

Israeli settlements amount to war crime: UN rights expert

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Fri, 2021-07-09 14:37

GENEVA: Israeli settlements in east Jerusalem and the West Bank amount to a war crime, a UN human rights investigator said on Friday, calling on countries to inflict a cost on Israel for its "illegal occupation." Michael Lynk, UN special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, was addressing a session of the UN Human Rights Council, boycotted by Israel which does not recognize his mandate or cooperate with him.

"I conclude that the Israeli settlements do amount to a war crime," Lynk said.

He said the settlements violate an absolute ban on an occupying power transferring part of its civilian population into an occupied territory, thereby meeting the definition of a war crime under the Rome Statute founding the International Criminal Court (ICC).

"I submit to you that this finding compels the international community ... to make it clear to Israel that its illegal occupation, and its defiance of international law and international opinion, can and will no longer be cost-free," Lynk told the Geneva rights forum.

Many countries consider the settlements a breach of international law. Israel disputes this and cites Biblical and historical connections to the land, as well as security needs.

In a separate statement, Lynk said Israeli settlements were "the engine of Israel's 54-year-old occupation". There are now close to 300 settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, with more than 680,000 Israeli settlers, he said.

The United States, Israel's closest ally which has observer status at the council, was not on the speakers' list for the debate.

Lotte Knudsen, the European Union's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, said the settlements were illegal under international law, echoing the position of most countries.

"Such actions as forced transfers, evictions, demolitions, and confiscation of homes will only escalate an already tense environment."

Palestinian Ambassador Ibrahim Khraishi said Israel detained 5,000 Palestinians, some of them for more than 20 years.

Palestinians want to establish an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital, but the issue of Jewish settlements on land captured by Israel in a 1967 war has long been a stumbling block in the peace process. The last round of peace talks collapsed in 2014.



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Israel razes home of Palestinian shooting suspect's estranged wife
Jordan, Israel agree to water deal, more West Bank trade

[Lebanese minister denies request to quiz security chief over Beirut blast](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2021-07-09 15:41

BEIRUT: A Lebanese minister has denied a request by the judge probing the Beirut port explosion to question a top security official, a document seen by Reuters on Friday showed.

Meanwhile attempts to deliver justice over the catastrophe continue to

flounder.

Nearly one year after the Aug. 4 explosion, which killed more than 200 people, wounded thousands more and devastated swathes of the capital, many ordinary Lebanese are furious that no senior officials have been held to account.

The blast was caused by a massive quantity of explosive chemicals that had been stored unsafely at the port for years.

The request from Judge Tarek Bitar to question Major General Abbas Ibrahim, head of the powerful General Security agency, was rejected by caretaker interior minister Mohamed Fahmy in a letter to the justice minister.

In a statement, Ibrahim said he was subject to the law like all Lebanese. But he said the probe should take place "far away from narrow political considerations."

Bitar became the lead investigator into the blast after his predecessor, Judge Fadi Sawan, was removed in February following requests from two former ministers he had charged with negligence over the blast.

Sawan had charged three ex-ministers and the outgoing prime minister Hassan Diab with negligence. But they refused to be questioned as suspects, accusing him of overstepping his powers.

A parliamentary committee convened on Friday to study a request by Bitar for immunity to be lifted from former Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil, former Public Works Minister Ghazi Zeaiter and former Interior Minister Nohad Machnouk.

Families of the victims protested nearby, some clutching photos of their relatives.

After being charged by Sawan, Diab said his conscience was clear, Khalil said he had no role in the blast and Zeaiter called the charges "a blatant violation." Machnouk has also denied any responsibility.



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[Major General Abbas Ibrahim](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Beirut blast](#)

[Mohamed Fahmy](#)

[Hassan Diab](#)

Lebanese judge takes aim at top politicians, officials over Beirut port blast 'Huge explosion' targets top lawyer's office in Beirut

[Ever Given owner vows to remain a regular customer of Suez authority](#)

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Thu, 2021-07-08 21:46

CAIRO: Shoei Kisen Kaisha, the Japanese owner of the Ever Given cargo ship,

said on Thursday that it will remain a regular and loyal customer of the Suez Canal Authority (SCA).

In March, the giant container ship ran aground during its crossing of the Suez Canal, causing disruption to international traffic, particularly oil tankers.

On Wednesday, the ship resumed its journey and left the Suez Canal, 106 days after becoming wedged across a southern section of the waterway for nearly a week.

After being dislodged, it was held by the SCA under court order while the authority sought compensation from the ship's owner and its insurers.

After protracted negotiations, an undisclosed settlement between the parties was reached and the SCA announced that the ship would be released.

In a statement, the company said it still maintains a good relationship with the SCA and that it has been strengthened through the experience.

Shoei Kisen Kaisha also thanked the authorities and those who worked to release the ship as soon as possible.

Yukito Higaki, head of Imabari Shipbuilding Co., which owns Shoei Kisen Kaisha, said the Suez Canal is one of the main pillars of international maritime trade.

In a recorded speech during the signing ceremony of the settlement agreement with the SCA, he praised the authority's help in floating the ship safely within seven days, noting that the company owns a large fleet of ships and will remain a regular and loyal customer of the SCA.

Higaki said that the situation was difficult, and expressed his gratitude to Lt. Gen. Osama Rabie, SCA chairman, and the Egyptian people for accomplishing the task of floating the ship.

He expressed his happiness over the "excellent relationship" between the ship-owning company and the SCA that had been maintained and had even been enhanced through the success of floating the ship.



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Egypt's headline inflation up slightly at 4.9 percent in June
Egypt to release megaship impounded over Suez blockage

[Amid Lebanon's drastic fuel shortages, the rare site of a woman petrol station attendant brings hope](#)

Thu, 2021-07-08 20:40

BEIRUT: Amid Lebanon's fuel shortage crisis, a young woman has emerged as a symbol of hope as possibly the country's only female petrol pump attendant.

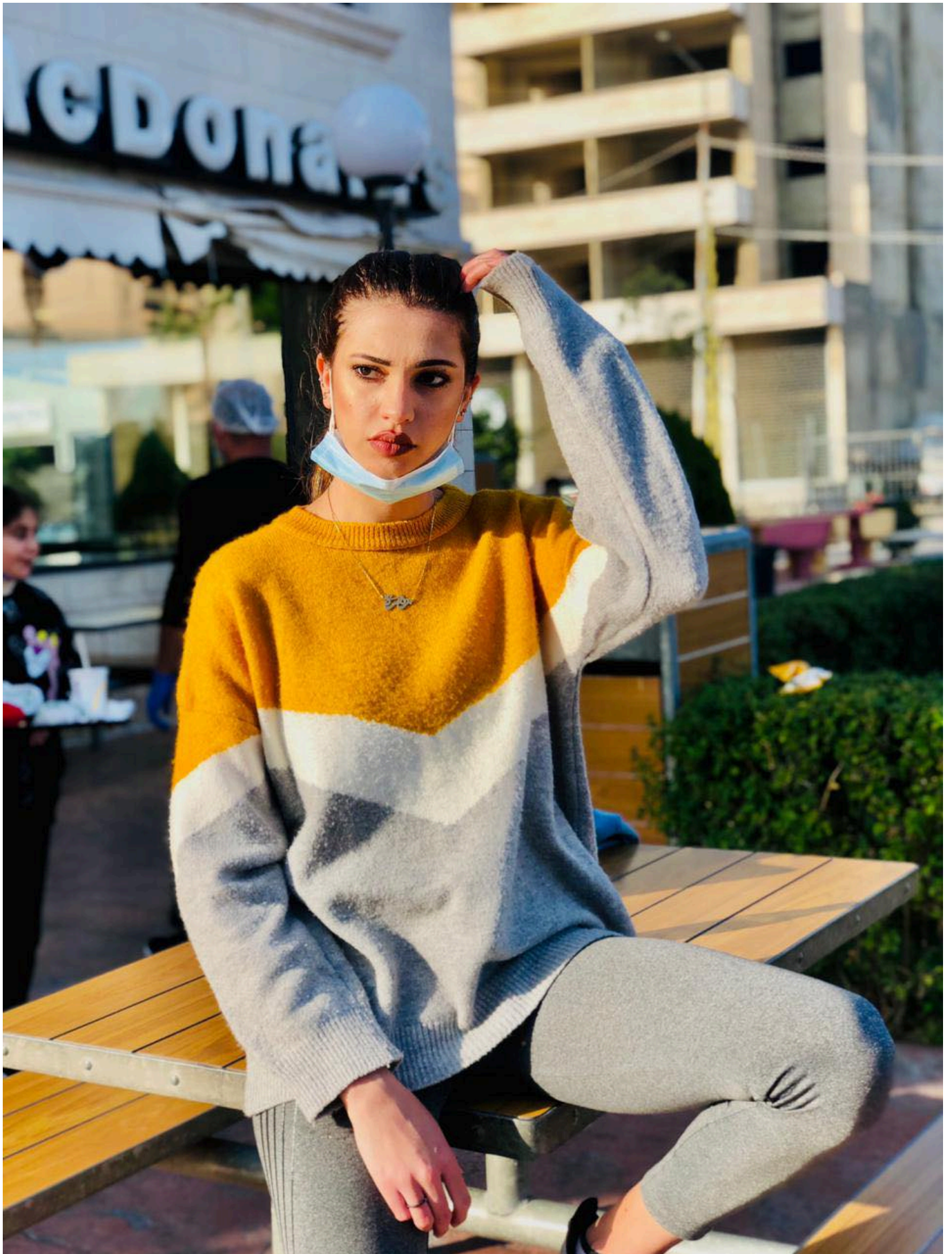
Amani Mneimneh, 21, defies social taboos when each day she rolls up her sleeves and helps refuel drivers' cars.

Lebanon has been suffering massive fuel shortages as the country slides deeper into economic collapse.

Long queues outside petrol stations have sparked brawls, traffic jams, accidents and even gunfights.

Aside from the fuel crisis, most people are not used to seeing women fill their tanks in what many Lebanese would consider a job for men.

<https://www.arabnews.com/sites/default/files/main-image/2021/07/08/27047...>



Amani Mneimneh, 21, has drawn praise for taking up the job of a gas station operator as Lebanon's economy collapses (Supplied)

Two weeks ago, and struggling for work, Mneimneh defied social pressure, along with the increasingly hostile atmosphere on the roads, and started work

at Queen Station in the southern seaside city of Saida.

“I refuse to be branded by anyone,” Amani told Arab News. “I love this decent job that helps me earn my living,”

Mneimneh first worked at Queen Station in 2017 for a year after she attained her national diploma. At the time, the petrol station was the country’s only one staffed by women, but the ground-breaking business idea ran out of steam and the female staff slowly left.

“In 2017, five girls and I worked here ... they couldn’t withstand the job requirements and challenges, unlike me, I stayed for a year then quit to study,” Mneimneh said.

She enrolled in an institute to study interior design but was unable to complete the course due to financial difficulties, so instead she studied hairstyling and worked in a salon.

She said Lebanon’s devastating and deteriorating economic situation, meant she was left needing work and that’s when she went back to Queen Station.

Her parents and five siblings support her to “the maximum.”

“I am grateful and proud of them ... I am even prouder to be supporting mum and dad financially,” she said.

Last week, Hussein Taboush, an acquaintance of Amani, went to get petrol. When his turn came, he spotted Amani, who rushed shyly to hide inside. He brought her out and took photos of her working then posted them on his Facebook with a message praising her for being “hardworking, courageous and upright.”

Taboush’s post received an overwhelming reaction, with 11,000 likes, 1,300 shares and 1,700 comments.

“I had a couple of thousand followers on Facebook,” said Amani. “When Hussein posted the photos, I sarcastically asked him if he was going to make me famous.”

When she woke up the next day, her followers exceeding 10,800.

She said her phone was inundated with WhatsApp messages and calls she received in reaction to Taboush’s post.

“I couldn’t believe my eyes. There were thousands of comments, shares and likes. Many of them invigorated and supported me while others criticized and shamed me for taking up what many label by a man’s job,” she said.

Mneimneh earns 700,000 Lebanese pounds a day (the equivalent of \$42) and works six days a week from 8am-3pm.

Recalling an affectionate incident at work, she said one woman, who was weeping and exhausted having queued for hours, “came down from her car and hugged me in support when I gently told her to smile and be patient.”

Asked whether she had faced abuse from irritated customers, she said she always smiles and asks them to “calm down and be patient.”

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11K

1.8K Comments 1.4K Shares

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[social taboos](#)

Expatriate workers at gas stations in Lebanon face insults, threats and assault amid fuel shortage. Mother and four daughters killed as they looked for fuel amid Lebanon's petrol shortage.

[How Hezbollah has permeated the Lebanese state](#)

Thu, 2021-07-08 20:36

LONDON: Hezbollah has used its financial backers in Iran and its significant military arsenal to “permeate the Lebanese state,” according to a paper launched this week.

The paper – authored by Lina Khatib, director of London-based think tank Chatham House’s Middle East and North Africa program, and launched at an online event on Thursday attended by Arab News – details how Hezbollah morphed from a resistance group against Israeli occupation to a hybrid power holding the Lebanese state in an ideological stranglehold.

“Hezbollah has spread its influence throughout the Lebanese state, from the presidency of the republic to representative political institutions and the civil service, as well as Lebanon’s military and security institutions,” the paper said.

“This influence is due to a number of factors: Hezbollah’s benefiting from a reliable external patron – Iran – unlike other parties in Lebanon; Hezbollah’s capacity in terms of organization, funding, physical resources and numbers of followers, which dwarfs that of other Lebanese parties.”

Other means used by Hezbollah, the paper said, include the “weakness of the Lebanese state” and the existence of “a political system based on elite pacts.”

Khatib told event attendees that she urges analysts, particularly in the West, to take a “nuanced” approach to understanding the relationship between Lebanon and Hezbollah.

“While Hezbollah is a contributing factor to the weakness of the Lebanese state, it’s also a product of the political system in Lebanon,” she said.

“As long as the current political system in Lebanon continues to exist, it won’t be possible to reverse Hezbollah’s sway over the Lebanese state.”

Khatib said the characterization of Hezbollah as a “state within a state” – popular in academic and policymaking circles – is inaccurate.

This characterization “implies that Hezbollah is operating in a way that’s completely detached from the Lebanese state at large. Instead, what I argue is that Hezbollah permeates the state in Lebanon,” she added.

“And when we say ‘the state,’ I’m not just talking about the state institutions, I’m also talking about the state as the space for the contestation of power in Lebanon.

“This, I think, is vividly illustrated by how Hezbollah, unlike other groups in Lebanon ... has surveillance capacities. That means it’s monitoring not just what happens inside state institutions, but it’s monitoring its allies and its opponents in all kinds of arenas: Cultural, social, education, economic. This is something that gives it a huge tactical advantage.”

Khatib said other parties also take advantage of the Lebanese state for their own benefit, but “it’s Hezbollah, unlike the others, that has coercive power over both its opponents and its allies – this also gives it the edge.”

Mona Yacoubian, a senior advisor at the US Institute for Peace, said Hezbollah moved from “the crucible of resistance to Israeli occupation” at

the end of the 20th century, to becoming the “praetorian guard of Lebanon’s corrupt, cronyism system.”

Hezbollah is different from other parties in the country “by virtue of its arms, and that these arms sit outside the gambit of state control,” she added.

Despite being a late arrival to the Lebanese political scene, Yacoubian said, the Shiite group has “adopted and emulated some of the most corrupt practices of Lebanon’s political class, and in a sense has become completely enmeshed with Lebanon’s political system.”

She added: “It has increasingly exploited state institutions – Parliament, ministries, the civil service – and used its influence to garner power, to spread patronage and to gain revenues.”

However, Yacoubian said this behavior has come back to bite the Iranian proxy. “What we saw in the October 2019 protests (in Lebanon) and beyond is that Hezbollah is no longer viewed as above corruption,” she added.

“We see that it has been tarnished by this behavior. Even within its own base, there’s growing disaffection.”

Lebanon is experiencing its worst financial crisis in more than 150 years, and on Wednesday Prime Minister Hassan Diab warned that the country is “days away from a social explosion.”

Yacoubian said because of this approaching explosion, her key question moving forward is: “What would be the impact of a total state collapse on Hezbollah? Because I think that’s a real possibility.”



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Lebanon's Hezbollah hails Raisi's election win in Iran
Pentagon official warns of Hezbollah threat to Lebanon's stability amid financial crisis