

Date: March 24th, 2021

Dear Friends and Partners,

Unfortunately, it is advisable to reconsider travel to Lebanon in the present. This is due to COVID-19, crime, potential armed conflict, and civil unrest. These are natural consequences of increased poverty, political disputes, and absence of a cabinet. News reports and analyses indicate widespread of chaos in the streets associated with the struggle over power in the country.

Increased violence expected

Local security authorities have noted a recent rise in violent crimes, including political violence. Multiple unsolved killings within the past months in Lebanon may have been politically motivated, as reported.

Analysts speculated some armed groups may conduct attacks targeting tourist locations, markets/shopping malls, and local government facilities.

Family, neighborhood, or sectarian disputes escalate quickly and has led in instances to gunfire or other violence. Armed clashes have occurred along the borders, in Beirut, and in refugee camps. The Lebanese Military Forces have been brought in to quell the violence in such situations.

There are frequent demonstrations in Lebanon. Protesters block major roads, including thoroughfares to the major cities in Lebanon, blocking access to the north, south and Bekaa provinces, in addition to separating Beirut areas using flaring tires.

Increased inflation, poverty and unemployment increase the likelihood of theft and looting

Serious incidents of violent crimes such as robbery and assault are more frequent in Lebanon, however still on petty levels at the moment. The Lebanese government lacks sufficient emergency reserves to compensate for businesses' financial losses, and poverty and unemployment are in substantial increase on daily basis with the US dollar exchange rate reaching more than 15,000 L.L. Surpassing 50% of poverty, looting and food riots have become frequent scenes in the supermarkets. Theft and armed robbery have already made the news titles.

Risks of war happening

War risks between Israel and Lebanon are very high. A war, if occurred, would entail extensive damage to Lebanese infrastructure. According to political analysts, there is an increased likelihood of war breaking out between Israel and Hezbollah since Israel's Prime Minister is more likely to respond with disproportionate force due to growing pressure domestically.

Based on observations and analyses, a civil war is unlikely to happen. However, there is a high risk of localized intra-factional fighting involving small arms, and explosives against party-affiliated assets. Risks involve assassination operations against prominent political leaders.

Social stability broken

The people's protests against taxes, corruption, poor services, and restrictions on bank withdrawals began on October 17th, 2019, across the country. The Beirut Port explosion revealed more of the corruption in the political leadership. The obstacles in forming a government, the poor crisis management, food shortages, and price hikes, are leading to further expanding protests and food riots. In such conditions, there is an elevated risk of fighting between rival party supporters.

Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon most impacted

The long-suffering Palestinian refugees in the camps are directly influenced by the country security, social and economic problems, and civil unrest. Poverty has hit the refugee community double or three times more than the Lebanese reaching more than 80%, according to UNRWA reports.

The overcrowded camps hosting refugees from Syria (Palestinians and Syrians) have been living in tension since 2011. With the spread of COVID-19, the number of infected cases and deaths among the Palestinians is more than double Lebanon's rate of 1%. Being under the pressure of the economic situation, the Palestinian refugees in the camps tend to neglect the safety measures needed to protect themselves from the pandemic. They prioritize providing food for their families rather than staying home, or spending money on hygiene materials, sanitizers and face-masks.

In this environment of disease, lack of jobs, food shortages, price hikes and unrest, internal tensions among the communities sharing the small space have escalated.

Violence emerging widely in the camps

Marginalized, deprived of rights, trapped in the camps! Palestinian refugees live in an environment that is more likely to nurture risky behaviors of delinquency and crime, especially among the youth.

The refugee camps are no void of the chaos prevailing in Lebanon. Increased violence domestically and in the streets has been frequent. In the past year and early in 2021, several cases of murders in the camps made up national news stories. Some of those crimes were the causes of theft, while others reported to be the result of family disputes, or drug dealers' "arguments". In addition, victims of gender-based violence have increased recently, according to reports.

In short, the crises have laid heavy influence upon the Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon demonstrated by increased drug abuse and smoking, increased depression and mental disturbances, youth suicidal attempts, and an increase in domestic problems leading to divorces and family disintegration.

Dear Friends,

As much as we'd love to have you with us, it is not recommended to travel to Lebanon in the present, as informed sources say.

Hoping the situation will change and become better,

Sincerely Yours;

Kassem Aina

