

7.3.1 Treatment of human rights lawyers and legal defenders

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The Lebanese judiciary was reported to lack independence, with political leaders exerting significant influence over appointments, jurisdiction, and decision-making. Judicial processes were further affected by corruption and the undue influence of prominent individuals.609 Human rights lawyers stated that vague legislation regulating social media created uncertainty, as there were no clear standards defining what was permissible. Lawyers specialising in immigration matters reported being subjected to public hostility, with accusations of prioritising foreigners over Lebanese nationals. Judges were also reported to be targeted online, with details of their personal lives and families published on social media platforms as a means of intimidation.610

Due process guarantees were described as particularly insufficient in Lebanon's exceptional courts, most notably the military courts. Judges in these courts were not required to have a legal background, yet were authorised to hear cases involving civilians and minors in matters deemed related to security. In practice, military courts exercised jurisdiction over cases involving human rights activists and demonstrators, in addition to cases involving alleged spies or militants.611 Human Rights Watch also reported the continued use of military courts to try civilians and intimidation of judicial actors.612

During the reference period human rights lawyers faced direct targeting as a consequence of their work. Khaled W. Al Sabbagh, head of the advocacy and rights executive unit at the Tripoli Coalition of Advocates and of the strategic advocacy and communication unit at AnaHon – an independent media platform from Tripoli613 –, had faced repeated harassment, threats, and intimidation since 2017 as a result of his work. He primarily operated in conflict-affected areas and represented human rights defenders accused under anti-terrorism legislation. On 9 October 2024, he was arrested by members of the 12th Brigade of the Lebanese Armed Forces and detained at the Military Police Detention Centre, where he was interrogated. During questioning, he was repeatedly asked whether he intended to continue criticising the Military Tribunal and security agencies. Authorities specifically referred to a podcast he had hosted on AnaHon, in which he and lawyer and defender Mohamad Sablouh discussed human rights violations attributed to Lebanese security services, including allegations of torture during interrogation, unlawful detention, and procedural delays. He was released without charge the same day. Following his release, colleagues and community members reported that security agencies had been making enquiries about him in relation to the accusations.614

Similar pressures were reported in the case of Mohammad Sablouh, head of the legal support programme at the Cedar Centre for Legal Studies. He represented victims of torture and arbitrary detention and documented violations affecting Syrian refugees. Since 2021, he had reported repeated harassment. In August 2024, while attending a hearing for a client in the Military Court in Beirut, Sablouh published a social media post criticising the sentencing decision by the court and calling for the abolition of the military judiciary. He was consequentially banned from entering the Military Court for three months due to the post. Following an appeal, the decision was lifted and he was able to resume appearing before the court.615

Further restrictions on lawyers were introduced in 2025. On 6 May 2025, the Tripoli Bar Association issued a circular to all lawyers under its jurisdiction. The circular reminded lawyers of the obligation to obtain prior approval from the President of the Bar before making media appearances or public statements, in accordance with Article 39 of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. It further prohibited public criticism of the judiciary or security agencies, warning of disciplinary measures for non-compliance.616 For more information on the justice system in Lebanon, see section 3 Legal system and the judiciary.

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  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Lebanon, 2025, url, section F1

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  GCHR et al., Attacked from all directions: Media workers under fire in Lebanon’s war, December 2024, url, p. 19

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  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Lebanon, 2025, url, section F2

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  HRW, Lebanon: Judicial Reforms Positive, But Fall Short, 15 August 2025, url

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  Anahon, Who We Are, n.d., url

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  FLD, Human rights defender and lawyer Khaled W. Al Sabbagh subject to ongoing defamation campaign led by Lebanese security agencies, 7 November 2024, url

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  CCLS, Harassment against Attorney Mohammad Sablouh, 21 August 2024, url

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CCLS, Restricting Legal Speech - The Implications of the Tripoli Bar Association’s Circular on Freedom of Expression and the Independence of the Legal Profession, 9 May 2025, url

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