

# UN official: Libya elections could be rescheduled for June

Author:

Tue, 2022-01-18 00:23

CAIRO: A senior US official said she is pushing for Libya to hold elections by June after the country missed a December deadline to elect its first president since the 2011 ouster and killing of longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

Stephanie Williams, the UN's special adviser on Libya, said that it is still "very reasonable and possible" for the country's 2.8 million voters to cast their ballots by June in line with the UN-brokered 2020 roadmap.

Libya failed to hold its first-ever presidential elections on Dec. 24 as scheduled, a major blow to international efforts to end a decade-long chaos in the oil-rich Mediterranean nation.

Williams, who led UN efforts to end the latest bout of violence in Libya in 2020, said elections are needed in the country to give credence to the country's institutions.

"All the institutions are suffering a crisis of legitimacy," she said.

"I don't see any other exit for Libya other than a peaceful political process."

The country plunged into turmoil after the NATO-backed 2011 uprising and split into rival governments – one in the east, backed by military commander Khalifa Haftar, and another UN-supported administration in the capital of Tripoli, in the west. Each side is supported by a variety of militias and foreign powers.

Mediated by the UN, an October 2020 ceasefire led to the formation of a transitional government and scheduled elections for Dec. 24. But the vote faced steep challenges that eventually forced its postponement.

Williams urged lawmakers, who are convening Monday in the eastern city of Tobruk, to agree on a "clear, time-bound process with a clear horizon and to not create an open-ended process."

"They have to shoulder a great responsibility right now to respect the will of the Libyans who registered to vote," she said.

"Libyans want an end to this long period of transition that the country has experienced since the events of 2011."

The missed election deadline came after bitter disputes over the laws governing the electoral process. Outbreaks of fighting among armed factions and the presence of thousands of foreign fighters and troops in the North

African country also fed mistrust between the rival groups.

Controversial figures declaring runs for the presidency have further polarized the political scene in recent months. Among them are Hifter, Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and Seif Al-Islam Qaddafi, the ousted dictator's son and one-time heir apparent. Opponents of Hifter and Gadhafi have said they will never accept an election victory by them.

The country's election commission didn't name a final list of candidates for the presidential and parliamentary elections. Imad Al-Sayeh, head the commission, told the parliament Monday that militias threatened to stop the electoral process if a final list was announced.

Al-Sayeh said the commission needs between six and eight months to prepare for elections, given the uphill challenges that led to the postponement of Dec. 24 vote.

Williams said lawmakers and leaders in Tripoli should work out the disputes over the elections rules. She did not see the departure of foreign mercenaries as a "prerequisite for the elections," saying that holding the cease-fire is the priority.

"There have been mercenaries in Libya since 1970s," she said, adding later, "I don't believe that that is a card that is necessary to play at this time."

Williams also said all factions should accept the results no matter who wins.

"The way to solve this is (allowing) the Libyan voters go to the ballot box and make their own choice," she said. "Results need to be respected."

The vote's delay also threatens to open a power vacuum. Lawmakers have argued that the mandate of Dbeibah's government ended on Dec. 24. Aguila Saleh, the influential speaker of parliament, said Monday that the transitional government "should be restructured."

The UN adviser called on the parliament to focus on delivering the vote rather than appointing a new transitional administration.

"What Libyans have clearly said is that they want to go to the ballot box and choose their government, a democratically government representing the entire Libya," she said.



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Libyan security forces break up protest sit-in by migrants  
UN envoy says hard to hold Libya elections in December

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## [Palestinian shot dead by Israeli troops in occupied West Bank](#)

Author:

Tue, 2022-01-18 00:00

HEBRON: A Palestinian tried to stab an Israeli soldier in the occupied West Bank on Monday and was shot dead by him, the army said.

In a separate incident, the Palestinian Health Ministry said an elderly Palestinian died of injuries received nearly two weeks ago when he was hit by a vehicle in Israeli police service.

Violence has simmered in the West Bank, among territories Palestinians seek for a state, since US-backed peace talks with Israel stalled in 2014.

Video circulated on social media, and apparently taken by a motorist, showed a man lying on the road at the Gush Etzion junction in the West Bank, knife in hand, as three soldiers approached with rifles trained on him. A military spokesman said a man had emerged from a car and tried to stab a soldier, who shot him dead, and that the vehicle had fled the scene.

Another Israeli military official identified the dead man as a Palestinian from an outlying village.

In the nearby city of Hebron, the Health Ministry announced the death of 75-year-old Suleiman Al-Hathalin, a veteran protester against Israel's West Bank settlements.

He had been standing in front of a tow truck that had been sent to his village of Um El-Kheir to confiscate unlicensed cars on Jan 5, a relative, Hazem Al-Hathalin, said.

He said that Suleiman Al-Hathalin was struck deliberately by the truck, which "ran him over with its front and back wheels" before driving away.

Israeli police spokespersons did not immediately comment.

In a statement quoted by Israel's Haaretz newspaper on Jan. 14, police said Palestinians had thrown stones at the truck and police forces that had accompanied it, making it impossible for them to stop and help a man who had climbed on the vehicle and fallen.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said on Facebook that he "died defending his village."

Villagers said vehicles which police had sought to tow away were bought from Israelis at low cost after they failed to pass annual roadworthiness inspections in Israel.



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## [Protest by families of Beirut blast victims brings Palace of Justice to standstill](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-01-17 22:52

BEIRUT: Relatives of the victims of the explosion that destroyed Beirut's Port in August 2020 staged a fresh protest in the city on Monday, amid growing anger and frustration over what they see as "procrastination" that is hampering the official investigation into the blast.

They blocked roads and entrances at the Palace of Justice to express their "anger and deep sense of the injustice inflicted on them by all those who submit requests to reject the work of judicial investigator Judge Tarek Bitar."

Their demonstration caused work in the courtrooms to grind to a halt. The families accuse authorities of “negligence, ignoring and covering up the crime and the catastrophe of the biggest explosion in modern history that afflicted Lebanon and Beirut.”

They said that they will call for an international investigation “if stagnation and threats continue, and the case is diluted.”

Bitar, 48, has been unable to complete his investigation into the explosion and the part that the actions of politicians and officials might have played in the events that led up to it. The individuals under investigation include a former prime minister, four ministers and a number of deputies, senior security officials and port officials.

The work of the judge has been suspended for more than two months. He took over the case in February last year after his predecessor, Judge Fadi Sawan, who was removed from the investigation by the Court of Cassation following complaints by two ministers accused of negligence that resulted in the deaths of innocent people.

Since taking over the case, Bitar has been subjected to a smear campaign, intense political pressure and threats inside the Palace of Justice from a Hezbollah official. Suspects in the case, including ministers and representatives, who enjoy parliamentary immunity, have filed dozens of lawsuits calling for Bitar to be removed from the case.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah accused Bitar of “politicizing the investigation and exercising discretion.” The party’s supporters staged protests in October demanding the judge be replaced. Supporters of the Amal Movement joined the demonstrations, which escalated into violent clashes and led to deaths.

During the protests at the Palace of Justice on Monday, families of the victims of the port explosion called on officials to make the necessary judicial appointments to ensure requirements are met for the number of members of the general assembly of the Court of Cassation. The court recently lost its quorum when one of its judges retired, which has hampered efforts to resume the investigation.

A delegation representing the protesters reached the office of Judge Suhail Abboud, the president of the Supreme Judicial Council. Members of the delegation said that when asked about restoring the quorum, Abboud told them “any legal measures that can be taken to protect the investigation will be studied.”

The protesters carried banners denouncing the “corrupt political authority and state officials who dilute the investigation file, manipulate the law and want to remove Judge Bitar, who is entrusted by all the Lebanese to reveal the facts and punish the criminal perpetrators, from whichever side.”

Another banner read: “No one is immune when 220 are martyred, 6,500 wounded, half of the capital Beirut is destroyed and hundreds of thousands of citizens

are displaced.”

In a statement, the protesters said: “Enough of wasting time, sometimes by resorting to political immunity and sometimes by accusing Judge Bitar of discretion or politicization in an attempt to remove him and end the investigation.

“Today, we affirm that we are behind the judicial investigator more than ever before and we hold the accused criminals responsible for doing nothing but obstruction and evasion of justice.”

The relatives expressed anger over the failure of authorities to act on a warrant, issued by Bitar, for the arrest of MP Ali Hassan Khalil, a former finance minister who is political assistant to the head of the Amal Movement, Nabih Berri.

They questioned “how this minister was able to hold a press conference a week ago without anyone touching him.”

A judicial source told Arab News that Judge Bitar will remain unable to resume his investigation until appointments are made to the Court of Cassation so that it can make a decision to do so, and ruled out the possibility of these appointments taking place before the presidential election in May.



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Lebanon: Hezbollah trolls harass critical Black news anchor with racist tweets  
Fears grow over Iran influence in Lebanon after Hezbollah, Amal Cabinet decision

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## [Qatar FM and UN Syria envoy stress humanitarian access must flow to all Syrians](#)

Mon, 2022-01-17 22:25

RIYADH: Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman on Monday met with UN envoy to Syria Geir Pedersen, during his visit to Doha, state news agency QNA reported.

During the meeting, they discussed latest developments in the Syrian crisis, and stressing the importance of continuing to facilitate humanitarian access to all Syrians.

The two sides also stressed the importance of reaching a political solution that ends the war and the suffering of the Syrian people in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions.

[.@Geir0Pedersen](#) in Doha for meeting w/FM Mohammed Abdulrahman Al Thani. Appreciate the support of Qatar for my mandate and for the pursuit of a political settlement within the framework of SC resolution 2254.

– UN Special Envoy for Syria (@UNEnvoySyria) [January 17, 2022](#)



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## [Senior European politicians call for UN probe into 1988 Iran massacres](#)

Mon, 2022-01-17 21:19

LONDON: Senior politicians from across the EU and UK on Monday urged the UN to open an investigation into the 1988 massacres of political prisoners by the Iranian regime.

Speaking at an event hosted by the National Council of Resistance of Iran and attended by Arab News, former heads of state and senior parliamentary figures threw their support behind its campaign for accountability over the massacres.

Guy Verhofstadt, Belgium's prime minister from 1999 to 2008, described the

massacres – in which Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi played a key role as a prosecutor in Tehran – as “genocide.”

Verhofstadt, now a member of the European Parliament, said: “The impunity crisis in Iran reached a peak in June when Raisi was appointed as the regime’s president. He’s one of the main perpetrators of the 1988 mass murder of more than 30,000 political prisoners.

“Instead of being tried for crimes against humanity, he’s occupying the post of presidency. This shows that impunity is rampant in Iran.”

The 1988 killings heavily targeted the Mujahedin el-Khalq, an opposition group that played a key role in the 1979 revolution but was later violently turned upon by Iran’s then-Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini as he sought to consolidate power.

The MEK is the largest constituent organization of the NCRI, an umbrella movement for Iranian opposition groups.

Many current members of the NCRI lost family and friends in the massacres, which Amnesty International has described as “crimes against humanity.”

Verhofstadt said: “The architects and perpetrators of genocides must always be brought to justice. Crimes against humanity can never go unpunished. We are shocked by the genocide that took place in Iran in 1988. The men and women died only because they strived for a free and democratic Iran.”

Also in attendance at Monday’s event was John Bercow, who served as the speaker in the British Parliament for a decade until 2019.

Best known for his commands of “order” aimed at unruly MPs, he took on a somber tone to tell attendees that “the 1988 massacre must be investigated.” Raisi “must be prosecuted for crimes against humanity,” said Bercow. “He’s a disgrace.”

Bercow also voiced his backing more broadly for the NCRI’s mission, calling himself an “ally” and “friend” of the group, and reiterating his support for their slogan: “Down with the oppressor, be it the shah or the supreme leader.” He added: “I back your call for a secular and democratic republic.”

Other speakers at Monday’s event included former Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt and former Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini.

Both echoed Bercow’s and Verhofstadt’s calls for an investigation into the 1988 massacres – which they said continues to be covered up to this day – and backed the NCRI under the leadership of Maryam Rajavi, the group’s president-elect.

Rajavi, who has been president of the NCRI since 1993, said the organization seeks to install a government that is “the democratic alternative to the clerical regime.”

The NCRI, she added, “seeks a republic based on the separation of religion

and state, gender equality, and the autonomy of the oppressed ethnic groups.”





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Families gather at Tehran cemetery in memory of 1988 massacre UN urged to launch inquiry into Iran's 1988 massacre