those ceasefires and ensure their implementation. People have lost trust in the ability of countries that are out there promising ceasefires when the reality on the ground is there is no ceasefire. And the concept of ceasefire is also, I have to say, there's been such a focus on the strikes that, and ignoring Israeli encroachment, which leads to violations of the ceasefire. And the reality is, we cannot disconnect these conversations. With regards to Israeli presence in Lebanon, there's a, in Lebanon, there's the historic blue line, which is where the kind of UN was meant to be, and kind of separating between Lebanon and Israel. Israel announced a new yellow line, which is 10 kilometers in from the border. That's in Lebanese land, sovereign land that belongs to Lebanon, that they decided to be around there. And then at various times they've gone even further than that. As recently as this weekend, the Israeli military released a new map that shows that its troops are operating several kilometers deeper into the country from even the yellow line, including in areas like Nabatieh, which I mentioned today had the ceasefire violation. And Israeli officials have said they're not going to back down. They say they need this. They're going to stay for as long as necessary, even in the face of U.S. administration concerns to some degree. There has been no movement on this, and the most problematic part of this is that Israel refers to this area as a "security buffer zone." But the reality is that the term "security buffer zone" has become a phrase, a nice way to say illegal occupation. International law is clear. This is Lebanese sovereign territory that Israel should not be in, and the fact that they're encroaching further without any form of accountability raises a lot of really serious questions that are being now discussed at various forums, but are at the heart of, at the end of the day, what this means is that less and less Lebanese people can return to their homes.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 27:21

Given TIMEAP's emphasis on kind of context, as you mentioned with the Arab Spring and your founding, contextualizing issues in the MENA region through the voices of advocates and experts from and in the region, you know, in the case of Lebanon, what perspectives or dimensions have you seen as being missing from the broader geopolitical discussions?

M Mai El-Sadany 27:45

I think first and foremost, the stories of everyday Lebanese. When you read the headlines, especially in the U.S., but not solely so, you would think this is a war between Israel and Hezbollah, and that's it, and that there are no civilian casualties. The fact is, we're talking about more than 4,000 people who've been killed since March. That is a short period of time. We are talking about 1.2 million people displaced from their homes. That is a fifth of the population. These are immense numbers that constitute a humanitarian crisis, and the headlines have not reflected that. So, one, you have not enough Lebanese stories making it to the headlines, not enough photos of children and families and people who had dreams making it to our social media timelines and really humanizing this war and bringing it to life and really driving home the cost of every day that this continues. Just the other day, this environmentalist, Mona Khalil, who had spent her life in the south, dedicated to saving endangered turtles, was killed by Israel. And she and they knew that she lived there. They knew where she lived. Her story was well known. She was creating a movement to protect, to kind of advance environmentalism, and she was targeted. This is the type of people that Israel is targeting, but you would never know that from reading the headlines. So, one, I think humanizing the conversation and really driving home the real human cost, that of what this looks like in practice too, I think contextualizing the conversation is every, as this happens, and while this happens, a reformist government that had a lot of potential is no longer able to pursue financial reforms and accountability and bring in much-needed money from the IMF because it's caught responding to one crisis after the next, right? It's extremely hard to build a pathway to justice, or even to hold, you know, government to account when they are busy responding to this horrific aggression, and so it deprives even Lebanese people of being able to imagine a political future, an economic future, of really thinking about how we're going to bring the country forward. And even on a security lens, this context is not an environment in which the Lebanese people can have a conversation on things like the disarmament of Hezbollah, or how they want the state, what role they want the state to play, or what the state owes the people of the South and how they have been left behind. All of these really big conversations are Lebanese conversations that need to be had, but Israel's continued aggression makes it impossible for these conversations to be had, so there's also a need to just create space for these conversations, while also ensuring we have a lasting ceasefire, so that Lebanon can finally build the country that its people deserve.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 30:32

I just want to touch very briefly on Hezbollah itself, and because so much of, you know, Israel's posturing has surrounded Hezbollah's role in Lebanon. You know, as a group, it's often described as both a political party and an armed non-state actor. So, from a human rights and international law perspective, how should we understand this sort of dual role in Lebanon today?

M Mai El-Sadany 31:00

And this is a this is not an easy question, and it's a question that a lot of Lebanese are grappling with. There are many conversations in Lebanon today about how to disarm Hezbollah and how to ensure that the state is the only one in control, you know, with a military and control of arms, and that's a conversation that needs to be had. There are many Lebanese ideas on what that should look like. The problem, of course, is that Lebanese are being deprived of the chance to have those conversations and implement plans that work for them. The reality is that because of Hezbollah's nature, dual nature, it is present in the south. It, there are people with connections to it on a personal level and otherwise, and this requires a conversation among the public on where they go from here. How do we build a state in which there's only one military? How do we ensure that that military has the training and resources to be able to defend the country and also able to take the country forward? These are big questions. I can't answer them, nor should I, given that I'm not Lebanese. But I do know for a fact that there are plenty of conversations happening in person, online, behind closed doors, within the government on what's next and what that should look like. I can tell you that the focus needs to be on these Lebanese voices on productive solutions on what's next. There are different ideas out there. There are different plans. There are different approaches, from separating out the political party from the armed group and dealing with them differently, and some people who reject that as well. And the reality is, Lebanon is in need of a debate and a discourse and a dialog. But that's not going to happen in the middle of a war in which they're being attacked and in which a fifth of the country has been displaced.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 32:53

Absolutely, and I think given these dynamics as well as economic and other constraints on the Lebanese authorities, including, you know, a very limited capacity in the midst of a conflict to deliver at-scale support to communities affected by the attacks. You know, what steps do you think can be taken to ensure the full withdrawal of Israeli forces, break the cycle of escalation, and move towards a durable resolution? Whether it be by authorities within Lebanon, international community, or others, I'm sure that the voices of Lebanese people need to be a part of that. But, you know, what they are talking about, and what steps do you think are needed?

M Mai El-Sadany 33:46

There's a whole host of things, and I think a lot of the disagreement has been on what comes first. So I'm going to avoid that question and instead tell you what those things are, with the caveat, of course, that number one is a lasting ceasefire. None of this gets done if Israel continues to strike Lebanon and displace people and lead to civilian death. That's number one, and that ceasefire needs to be upheld. There are governments, including the U.S., that, you know, are involved in the process that are not able to ensure the enforcement of the ceasefire. I think real questions about why that is-is it political will? Is it a true lack of ability to enforce? Need to be answered so that we can get to a point in which the ceasefire is actually implemented. That's step one. Second bubble: I think there is a need to think of Lebanese solutions for the issue of disarmament. The reality is, no sovereign state can have a military and a non-state actor fighting on its behalf. That is not a sustainable solution. It also has created a lot of issues for the country, so that needs to be resolved. And like I said, there are a couple of different ideas out there, policy ideas out there on what's next, how that could be done, what that looks like. It involves complex questions about the political party versus the militia, and it also involves real questions about accountability, because, like I mentioned, Hezbollah did drag Lebanon into the war, not at the choice of the Lebanese people, and they have committed what are likely atrocities that they could be held to account in court for. However, that doesn't, you know, negate kind of this larger conversation, I think. So that's one bucket. Another bucket has to be how Lebanon gets the resourcing that it needs in order to be able to rebuild the state. How does the LAF, the Lebanese Armed Forces, get the resources that it needs in order to be able to serve as that sole military? These are all really big questions. I think there is a pathway for Lebanon with the IMF. They've been in talks with the IMF in order to get the financing they need. Lebanon needs to do a couple of financial reforms, so they were on track on some of these things, and then, of course, the war happened. And so, getting back on track, there is extremely important in order for the country to be able to bring in that financing, in order to be able to deliver needs. Lebanon also needs reconstruction, a reconstruction plan. Who's going to pay for that reconstruction? Where is the money coming from? Who does that reconstruction benefit? Which areas get reconstructed? But again, you can't have a reconstruction plan if there is Israeli presence in the areas in which you want to construct, or if there are Israeli strikes, making it impossible to rebuild. We saw that in the period of time between November 2024 and March 2026, Israel was targeting tools being used for reconstruction, and so real questions there on whether like, what conditions are necessary for reconstruction to even be conceptualized and to begin.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 36:43

Given all the challenges facing Lebanon and the cycles of abuses and atrocities they've seen, what pathways to accountability exist right now?

M **Mai El-Sadany** 36:52

Right now in Lebanon, there is there is discussion among Lebanese advocates, Lebanese lawyers, on whether Lebanon should join the Rome Statute and/or grant the ICC jurisdiction over its territory. It got very close in 2024, but ended up withdrawing it because of concerns, perhaps on on how the pursuit of investigations would go and what path it would take. The reality is, if Lebanon joins the ICC, Hezbollah could also be brought to court, so there are some political considerations there. But many Lebanese lawyers and advocates are calling for the government to join the ICC. They view it as a credible pathway to be able to hold Israel to account for its violations as well. And so that's a conversation that's happening now. We've also begun to see cases being brought in third states. For example, there's a Lebanese artist named Ali Cherri who brought a case before a Paris war crimes unit because of an Israeli strike that targeted his Beirut-based residential apartment and killed seven people, including his parents. And so we're starting to see ideas around extraterritorial jurisdiction and possible universal jurisdiction cases, and so all the while, as this is happening, I think there needs to be a discussion of accountability. Given how much lack of accountability Lebanon has experienced, that's not to say, you know, the need for accountability that existed even well beyond this in response to the financial crisis of 2019 and the Beirut port explosion, for which there has still been no accountability, and so the country is still also reeling from an impunity crisis that needs to be addressed. And none of this makes it any easier.

J **Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall** 38:32

Unlike other crises in the Middle East, Lebanon is not as deeply covered in the news. If anything, you know the focus on Iran has made it such that sometimes people can even forget that the crisis is still ongoing in Lebanon. So what are we missing when we don't hear about what's happening there, and why should people be paying closer attention to Lebanon?

M Mai El-Sadany 39:04

Lebanon is not receiving nearly enough attention among everyday people. It's not receiving enough attention on the headlines. I think I want to really answer the question of why we should care about what's happening in Lebanon. Not only because of the immense devastation and human suffering that's happening, but also because what's happening in Lebanon and a failure to implement a ceasefire could risk the Iran deal falling apart or the MOU falling apart. We've already begun to see discussions on that. We should care because, also, as this is happening, Israel and Lebanon are having direct talks for the first time; the fifth round of talks are actually happening today, and so this is part of a political discussion. We should care because atrocities are happening, and those of us who care about reinvigorating international law and protecting it really have to be paying attention to the ways in which it's being obliterated and how we can use it in the spaces that remain to protect people, and we should also care because the fact is, the Lebanese government, which was a reformist government, is not going to be able to deliver on an agenda on accountability and financial reforms and progress for the country and deliver safety and peace for the people if it continues to be caught in a war. And so, I truly hope that people make the time to read up on what's happening to Lebanon, pay attention, center Lebanese voices, and remember, at the end of the day, yes, some of these issues are super complex: issues of disarmament, issues of potential sectarian tension, issues of occupation. But there are ideas out there on how we get out of this, and finding those ideas really starts with centering Lebanese voices in the conversation.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 40:47

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