

Priority Objective: Building Trust Between the New Parliament and Citizens

Since 2005, the United Nations in Lebanon has been providing electoral assistance to the government. In 2012, the recent UNDP Lebanese Elections Assistance Project has focused its efforts towards the successful organization of free and fair parliamentary elections.

After five years of delay and three extensions of the mandate of the parliament, parliamentary elections were finally organized on May 6th, 2018. These elections were conducted under a new electoral law, which among other changes, included 15 electoral districts, and a proportional representation system with a preferential vote.

In terms of political participation, the 2018 parliamentary elections were characterized by a relatively low voter turnout of 49.7 percent nationally with «Beirut 1» registering the lowest (33.19 percent) and «Mount Lebanon 1» the highest turnout (67.09 percent). With an estimated number of more than a million voters who are not residing in the country, the turnout remained lower than in previous elections (52 percent in 2009).

For the first time, 82,970 Lebanese voters residing abroad, have casted their votes. Whilst out of country voting has remained modest, this new measure will pave the way for greater participation of registered voters living abroad.

These elections introduced important reforms, including the use of preprinted ballot, to ensure secrecy of voting, as well as out of country voting.

For the past six years, with the support of the European Union and more recently USAID, UNDP Electoral Assistance Project has been providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities on the organization of parliamentary elections. It has also supported the Supervisory Commission on Elections on the monitoring of media and campaign financing, as well as the Constitutional Council and the Shura Council on elections disputes.

The project also included the training of thousands of polling officials, the automation of candidates and a list of registration systems, the implementation of an automated result management system, the voters' education campaigns as well as the technical support to women's participation and representation.

Despite an increased level of electoral competitiveness with the total number of candidates jumping to 976, including 113 women candidates, women still, remain under represented. The increase of women candidates from 12 in 2009 to 86 (14.4%) in 2018, was not reflected in the number of seats won by women. The increase of women representation in parliament increased from 4 to 6 seats in 2018. This is a strong evidence that there is still a need to introduce special temporary measures, such as the quota, to increase women representation.

Another area that would require special attention in the

years to come, is the safeguard of the rights to vote of people with disabilities, through accessible of polling stations.

Most importantly, the years to come should be an opportunity for the newly elected parliament to build trust with citizens, to ensure increased voters' participation and consolidation of democratic elections. The UN will continue to support electoral reforms in Lebanon, which is strategically linked to the achievement of the sustainable development goal No. 16 «Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions» as well as to the sustainable development goal No. 5 on achieving Gender equality. Both goals are key to achieve the 2030 development agenda in Lebanon.

The 2018 parliamentary elections were a step forward, and UNDP with the support of its partners, will assess the lessons learned from the 2018 elections, to develop the appropriate and most relevant priority areas of intervention towards achieving electoral reforms, democratic stability and participatory governance in Lebanon.

Philippe Lazzarini
UN Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator
UNDP Resident Representative

Lebanon After the Parliamentary Elections

Following a prolonged political impasse, the Lebanese, both in Lebanon and abroad, cast their votes in May 2018 under a new electoral law. By exercising their right to vote, they voiced their preferences by choosing their representatives. During the electoral campaign, the candidates highlighted important issues in Lebanon, from corruption to bad governance, transportation, pollution and power outages. As noted by Rita Chemaly, one of the writers participating in this supplement, Lebanon remains far behind in the international ranking when it comes to the political participation and candidacy of women: 113 in personal candidacies and 86 candidacies on lists in 2018 compared to 12 candidacies in 2009 and 44 in 2013 when the elections did not take place.

In this supplement, we discuss the importance of further increasing women's participation in electoral and democratic processes, the influence of youth and first-time voters on peace-building and the

important role of monitoring in elections. We also shed light on the obstacles encountered by disabled people during the elections.

You will find in this issue inspiring stories of change, perseverance and resilience. The same resilience that Lebanon showed the world by holding parliamentary elections in the midst of regional turmoil, and considerable economic, social and political challenges.

We hope that the newly elected parliament and the incoming government will make a reality the Lebanon all its citizens' dream of: a country of peace, security, prosperity and a clean environment. The elections are widely considered as a chance to bring up change as there was never a more appropriate time to do so.

Dr. Michael Reuss
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Starting All Over Again

How many years, or even decades, is it going to take Lebanon to find the right path to good governance? Has the country reached a point of no return? Is it condemned to this faltering evolution, in fits and starts, where the rare good courses of progress alternate with bad ones?

There has been no acceptable solution to any one of the many critical problems facing Lebanon today: from the crisis of Syrian refugees to the mishaps that peppered last May's legislative elections and the eternal thorny issues of household waste, the degeneration of public service, the corruption endemic in the political class, the long-awaited structural reforms and the virtual absence of transparency in the exercise of power.

This would make you think that the country's education has to be done all over again to provide instruction in tolerance to counter displays of xenophobia, and even racism; instruction in democracy and respect for the law; instruction in the basic principles of ecology and respect for the environment; instruction in the spirit of public service, which consists of knowing the difference between «serving others» and «self-serving»; and finally instruction in the sacrosanct concept of accountability, so that elected officials, who instinctively believe that they are above the law, are held accountable.

If public opinion in Lebanon is unable to get its voice across, it is simply because elected officials consider themselves untouchable by the very fact that they are almost sure to be re-elected in the next elections, whatever the blunders they may commit during their term of office.

This is a political class that almost in its entirety bands together in brazen complicity and is regularly re-elected amid the generalized lethargy of a population that has nothing but tradition to invoke.

Gaby Nasr
Managing Editor - L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

A Safe and Stable Life: The «OffreJoie» Model

I was very delighted by the invitation I received from President Elias Hraoui Award Committee, which announces the 2018 award being granted to «OffreJoie» organization. OffreJoie has helped and still contributes to strengthening civil peace in Lebanon. Its activities have also expanded to Iraq where it organized meetings and camps in the regions where people returned to their villages, after being forced by the terrorism of ISIS, in its various types and shapes, out of their houses. «OffreJoie» has endeavored, since the Lebanese civil war, to bypass both geographical crossings between regions and psychological borders between citizens compelled to separate by de facto forces. I remember it once organized a camp in Bekaa for a thousand young boys and girls who came from all regions. The participants had broken into (an organized peaceful access) the then-named border strip area, given it was a Lebanese territory that should not be excluded from their visit to the regions. The participants spent the night at and with the town's families. I spent that night at a Shiite family in Bint Jbeil and received amazing hospitality.

«OffreJoie», the ever active NGO, focuses on reconciling people, first and foremost, particularly in the memory of the Lebanese War. This is what it did in Iraq and it might expand to other countries in a region, steeped in fraternal wars.

This brings me to the suffering of the Syrian refugees, the matter of their safe, voluntary, permanent or temporary return home and other terms that turn them into a commodity among nations and political accounts. To return, for them, is to restore their lands, homes and these rights, accompanied with other due human, social, political, religious and other rights. Then, all the previous statements become meaningless, for we have all experienced war and displacement and we know the value of regaining land and honor.

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