

# Displaced and Disrupted: The Impact of War on Lebanese Prisons

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## Abstract

**Background:** Lebanon is facing a multifaceted crisis marked by political instability, economic collapse, and ongoing armed conflict, which has profoundly affected its prison system. This crisis has led to severe overcrowding, deteriorating conditions, and disruptions to essential services, particularly impacting prisoners' well-being and the ability of prison staff to manage the system. **Aim:** This paper examines the impact of Lebanon's crisis on its prison system, with a specific focus on the displacement of prisoners due to escalated conflict, challenges related to overcrowding, healthcare, and mental health, and the responses from both state and non-governmental organizations. **Methods:** The research analyzes the challenges faced by both prisoners and prison staff, drawing on case studies and reports of the response from the Internal Security Forces (ISF), including evacuation efforts and emergency assistance provided. Additionally, the role of non-governmental organizations in supporting prisoner release initiatives is explored. **Findings:** The study reveals that the Lebanese prison system is overwhelmed by overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, and limited mental health support for detainees and staff. Displacement of prisoners due to conflict and the lack of resources further exacerbate these challenges. The ISF's efforts, alongside the intervention of non-governmental organizations, have provided some relief but highlight the need for a more structured, national response. **Implications:** The paper calls for the establishment of a comprehensive national disaster plan for prisons, emphasizing the need for improved emergency preparedness, enhanced inter-agency collaboration, and robust mental health support systems for both prisoners and staff. The findings also aim to contribute to the development of effective strategies for safeguarding detainees' rights and well-being during crises in volatile environments like Lebanon.

## Keywords

Prisons, War, Crisis, Displacement, Relief, Lebanon

## 1. Introduction

Prisons are not isolated institutions than the society; rather, they are integral components of society, reflecting broader social, political, and economic conditions. At their core, prisons are facilities where individuals are deprived of their liberty as a result of criminal detentions or convictions. Prisoners are individuals who have been deprived of their liberty and are confined within a prison or correctional facility.

Understanding the context of imprisonment requires an exploration of the various factors that influence how prisoners are categorized. Diverse factors, including the nature of the crime, legal frameworks, and facility types, contribute to the categorization of prisoners. Across legal systems and jurisdictions, the conditions, rights, and treatment of prisoners exhibit significant variations. Striking a balance between punitive measures and rehabilitative efforts is a common societal goal, aiming to address the root causes of criminal behavior (Zehr, 2002). This variation underscores the importance of researching prisons not only from a legal perspective but also as sites of human dignity, particularly in fragile and crisis-ridden contexts.

Human rights in prison settings are essential to ensuring that those incarcerated receive treatment that respects their dignity, despite their legal status. Prisons must adhere to international human rights standards that prohibit cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (United Nations, 2006). These standards affirm that prisoners, like all individuals, retain fundamental human rights, including access to adequate healthcare, nutrition, and humane living conditions. The global consensus on human rights emphasizes the indivisible nature of these entitlements, ensuring that even those imprisoned are not stripped of their intrinsic humanity and dignity as humans. Recognizing that imprisonment does not negate a person's dignity is crucial, as is ensuring that punitive measures do not overshadow efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate individuals into society.

Michel Foucault's analysis of prisons highlights that prison is not a separate part of the outer society. Indeed, it is well integrated. This integration calls for a reassessment of societal norms and policies and their role in the broader power structures within society, suggesting that prisons do not exist apart from society but rather reflect its norms and systems of control (Foucault, 1977).

Thus, the same policies and systems of power, knowledge, and discipline that govern society should also be applied within prisons, reflecting the broader societal structures of control and influence. This framework is particularly relevant when examining the impact of crises on prisons, as it emphasizes the interconnectedness between societal power dynamics and the experiences of those incarcerated. In times of crisis, such as armed conflict, political unrest, or economic collapse, these dynamics are often amplified, further complicating the conditions within prisons. Thus, studying prisons during crises is essential not only for understanding immediate humanitarian needs but also for shaping more responsive policies that protect human rights in volatile environments.

Lebanon presents a unique case study for examining the impact of crisis on prisons. The country has experienced a multidimensional crisis, encompassing political, economic, and public health challenges, all of which have been exacerbated by armed conflict since October 2023. During such crises, the conditions within prisons often deteriorate, and the vulnerability of prisoners is expected to increase. For instance, the displacement of prisoners during a crisis presents particular risks, as it further disrupts the fragile equilibrium within the prison system. Prisoners are not only uprooted from their established routines and support systems but also face heightened exposure to violence and poor conditions in transit or new detention facilities. Similarly, prison staff, who are already operating under stress, face significant challenges in managing the heightened tension and instability brought about by such movements.

Research into the status of Lebanon's prison system during these tough times is crucial for identifying the specific needs of incarcerated individuals and prison staff. It also offers insights into how crises impact both the logistical and human aspects of prison management. Examining Lebanon's prisons during times of crisis is also essential not only for addressing immediate humanitarian concerns but also for guiding effective crisis management strategies.

Research into the impact of these challenges is vital for understanding how best to protect prisoners' rights, safeguard the well-being of prison staff, and ensure the continuity of essential services during times of crisis (Boivin & Moro, 2023).

This paper seeks to explore the specific case of Lebanon's prisons within the context of crisis, focusing on the displacement of prisoners and its impact on both prisoners and prison staff. By examining the conditions faced by prisoners in Lebanon during its ongoing multidimensional crisis, this research aims to highlight the vulnerabilities of incarcerated individuals and propose strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of crises on the prison population. Furthermore, this study will explore how such research can inform broader policies aimed at protecting human rights and improving prison conditions during times of instability, ultimately contributing to the broader understanding of prisons as integral parts of society that require careful consideration, even in the most fragile contexts.

## 2. Lebanon Amid Remarkable History and Wars

Lebanon's historical events have not only shaped Lebanon's political landscape but have also had profound and enduring consequences on its infrastructure, economy, and social institutions, including the prison system.

Lebanon's geopolitical significance is underscored by its location, strategically positioned between Asia, Europe, and Africa, and its proximity to both mountainous regions and the Mediterranean Sea, enhancing its geographic appeal (Khalifeh, 2008). The country is known as a cultural and ideological bridge, with a diverse society that is home for various religious, cultural, and political ideologies, distinguishing it from its Arab neighbors. Lebanon's democratic system, which emphasizes freedom and gender equality, further sets it apart in a region often

marked by political and social conservatism (Khalifeh, 2008). Lebanon's political trajectory, influenced by its time under Ottoman rule and French mandate and the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920, was further witnessing geopolitical events after gaining independence in 1943. The country became embroiled in regional conflicts, especially following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, when Palestinian militants used Lebanese territory to attack Israel (Traboulsi, 2012).

The historical legacy of conflict and instability in Lebanon is a critical context for understanding the contemporary challenges faced by its prison system. The 1975-1990 civil war, fueled by sectarian and political tensions among Christians, Muslims, and Palestinians, was a dark chapter in Lebanon's history. Foreign interventions, including Syrian peacekeeping forces in 1976 and the Israeli invasion of 1982, further exacerbated the conflict. While the war officially ended in 1990, regional instability persisted, marked by Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 and ongoing clashes with Hezbollah along the border. The assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005 sparked anti-Syrian protests and led to Syria's withdrawal, but political instability continued, as evidenced by the assassinations of other anti-Syrian figures and the devastating 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war (BBC News, 2018; Middle East Monitor, 2022). Lebanon's political landscape remained tense, characterized by sectarian divisions and external influences from major powers. This has frequently led to government paralysis, with political gridlocks and cabinet resignations becoming common. The 2015 "You Stink" protests, fueled by public discontent with government inefficiency and corruption, were a precursor to the larger 2019 revolution, which challenged both the political elite and the banking system. This revolution culminated in violent clashes between protesters, security forces, and political factions (France 24, 2015; Khatib, 2022).

The security situation in Lebanon has remained fragile, particularly in regards with Israel. The 1982 Israeli invasion triggered a protracted conflict, and while Israeli forces withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000, back and forth clashes continued, most notably in 2006, when Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers initiated a 33 days-long war, resulting in nearly 1200 deaths in Lebanon, mostly civilians, and significant infrastructure damage (Middle East Monitor, 2022). Although the 2010s to 2023 witnessed periods of relative calm, tensions never fully subsided. The situation escalated in October 2023 with Israel's military actions in Gaza, leading to increased hostilities along the Lebanese-Israeli border, particularly with Hezbollah's involvement in launching attacks on Israel. The conflict became more intense in September 2024, leading to the most severe escalation since 2006. This escalation has led to massive destruction, nearly 3768 people were killed (as of October 2023) along with 15,699 were injured along with a high influx of displacement accounting at least 900,000 IDPs and exacerbating Lebanon's ongoing humanitarian crises (UNOCHA, 2024).

Following the ceasefire with Israel, which took effect on November 27, 2024, the situation shows a significant deterioration, leading to widespread damage and

long-lasting consequences. A preliminary report by the World Bank estimates a 6.6% decrease in GDP growth and a total war damage of \$3.4 billion, with the housing sector bearing the burden, followed by the environment, commerce, agriculture, health, and tourism and hospitality sectors. The impact of displacement is equally devastating, with over 875,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and nearly 166,000 job losses, resulting in an annual income reduction of \$168 million (The World Bank Group, 2024).

Lebanon's rich and complex history of conflict and war has shaped not only its political landscape but also the state of its prison system today. The challenges faced by Lebanon's prisons are deeply rooted in the historical, socio-political, and economic crises that have continuously destabilized the country. To better understand the current state of Lebanon's prisons, it is essential to consider how past wars and ongoing geopolitical tensions have shaped the institutional structures that govern detention and incarceration.

### 3. Lebanon Enduring Multiple Crisis

Lebanon is a small country with an estimated population of 5.35 million characterized by the presence of large refugee populations. As of 2021, refugees and migrants constitute 23.77% of the population, including 1.5 million Syrian refugees, 855,172 of whom are registered with UNHCR, and 477,574 Palestinian refugees (Arab Development Portal, 2023). Lebanon's healthcare system is under significant challenges. Despite widespread access to basic water and sanitation (92.6% and 99.2%, respectively), 10.9% of the population remains undernourished. Additionally, out-of-pocket health expenses count for a substantial 33% of total health costs (Arab Development Portal, 2023).

Lebanon's economic and social dynamics has been severely challenged by a multifaceted crisis that began in October 2019. The rapid devaluation of the Lebanese Pound, coupled with a shortage of foreign currency reserves, has pushed nearly half the population into poverty (World Bank, 2020). The crisis has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the devastating Beirut port explosion, and the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis.

The healthcare sector, already facing chronic underfunding and mismanagement, has been further placed under stress by the pandemic. While the government's response had commendable aspects, it was hampered by resource constraints and institutional weaknesses (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The economic recession has also had a profound impact on the judicial system. Overcrowded prisons, poor sanitation, and limited healthcare access within these institutions have created a public health crisis. These challenges underscore the urgent need for prison reform and increased investment in the justice sector (Amnesty International, 2020; UNODC ROMENA, 2020).

In Lebanon, the government has implemented the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) to address the ongoing crises. The LCRP, a subsidiary strategy of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), provides a framework for delivering

humanitarian assistance and essential services to both refugees and host communities (United Nations in Lebanon, 2021; Beaujouan & Rasheed, 2020).

Moreover, the government has employed measures to mitigate economic crisis such as capital controls and currency exchange rate adjustments. However, these measures have often proved insufficient to stabilize the economy. The government's reliance on international aid and IMF loans highlights the severity of the crisis and the urgent need for structural reforms (Reuters, 2023).

#### 4. Police and Courts in Crisis

Crisis situations can significantly impact both police and judiciary systems, with the severity and nature of these impacts varying based on the crisis type and the authorities' response. Crises often lead to increased demands on law enforcement, requiring them to manage heightened workloads due to natural disasters, civil unrest, or security threats. To deal with with these pressures, police forces may deploy additional resources, adapt their strategies, and coordinate with other emergency response agencies to ensure an effective response (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The Lebanese police, like those in other countries, face challenges related to the use of force during crises, particularly when public safety is at risk. Balancing order maintenance with human rights respect is crucial, as excessive force can lead to public backlash, legal challenges, and erosion of trust in law enforcement. During crises, police must collaborate with other agencies, such as medical services and disaster relief organizations, to coordinate a multi-faceted response. Transparent communication, community engagement, and the protection of civil liberties are essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring police accountability (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The judiciary system also faces significant encounters during crises. Increased legal cases, particularly those related to emergency measures and public safety and security, can overwhelm the judicial system and cause significant delays. Governments may introduce emergency legislation or temporary legal changes, which can affect judicial processes and individual rights. Balancing public safety with civil liberties protection is a key issue, as is preserving judicial independence in the face of political pressures. In Lebanon, UN human rights experts have raised concerns about the security forces' excessive use of force against peaceful protesters during the 2019 demonstrations (OHCHR, 2019; Qiblawi, 2019).

The crisis environment also poses security risks for legal professionals like judges and lawyers. These risks can hinder their ability to conduct proceedings and administer justice effectively. The judiciary must adapt to new legal realities created by the crisis, such as interpreting emergency measures and considering the broader context when making legal decisions. Upholding human rights, especially during crises, remains a fundamental responsibility of the judiciary. It plays a critical role in ensuring that emergency actions and government responses are aligned with constitutional and international human rights standards.

Crises, such as pandemics or natural disasters, can further strain systems like healthcare, including the system within prisons. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted vulnerabilities in Lebanon's prison system, with overcrowding making it difficult to implement effective health measures. Studying prison conditions during crises is essential to ensure adequate measures are in place to safeguard public health and prevent human rights violations.

In conclusion, crises have a significant impact on both police and judiciary systems, requiring coordinated responses, adaptation, and a commitment to upholding the rule of law and human rights. In Lebanon, effective crisis management relies on the ability of law enforcement and judicial bodies to navigate these challenges while ensuring public safety, protecting civil liberties, and maintaining trust in these institutions.

## 5. Lebanon's Prison Context

In Lebanon, the prison's directorate manages 28 prisons located in all geographical districts with approximately 6399 inmates excluding those held in local police and immigration detention centers. Among these facilities, three prisons are allocated for female adults, one prison for male juveniles, one prison for female juveniles and 23 prisons are solely reserved for male adults (Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 2022). The central prison of Roumieh (RCP) hosts 60% of the country's prison population. Furthermore, the majority of prisoners are males (93%) and 60% of the prison population is Lebanese. Interestingly, Lebanese prisons host detainees from 35 nationalities including Syrian migrants and refugees (27%), Palestinian refugees (8%) in addition to some stateless prisoners (Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 2022). The prison population rate<sup>1</sup> in Lebanon is 98, which is significantly lower than countries in the MENA, such as Saudi Arabia (207), Iraq (145), Bahrain (234), United Arab Emirates (104), Jordan (174), Tunisia (197), Morocco (232), Libya (139), Egypt (118) and Algeria (153) (Fair & Walmsley, 2021).

## 6. Prisons and Pre-War Reflections on Absence of Policy and Legislation

During armed conflict, the protection of prisoners is governed by a combination of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and human rights law, with the Geneva Conventions serving as the foundation. Although there are no specific standards outlining the protection of individuals incarcerated in prisons in conflict zones, several legal instruments safeguard the treatment of all prisoners in general, and prisoners of war in specific. The Geneva Convention III (1949) on the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs) mandates humane treatment, prohibiting torture, violence, and degrading treatment (ICRC, 1949). It requires that prisoners be provided with adequate food, shelter, medical care, and the ability to communicate with their families. Similarly, Geneva Convention IV (1949), which applies to

<sup>1</sup>The prison population rate is the number of prisoners per 100,000 people in a population.

civilians in conflict, ensures their humane treatment in detention, safeguarding them from violence and coercion (ICRC, 2020). The Nelson Mandela Rules (2015), though primarily focused on prison conditions worldwide, emphasize the need to treat prisoners with dignity, prevent violence, and provide a safe environment, which is critical during conflict situations (United Nations, 2015).

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) plays a crucial role in monitoring compliance with these standards, providing humanitarian assistance, and ensuring prisoners' rights are respected (ICRC, 2020).

International standards emphasize the protection of prisoners during armed conflict. However, conflicts pose significant threats to prisons. Bombing can damage infrastructure, disrupt essential services (water, electricity, sanitation), and cause casualties among prisoners and staff. Attacks may target prisons to release or kill specific individuals, as seen in the 2020 Yemen and Democratic Republic of Congo attacks (Penal Reform International, 2021).

While the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Presidential Policy Directive outlines a national preparedness framework with five pillars (prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery), it lacks specific guidance on emergency preparedness for prisons in conflict zones (Corrections1, 2018).

In Lebanon, the existing prison law does not adequately address the unique vulnerabilities of prisons during potential conflicts, such as escalating tensions with Israel. This lack of preparedness could endanger the lives and well-being of both prisoners and officers in the event of attacks or disruptions to essential services

Due to heightened security tensions along the southern border, the ISF has been compelled to shut down several police stations in vulnerable border regions, particularly those under the Tyre and Nabatieh detachments. The affected stations include Borj al-Moulouk, Rashaya al-Fokhar, and al-Khiyam (under Nabatieh's jurisdiction), as well as Alma Al-Shaab, Ramia, Bint Jbeil, Debel, Ain Ebel, and Rmeish (under Tyre's jurisdiction). Despite these closures, the prisons in these areas—Tibneen, Bint Jbeil, and Marjayoun—were still operational until before the escalation of war (National Human Rights Commission, 2024).

In fact, prisons in the affected areas such as prisons of Nabatieh, Marjeyoun, Tebnin and Bent Jbeil are located in close proximity to military targets, making them vulnerable to shelling or other attacks. Thus, in case of escalation of conflict to the areas where the prisons are located, it remains unknown to what extent would the authorities be able to evacuate the prisoners and have available the needed vehicles for transport and find accommodation in other prisons while taking into consideration the acceptable occupancy rate. Moreover, disruptions to essential services, such as water and electricity supplies, could also have a devastating impact on prisoners' health and well-being. Additionally, overcrowding and poor sanitation in prisons could create ideal conditions for the spread of disease in the aftermath of an attack.

Moreover, the national disaster plan found by the disaster risk reduction and management at the presidency of Lebanon Council of Ministers, communicated in October 2023 did not include prisons in any of the sections.

## 7. Prisoners in Times of War in Lebanon: Internally Displaced but Confined!

The war in Lebanon has exacerbated the already dire conditions for detainees across the country. From overcrowded cells to inadequate sanitation and food shortages, detainees face series of challenges.

In some prisons, like Baabda Women's Prison, the lack of basic necessities, such as water, has led to outbreaks of diseases. The shortage of mattresses, blankets, and hygiene items has further compounded the suffering of detainees, especially as families are increasingly unable to visit due to the war (Sheild, 2024).

The sudden influx of detainees has led to severe overcrowding in these facilities, with occupancy rates<sup>2</sup> soaring from 262% to 320% (Internal Security Forces in Lebanon, 2024). This has exacerbated existing tensions among prisoners, particularly over basic necessities like mattresses and blankets. The limited space and challenges in maintaining hygiene standards have further compounded the situation.

For instance, two minor girls (one Lebanese, one Syrian) in Moukhayamat stations were sharing a room with adult detainees due to a lack of space. Similarly, a Syrian detainee in Nabatieh Judicial Detachment reported overcrowding, staying with 14 detainees in a room initially designated for 8, leading to rotating sleep patterns (Sheild, 2024).

The war has disrupted the daily routines of prisons and detention centers. Detainees are often confined to their cells for extended periods, deprived of exercise and fresh air. The lack of access to news and information has caused significant anxiety and fear. Family visits, a crucial source of support and comfort, have become increasingly difficult. Many families, especially those from conflict-affected areas, struggle to visit their loved ones, leading to feelings of isolation and despair. The situation is particularly dire for Syrian detainees, whose families often face significant challenges in visiting them (Sheild, 2024).

## 8. ISF Response to War and Forced Displacement in the Prison Context

Despite the absence of a comprehensive national disaster plan for prisons, ISF have implemented important emergency measures to protect detainees.

The dynamics of conflict have forced the Internal Security Forces to take difficult decisions to ensure the safety of both detainees and their officers and personnel. Detainees from prisons in areas heavily affected by the war, such as Tebnine, Bint Jbeil and Marjaayoun, have been relocated to other facilities, primarily RCP.

ISF moved pre-trial and convicted detainees from prisons in locations that are under attack to other in safer areas like mount Lebanon and north Lebanon. Good coordination was noted with ICRC and UNIFIL to ensure safety of convoys and ensure safe corridors.

<sup>2</sup>Occupancy rate should equal 100%, which means that the number of occupants should perfectly match the capacity. Overcrowding, defined as an occupancy rate exceeding 150%, leads to increased competition for resources, violence, malnutrition, insufficient water supply, and health problems.

In south, evacuation took place for prisoners detained South of Litany, which are prisons of Marjeyoun, Bent Jbeil, Tibnin and Nabatieh. The attempts and efforts were focused on moving prisoners from south to mount Lebanon rather than move them to north of Lebanon for the sake of keeping them close to their family members especially in these tough times of war. In Bekaa, Baalbeck prison was evacuated and prisoners were moved to prisons of Zahle, Jib Jinnin and Rashayya. Several police stations including Dweir and Jbaa has been evacuated or closed while others like Choueifat, have relocated detainees to safer areas. Thus, detainees in detention centers in affected areas of south were moved to safer areas like Saida's detention centers (Sheild, 2024).

The war has also affected ISF staff, particularly women, who are worried about the safety of their families living in targeted areas. Many have been forced to bring their family members to police stations for protection. Many have appealed for support, requesting essential supplies like food and hygiene items, as well as financial assistance to help them support their families during these challenging times (Sheild, 2024).

Besides, the tense security situation has led to several incidents, including riots at RCP and Jezzine prisons. These disturbances have resulted in damage to facilities, theft of equipment, and even an attempt of escape of some detainees. Additionally, some prisons, like Baalbek, have been directly affected by airstrikes.

## 9. Response from Non-Governmental Sector

Efforts from non-governmental sector and personal initiatives were also mobilized to relieve prisons during this crisis. Relief campaigns were targeted to provide humanitarian assistance to prisons especially those that were a destination for "displaced" prisoners, mainly RCP. Relief assistance included mattresses, hygiene kits, beddings, etc. Upon needs assessment, high priorities are observed on the level of maintenance and psychosocial support (Prisons Working Group, 2024).

To alleviate overcrowding in Lebanese prisons during wartime, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) mobilized efforts to accelerate the application of Article 108 of the Code of Criminal Procedures<sup>3</sup>, which allows for the expedited release of detainees under specific conditions. This initiative, supported by the DCAF organization, facilitated releases by providing assistance with judicial procedures and covering fines or procedural costs. For example, at Qobbeh Women's Prison, the NCHR's focused initiative led to the potential release of 54 out of 831 male prisoners and 20 out of 91 female prisoners through simply strengthening the implementation of Article 108 (Internal Security Forces in Lebanon, 2024; Prisons Working Group, 2024).

Besides, there has been a progress on the issue of resuming work in the courtroom of RCP. However, the decision is still not final and has not been definitively confirmed to date (Prisons Working Group, 2024). Such a step will accelerate trial for those detained in RCP.

<sup>3</sup>Article 108 puts a limit on the maximum period that people can be detained before trial.

## 10. Discussion

Prisoners constitute a particularly vulnerable population, entirely reliant on the correctional institution for their safety and well-being during crises. Their confinement severely limits their ability to independently respond to emergencies and access humanitarian aid, making them dependent on the government, non-governmental organizations, and the prison system itself for their survival and support. Inmates are uniquely unable to provide and care for themselves compared to the general population and other institutionalized populations due to their containment within a correctional facility (Smith, 2016). Thus, they must fully rely on the correctional institution to ensure their safety and welfare, including movement to safe areas during emergencies and evacuation in extreme events (Hoffman, 2009; Gaillard & Navizet, 2012).

A thorough and detailed contingency plan for prisons is desired to manage crises like pandemics, economic collapse, security threats, while safeguarding prisoners' rights and well-being (Fakhry, 2024).

During COVID-19 pandemic, series of key recommendations by WHO came to light for emergency preparedness in prisons and other places of detention in the in the context of COVID-19 or other threats to safety.

In fact, effective emergency preparedness in detention facilities necessitates strong collaboration between health and justice sectors, with consistent communication with public health authorities. In times of COVID-19, this included developing and regularly updating comprehensive contingency plans, and incorporating risk assessments and self-assessment checklists. These plans should be integrated with national emergency response systems. Vigorous infection prevention and control measures. Training for staff and detainees on disease knowledge, hygiene practices, and PPE usage is essential. Screening all individuals entering the facility, monitoring contacts of suspected cases, and effectively managing cases with isolation and appropriate medical care are vital. Clear and consistent communication with staff, detainees, and visitors is essential. Providing mental health and psychosocial support to detainees and staff is also of high importance, especially during emergencies. Finally, considering non-custodial measures for low-risk offenders and implementing refined allocation procedures to minimize risk within the facility are key aspects of effective emergency preparedness (WHO, 2021).

Lebanese prisons lack comprehensive emergency preparedness plans, presenting significant challenges. Furthermore, the recent conflict severely impacted prisons in Marjeyoun, Tibnin, and Bent Jbeil, requiring restoration efforts. While prisons in Nabatieh and Baalbeck have been restored, the disruption highlights the ongoing issue of high occupancy rates.

According to WHO, psychological distress is a common experience for individuals affected by emergencies like war. The mental health burden of war and conflict is very heavy with nearly 25% of affected individuals experiencing conditions like depression, anxiety, and PTSD (World Health Organization, 2022). Due to

their vulnerability, mental health issues due to war are detrimental to prisoners. Mental health support is very important as well during and post-war. The war has significant detrimental psychological effects on individuals in detention. It is critical to prioritize their mental health and well-being, even amidst the challenges of protecting the general population during a crisis (Liebrenza et al., 2022). Subsequently, mental health care should be an integral part of any relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts in post-conflict settings.

## 11. Conclusion

The Lebanese prison system demonstrated a mixed response to the recent conflict. While ISF and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided relief assistance, evacuations from affected areas exacerbated existing overcrowding. Efforts to release eligible prisoners helped mitigate this issue. However, despite existing legislation and efforts by ISF, challenges persist in effectively responding to emergencies, particularly due to inadequate communication and coordination among stakeholders.

The lack of a comprehensive emergency preparedness plan at the government level is a significant concern. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring the safety, security, and well-being of prisoners. This requires establishing clear emergency plans that incorporate risk assessments and address the diverse needs of incarcerated individuals, including health, nutrition, and mental health. Strengthening inter-agency collaboration by fostering effective communication and coordination between ISF, the Ministry of Justice, lawyers, and NGOs is also essential. These measures are critical for upholding human rights and promoting dignity and fairness within the criminal justice system.

However, NGO efforts to support prisoners, while valuable, are not sustainable in the long run. These organizations are often limited by insufficient funding and the donor-oriented nature of their work. Unfortunately, prisons are typically not prioritized on the to-do lists of donors, leaving a critical gap in sustained support for Lebanon's prison system. As a result, while NGOs play an important role, their efforts cannot fully address the ongoing needs of Lebanon's prison population without more stable, long-term funding and a more comprehensive national strategy.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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