

UN envoy calls for 'inclusive settlement' to end Yemen crisis

Wed, 2021-10-06 22:27

LONDON: UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg called for an "inclusive political settlement" to end the conflict as he concluded his first visit to the country on Wednesday.

"There is an urgent need to change course and work toward an inclusive political settlement that comprehensively ends the conflict and allows Yemen to recover and develop," Grundberg said.

During his visit, the UN envoy met with the Yemeni prime minister, the governor of Aden, the chairman of the Southern Transitional Council, the governor of Taiz, and a diverse group of political actors.

He also consulted with representatives of civil society organizations and women's rights activists.

In his meetings, Grundberg emphasized his commitment to inclusivity as a necessity for the sustainability of peace, the statement said.

"Yemen has a rich history of political and social diversity. A durable solution is one that reflects the interests of diverse and broad segments of Yemeni society," Grundberg said.

During his meeting with Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed, Grundberg welcomed his recent return to Aden and stressed the importance of the full implementation of the Riyadh Agreement to support stability and functional state institutions.

He also discussed the deteriorating economic situation and the challenges of delivery of basic services.

"The humanitarian and economic impact of the war becomes more difficult to reverse with every passing day. The war has turned daily life into a struggle in Yemen," he said.



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Yemen's prime minister blasts Houthis for 'sabotaging peace, blackmailing the world'Saudi foreign minister receives UN envoy to Yemen

[US leads western praise for Iraqi electoral commission ahead of Sunday's vote](#)

Wed, 2021-10-06 20:10

LONDON: The US and 11 other countries welcomed on Wednesday the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission's preparations for the parliamentary election in Iraq.

The countries said the early election on Sunday is an opportunity for all Iraqis to democratically determine their future.

The joint statement came from the foreign ministers of Australia, Canada,

Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the UK, and the US.

“We recognize the importance of this moment in Iraqi history,” the statement said. “In response to requests from the Iraqi people, substantial resources have been mobilized in support of free and fair elections.”

The UN Assistance Mission (UNAMI) for Iraq is supporting supporting the IHEC. With five times more UN officials than were present during the 2018 election, the UN says it is the largest mission of its kind in the world.

The EU has a separate election observation mission.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

The foreign ministers’ statement said both these missions have already deployed monitors and observers.

“These missions represent a good-faith international effort to fulfill Iraqis’ request and bolster the integrity of the election,” they said.

“The Iraqi people now have an opportunity to exercise their fundamental right to vote. We support the Iraqi government’s efforts to ensure a safe, free, fair, and inclusive electoral environment for all Iraqis, including women and youth, who have long faced violence and intimidation in the pursuit of reform,” the foreign ministers said.

They added that they support the Iraqi government’s efforts to ensure that internally displaced persons can safely participate in the election.

“We call on all parties to respect the rule of law and the integrity of the electoral process,” they said.



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Hundreds of Iraqi protesters march in Baghdad ahead of vote Iraq issues warrants against attendees of Israel normalization conference

[Red Crescent says bodies of 17 people washed ashore in Libya](#)

Author:

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1633536865301714000

Wed, 2021-10-06 14:59

ABOARD GEO BARENTS: At least 17 bodies, likely of Europe-bound migrants, have washed ashore in western Libya, the Libyan Red Crescent said as authorities began to vaccinate migrants in the North African country on Wednesday against the coronavirus, in cooperation with the United Nations.

The bodies were found Tuesday near the western Libyan town of Zawiya, the Red

Crescent's branch in the town said, and were handed over to authorities for burial.

The migrants likely drowned. The UN migration agency has said that more than 1,100 migrants have been reported dead or presumed dead in numerous boat mishaps and shipwrecks off Libya's coast so far this year.

The Red Crescent posted images purporting to show its workers carrying white body bags with the Mediterranean Sea in the background.

Libya was plunged into turmoil by the NATO-backed 2011 uprising that toppled and killed longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi. The North African nation has since emerged as a popular, if extremely dangerous, route to Europe for those fleeing poverty and civil war in Africa and the Middle East.

Oil-rich Libya is largely governed by local militias, many of which profit from the trafficking. Rights groups say migrants traversing Libya have been tortured, raped and subjected to forced labor at the hands of traffickers and inside official detention centers.

UN-commissioned investigators found that the practice of arbitrary disappearances and violence against migrants inside Libyan prisons could amount to crimes against humanity.

Meanwhile, Libyan health authorities started to vaccinate migrants in the country against the coronavirus, in cooperation with the UN migration agency. The campaign kicked off at a health facility in Tripoli, where several migrants got their first shot of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine.

Federico Soda, the head of the International Organization for Migration in Libya, was present at Wednesday's kickoff of the vaccination drive. "This is a health issue for the migrants that we are extremely concerned about," he said. "But it's also a public health issue ... to overcome the pandemic."

It was not immediately clear how the authorities would go about vaccinating thousands of migrants held in detention centers across Libya. Tens of thousands of others live openly in Libyan cities and towns.

Libya has reported more than 34,400 cases of COVID-19 and 4,720 deaths, but the tally is likely much higher in part due to limited testing as in other impoverished countries.



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43 missing off Tunisia after migrant boat sinks: Red CrescentLibya's migrant roundup reaches 4,000 amid major crackdown

[Arab coalition destroys 3 boats, 2 drones at sites used to prepare Houthi attacks](#)

Wed, 2021-10-06 19:12

RIYADH: The Arab coalition said on Wednesday that it had destroyed three booby-trapped boats during an operation targeting a site in Hodeidah governorate.

The coalition said that the boats had been prepared to carry out imminent attacks and that the site was being used to assemble and arm boats.

Later on Wednesday, the coalition said it had destroyed a site in Al-Jawf, northern Yemen used by the Houthis to arm and launch drones.

It added that it had destroyed two drones that were being prepared to carry out an imminent hostile act towards Saudi Arabia.

“Our efforts have contributed to protecting shipping lanes in the Bab Al-Mandab strait and the southern Red Sea,” the coalition said about the first operation.



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Houthis under fire for killing displaced civilians in Marib
Houthis under fire for killing displaced civilians in Marib

[As Lebanese got poorer, politicians stowed wealth abroad](#)

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Wed, 2021-10-06 19:02

BEIRUT: A trove of leaked documents confirmed that for years, Lebanon's politicians and bankers have stowed wealth in offshore tax havens and used it to buy expensive properties.

A galling revelation for masses of newly impoverished Lebanese, caught in one of the world's worst economic meltdowns in decades.

Some of the newly outed holders of offshore accounts belong to the same ruling elite that is being blamed for the collapse and for derailing the lives of ordinary Lebanese who have lost access to savings and now struggle to get fuel, electricity and medicine.

Bold-faced names in the leaked documents include the longtime central bank governor, a pivotal figure in the failed policies that helped trigger the financial crisis, as well as Prime Minister Najib Mikati and his predecessor. The documents, named the "Pandora Papers," were examined by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, with the first findings released on Sunday. The ICIJ report exposes the offshore secrets of wealthy elites from more than 200 countries and territories.

It was based on a review of nearly 11.9 million records obtained from 14 firms that provide services in setting up offshore firms and shell companies. Clients of such firms are often trying to hide their wealth and financial activities.

Setting up an offshore company is not illegal, but reinforces the perception that the wealthy and powerful play by different rules – a particularly upsetting notion for many Lebanese.

The papers show how members of the political class were sending wealth abroad for years, even as they urged people to deposit money in Lebanon's banks, assuring them that it was safe, said Alia Ibrahim, a Lebanese journalist. "We are not talking about regular citizens," said Ibrahim, a co-founder of Daraj, a Beirut-based independent digital media platform, and one of scores of journalists across the world who worked with ICIJ on the investigation into the documents.

"These are politicians who served in public office for years, and they are partly responsible for the current crisis Lebanon is going through," she said.

Lebanon is in the midst of what the World Bank says is one of the world's worst economic meltdowns in the past 150 years. More than 70 percent of the population has been thrown into poverty, their savings nearly wiped out in the crisis that began in late 2019 and was in part caused by decades of corruption and mismanagement by the political class.

Hundreds of thousands of people staged nationwide protests against corruption starting in late 2019. Yet two years later the same politicians still run the country in the same way, protected by the sectarian-based system.

One of the protesters, Samir Skaff, said that the Lebanese are not surprised to be told that the political class "is made up of a bunch of thieves."

"We have been saying that for years," he said.

Offshore companies, though not illegal, can be used to elude taxes or hide illicitly gained money. The leaks only add further confirmation to what Lebanese have long said about their ruling class – though repeated reports of graft or illicit activity in the past have failed to bring change.

One of the 14 firms listed by ICIJ as providing offshore services is Trident Trust, with 346 Lebanese clients making up the largest group, more than double the second-place country, Britain.

One focus of the revelations is Riad Salameh, who has been Lebanon's central bank governor for nearly 30 years.

Daraj reported that the documents showed Salameh founded a company called AMANIOR, based in the British Virgin Islands, in 2007. He is listed as its full owner and sole director, which Daraj said appeared to violate Lebanese laws forbidding the central bank governor from activity in any enterprise. Salameh's office told The Associated Press that the central bank governor has no comment on the documents. ICIJ quoted him as saying that he declares his assets and has complied with reporting obligations under Lebanese law.

Salameh, 70, is being investigated in Switzerland and France for potential money laundering and embezzlement. Local media reported over the past months that Salameh and his brother as well as one of his aides have been involved in illegal businesses, including money transfers abroad despite the capital controls imposed at home. Salameh had denied making such transfers.

Other documents showed that Marwan Kheireddine, chairman of Lebanon's Al-Mawarid Bank, was involved in setting up a flurry of offshore businesses in the months just before the economic crisis hit in late 2019. In November that year, his bank and others began imposing capital controls that meant Lebanese could pull very little money out of their accounts even as the currency crashed, wrecking their savings' value.

The Pandora Papers reveal that in 2019, Kheireddine received control of an offshore firm in the British Virgin Islands, which he then used to buy a \$2 million yacht.

In January 2019, he and his brother set up four firms in Britain on the same day, all based at the same London address, and all registered as "small companies," which Daraj said meant they are exempt from auditing. In 2020, Kheireddine bought a \$9.9 million New York penthouse sold by American actress Jennifer Lawrence, Lebanese media reported at the time.

Kheireddine is a former Cabinet minister and a senior member of the Lebanese Democratic Party. He did not respond to calls and a text message by the AP. Prime Minister Mikati, a businessman who formed a new government last month, has owned a Panama-based offshore company since the 1990s. He used it in 2008 to buy property in Monaco worth more than \$10 million, Daraj reported from the documents.

The leaked documents also show that his son Maher was a director of at least two British Virgin Islands-based companies, which his father's Monaco-based company, M1 Group, used to obtain an office in central London.

Mikati released a statement saying his family fortune was amassed prior to his involvement in politics and was "compliant with global standards" and regularly scrutinized by auditors. Contacted by the AP, Mikati's media adviser Fares Gemayel said he had no comment.

Speaking to Daraj, Maher Mikati said it was common for people in Lebanon to use offshore companies "due to the easy process of incorporation" and denied the purpose was to evade taxes.

Mikati's predecessor as prime minister, Hassan Diab, was a co-owner of a shell company in the British Virgin Islands, Daraj reported.

Diab's office said in a statement Monday that he helped establish the company in 2015, but it did not do any business and he resigned from the firm and

gave up his shares in 2019.

“Is the setting up of a company against the law?” the statement said. Diab’s government resigned days after a massive Aug. 4, 2020, blast in Beirut that killed and injured hundreds and destroyed the city’s port and nearby neighborhoods. Diab was charged with intentional killings and negligence in the case. He denies any wrongdoing but has refused to be questioned by the judge leading the investigation.



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Lebanon’s telecom, internet sector could collapse within days
Lebanon’s former PM Diab says he gave up shares in company mentioned in ‘Pandora Papers’