

National Report on Hunting

**Country:
Lebanon**

2005

**BUILDING CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINABLE HUNTING OF MIGRATORY BIRDS IN
MEDITERRANEAN THIRD COUNTRIES**

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**Country:
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ACRONYMS

AEWA	African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement
AFDC	Association for Forest Development and Conservation
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GOL	Government of Lebanon
IBA	Important Bird Area
IUCN	World Conservation Union
LEF	Lebanese Environment Forum
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOE	Ministry of Environment
MOI	Ministry of Interior
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PEC	Parliamentary Environment Committee
SHAA	Syndicate of retailers of Hunting Arms and Ammunition
SHP	Sustainable Hunting Project
SPNL	Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon
UNDP	United Nation's Development Programme

PREAMBLE

This report was compiled as first step to document issues related to hunting in Lebanon. Information was collected over a 4 months' period but was regularly upgraded as information was added and cross-checked over a longer period of time. The outline and content of the report were agreed upon at the PAOC meeting in Tunisia by all the participating countries in an effort to allow for cross-regional analysis and comparison. It should be noted that during this meeting the issue of access to, availability and accuracy of data had been raised.

During the collection of information for the preparation of the present report such difficulties have been encountered. The information available in this report has relied heavily on interviews with individuals involved with hunting: government officials, members of hunting organizations, members of environmental organizations and individual hunters; on the review of press releases and articles and on investigative missions to supermarkets, restaurants, shops... In addition to these interviews, main reports related to the environment were reviewed and some investigative reporting even took place. The team was not always welcome in supermarkets, taxidermist shops or even with individual hunters as hunting is still illegal in Lebanon and as such a sensitive issue to discuss.

The delivery of this report would not have been possible without the insights, contributions and guidance of certain key individuals. In particular, Mr. Assad Serhal, Director General of SPNL has extensively facilitated the establishment of contacts and identification of key individuals, and provided the team with the historic context of hunting in Lebanon. Ms. Lara Samaha, SHP focal point at the Ministry of Environment, has guided the team through the meanders of a complex legal system. Mr. Raymond Mrad, Head of the Syndicate of Traders of Hunting Arms and Ammunition, has provided extensive information on the number and current sales of ammunition in the country. Our thanks are extended to these and to the more than 40 individuals that have been interviewed for the sake of this report.

As a result of this report, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon will be updating some of the information and has selected some key indicators that will be monitored on a regular basis in order to document the changes over time of the hunting situation in the country. These include for instance:

- 1 Number of shooting clubs,
- 2 Number of nature reserves and protected sites,
- 3 Area and number of hunting reserves and estates
- 4 Number of reported complaints submitted to the Ministry of Environment and the hotline of Al Bia' wal tanmia (Environment and Development) magazine.
- 5 Numbers of registered hunters
- 6 Number of hunting-related organizations

- 7 Number of registered violations at the General Security
- 8 Number of municipalities/private land owners banning hunting on their territories
- 9 Evolution in bird sales in restaurants and supermarkets (numbers and norms)
- 10 Staff training at the customs
- 11 Staff available for law enforcement at the different ministries

1 - INTRODUCTION

Although several hunters refer to hunting as being a traditional practice in Lebanon and as “hunting being in their blood”, hunting as we know it today was only introduced in Lebanon in the 1950’s. At the time of Camille Chamoun’s presidency, the first hunting law was voted as the president himself had learnt hunting in the UK where he undertook his studies. Being a handsome and charismatic person, men looked up to him while women appreciated him. By associating to his leisure, Lebanese upper class men thought they could obtain some of that charisma. It is therefore only since the late 50’s that the practice of hunting with shotguns and dogs was introduced to Lebanon. Prior to that, the main hunting practice was through the use of lime sticks and trapping.

Since that time hunting has become an increasingly trendy hobby and has replaced other hunting practices in the country. The low cost of hunting gear and ammunition has supported this trend, as have the huge number of migrating birds on one hand and the lack of other activities in rural areas on the other. In 1994, a census of registered hunters in Lebanon indicated their number was of 14000 while in the past few years informal estimations of the number of hunters has been much higher – ranging from 60000 on behalf of the hunting organizations to 600000 on behalf of environmental organizations. This huge discrepancy in figures can be explained by several factors.

In 1995, the government of Lebanon negotiated a GEF UNDP project on protected areas with the technical backstopping of IUCN. One of the pre-conditions of this project was to instate a national hunting ban over a five year period to allow for proper bird population counts and monitoring and to develop a more recent law that would take into account Lebanon’s obligations under the CBD, which was ratified in 1994.

After a long struggle between environmentalists on one side and hunting organizations and lobbies on the other, a national hunting ban was instated in 1995 for a five-year period. This duration was supposed to serve for the upgrading of hunting legislation and management responsibilities. However, struggles at all levels of the sector – i.e. between hunting and environmental organizations, within hunting and environmental organizations and between different government organizations – completely paralyzed the process leading to 4 renewals of the ban. It was only in February 2004 that a law for

the management and organization of hunting was voted by the Lebanese Parliament.

The impact of the ban on hunting has been tremendous on bird population, the hunting sector as an economic sector, on the development of new hunting practices, on the availability of data as well as the development of corruption and abuse of power. In addition to that, a whole generation of hunters has evolved without receiving any training on hunting ethics, practices or bird identification. In short, had a strategic assessment of the hunting ban been undertaken, then it would most certainly have not recommended a total ban.

A press article by Marouf H. in "Al Safir" newspaper issued in 2001 entitled "Is the Council of Ministers expediting the opening of the hunting season prior to issuing a law" indicates that both migrant and resident bird populations have been reduced by 18%. One of the main issues that has led the conservation community in Lebanon to converge towards an agreement whereby hunting should be organized and allowed are the slaughters that were taking place all over the country in an indiscriminate manner. Instead of coupling the hunting ban with systematic bird monitoring protocols and annual reviews of bird population dynamics, nothing in that regard was done officially. Some bird censuses were being implemented by independent researchers, NGOs (such as the A Rocha waterbird census) and within the context of some protected areas. However, there was no central database where the information was collated and analysed to support the development of science based policies on hunting and bird conservation.

The hunting ban also triggered the development of new hunting practices. Interviews and meetings with individual hunters show that their attitude towards birds changed to become much more vindictive. The use of calling machines became very widespread, as has the use of other destructive and indiscriminate practices described below.

The ban on hunting was not accompanied by any measures related to the sales and production of hunting gear and ammunition, and as such sent out mixed messages to the SHAA. The retail stores were not advised to reduce their stocks and were still allowed to sell gear, ammunition and the like. At the end of the official ban in 2000, no clear guidance on the policy was made, a situation which left the whole sector in an unstable situation. The hunting ban was renewed on annual basis, immediately prior to the start of the hunting season - i.e. September. The retail stores had already replenished their stocks in the hope that hunting would be allowed. As a result of this situation they incurred significant economic losses and have ever since increased their lobbying activities to allow hunting. To this effect a demonstration was organized in July 1997, with the intent to abolish the ban on hunting.

During the hunting ban, several newspapers reported the lack of abundance by

hunters on the ban on hunting, which became an issue of general knowledge. The hunting ban triggered practices such as corruption and bribery as well as the use of political or power leverages. Hunters with connections in the upper spheres of power resorted to their networks to avoid being fined or arrested. Others bribed the law enforcement officers; as a comparison to their salaries (ranging from 200 to 500\$ per month) the value of the bribe sometimes represented the equivalent of a week's salary.

Finally, with the hunting ban having extended over 10 years, a whole generation of new hunters has evolved with no training, education or sensitization on conservation, safety or ethical issues. The result of that is an increasing number of injuries, poor behavior and respect of private property as well as totally indiscriminate shooting of birds.

The agglomeration of all the above mentioned issues led the conservation and hunting communities alike to join forces and lobby for the adoption of a new law on hunting. This framework law was issued in February 2005, after a national consultation meeting was held at the parliament, organized by the Association for Forest Development and Conservation, under the auspices of the Parliamentary Environment Commity (PEC).

At the time of writing this report, the ban on hunting was still operational, as the new framework law on hunting requires the preparation and issuance of a decree for the establishment of the HHC in addition to 18 technical decrees. However, since this law was issued, the media sent confused messages to hunters, and hunting has tremendously increased in the country.

Birds in Lebanon are associated with food, as they constitute a main culinary delicacy. They are broadly sold in restaurants and the ban on hunting in Lebanon was not accompanied either by a ban on the sales of birds. This has triggered the import of birds on one hand and sustained some hunters in their illicit practices as it constituted a source of income for them. According to several interviewees, Lebanon constitutes a major route for the illicit trade in birds between Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Malta and Cyprus. The lack of capacities, knowledge and political will as it relates to the control of smuggling as well as the huge financial benefits resulting from it makes this issue a sensitive one to talk about.

2. HUNTING AND HUNTING ACTIVITIES

It can be confidently stated that hunting occurs everywhere and targets possibly all the migrating species. Restrictions on hunting are only noticed with respect to some of the resident birds such as the Chaffinch, Yellow vented bulbul and Hoopoe. Hunters refer to the hunting season in terms of the target game: from August until September they mainly head to the Bekaa for the Emmoh and to the plain of Akkar for the quail and short-toed lark. September to January is the Weathear and Blackbird season, with

woodcocks also being a major target species.

Interviews with some hunters have shown that raptors (with no distinction of species), storks, cranes, and other soaring birds are also hunted. However, hunting does not only include the shooting of birds but also the trapping of song birds and to a lesser extent the trapping of raptors for sales to the gulf countries.

Based on the interviews with individual hunters and on the results of an opinion poll undertaken in the framework of the SHP, it appears that hunting is practiced for many reasons the most important of which is the lack of other leisure and activities. Hunting is also practiced as a source of income given that birds are considered a delicacy in the country; other reasons include a way to relieve pressure; a hobby, sport and way to be in nature; and male-bonding activity allowing to escape women.

2.1 Names and coordinates of main hunting localities in country

The migration routes have been studied as part of the IBA assessment being undertaken by SPNL and A Rocha with support of the MAVA foundation. The completion of the IBA assessment in 2007 will provide additional information on migration routes, key sites where migrating birds reside and information on threats. To date, 41 sites have been identified as potential IBAs, a large number of which coincides with famous hunting localities.

The main migration flyways lie parallel to the Mediterranean Sea. The first flyway consists of the coastal area North-South – this is predominantly used by shorebirds, sea birds (shot for practice) and waders. This flyway is mainly used by raptors during the fall migration. The second flyway consists of the Bekaa valley, which is part of the Great Rift Valley / flyway. This is the main migration path in Lebanon, with the widest array of species, including soaring birds, songbirds, and water birds. The third flyway consists of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range and is mainly used by soaring birds during the spring migration. This area has not yet been studied in detail, only specific sites have been subject to preliminary research.

In addition to these three major routes, there are also several micro-flyways, one of which is the Beirut valley that has been assessed during this period and which is known as a main hunting spot, especially due to its proximity to Beirut. The Bhamdoun Markwas - literally shooting range - is reputed nation wide and the land there is covered with cartridges all over.

The above flyways have not yet been extensively studied, with information being mainly available for the Bekaa and coastal flyways. While spring and autumn migrations are the most spectacular; wintering water birds also occur and occasionally reside in Lebanon.

Migration across the Mediterranean constitutes an important component, as Lebanon is endowed with a long coastal area where these birds arrive. They then use the numerous valleys that link the coastal area to the Bekaa through the Mount Lebanon Range.

The overall number of migrating birds through Lebanon has been estimated to 2 million birds (inclusive of the two migration periods). However this is a rough estimate. Correlations to figures from Turkey and Israel could provide more specific information.

The past 10 years of hunting ban have actually had a negative effect on the monitoring of hunting in the country; the bird uptakes, hunting grounds and practices have become entirely underground therefore creating a lack of consistent data and information on this aspect. The information provided below is the result of personal observations and information collected at different occasions when meeting with hunters.

The jurd of Akkar/Hermel/Sir el Dennyeh is one of the main localities targeted by hunters in the country. This is not only related to the fact that migratory birds occur in this area, but also because it is a secluded area with difficult access which makes law enforcement (hunting is supposed to be banned in Lebanon) complicated.

The whole Bekaa valley – with mainly the Qaa area, the Anjar marshes, the vicinity of the Ammik marshes and the surroundings of the Qaraoun Lake – are the most popular areas for hunting. These areas host a wide array of bird species, including water birds whose hunting is appreciated. The whole valley is so popular for hunting that the Chtaura area - immediately after the mountain pass allowing access from Beirut, has developed thanks to the existence of huntin shops. One can count more than 20 large shops in a perimeter of less than 50m.

The different valleys lying perpendicular to the Bekaa Valley for birds migrating across the Mediterranean also constitute hunting sites. These locations area easily accessible and are targeted by commercial hunters who set their calling machines early in the morning and then sell their catch to either restaurants or individuals. The main birds that are targeted in these areas are the Black cap, thrushes, warblers and other passerines demanded for consumption.

Finally the south of Lebanon is becoming an increasingly targeted area by hunters, namely the Qada of Marjayoun, Hasbaya, and Bint Jbeil. The main reason for that is that, having been under Israeli occupation until 2000, the area remained pristine and still hosts a larg number of birds. One of Lebanon's most important bottleneck area - Ebel es Saqi - is located in this region and prior to SPNL's intervention there, soaring and migrating birds in general were targeted and shot by hunters during their passage.

Lately a new trend for hunting passerines in residential areas along the coast

has emerged and is spreading in the country. This hunting occurs mainly at night and is described in detail in the corresponding section.

Generally, hunting occurs everywhere in Lebanon, and the recently voted law strives to reduce this hunting – especially when occurring in the vicinity of residential areas. In addition to that, hunting of migratory birds occurs in an indiscriminate manner, with hunters often leaving their preys in the field. During the consultations and discussions – while preparing the report – some hunters have indicated their interest in hunting “rare” birds such as the golden oriole, for the sake of “collection”.

2.2 Main migratory species hunted

Blackcaps, red backed shrikes, spotted fly catchers, olive tree warblers (also called fig birds - 3asfour al tyan) larks all species included, wheatears, quail, thrushes (also trapped) including blackbirds and fieldfares, lapwings, woodcock, nightjar, linnets, cream coloured cursor, partridge, doves, chaffinch, bunting, warblers, house sparrows, swallows and swifts. In addition to that, hunting also affects soaring birds: eagles, storks, cranes. Trapping: Goldfinch, siskin, linnets. Indiscriminate hunting also targets special birds, and any migratory birds.

It should be noted that a general remark from hunters is that they do not shoot resident birds, but don't mind shooting at migratory ones. These are actually their main targets. Their explanation for that lies in the fact that (1) they believe migratory birds have a higher reproduction rate than resident birds and that they occur in huge numbers; (2) there is no ecological benefit from migratory birds; (3) they feel no connection with migratory birds and (4) they consider that the situation is much worse in Turkey and that the uptake in Lebanon is insignificant compared to the hunting occurring in Turkey. So they see no reason in restricting their hunting.

2.3 Numbers and localities of migratory bird species hunted

Reports on the shooting of migrating birds are almost inexistent, figures and localities even less so. At the time when the report was prepared, hunting was still a banned activity and information impossible to obtain since providing such information would be admitting to contravening the law. However, during the course of this investigation, the compilers have modified their approach in order to obtain more information. The information that could be collected includes the following:

Storks, cranes and pelicans - cumulative number of reported shot birds in 4 months 1780 in the following localities: Amioun, Koura, Laqlouq, Bzoummar, Baabat, Baabda, Bhamdoun, Baadaran, Tyre, Chkif.

Raptors - cumulative number of reported shot, injured or trapped birds in 4

months 3640 in the following localities: Jur el Hermel, Akkar, Qammouaa, Laqlouq, Chir el Bouachik, Ghazir, Harissa, Mazraait Kfarzebian, Sannine, Kfarzabad, Chartoun, Aaley, Bhamdoun, Bchamoun, Maghdouche, Rachaya el Fokhar.

Songbirds - cumulative number of reported trapped birds in 4 months > 5000 in the following localities: Deir el Ahmar, Ainata, Akkar, Chekka, Koura, Zgharta, Amchit, Jbeil, Safra, Ghazir, Nahr Beirut...

Blackcaps and other warblers - cumulative number of reported shot, eaten, sold birds during the reporting period > than 20000 all over Lebanon and with the use of calling machines.

2.4 Details of hunting methods used

Hunting techniques surveyed in Lebanon include the following practices, some of which may be undertaken jointly. Specific surveys on the adopted techniques per number of hunter have not been undertaken, and these figures are not available yet. This results mainly from the fact that hunting is not organized, there are no permitting systems, and hunting is widespread nationally and throughout the year in addition to being illegal.

Shooting is by far the most common hunting technique. The shotguns used range from 100 \$ Chinese or Russian made guns to very expensive Beretta or Brownings (sometimes over 5000\$). Local production of guns is still occurring – powder guns – in one very well known locality (Wadi Chahrour), although the extent and number of produced guns has been decreasing. Reports also show that semi-automatic guns (5 shots) as well as automatic guns are still being used in the country.

Trapping comes next in terms of hunting practice. It mainly targets song birds and thrushes that are later sold on the market.

Bird trappers usually use *mist nets* (banned by the new law) when intended for consumption. The results of the opinion poll show that young women in the Akkar region (north of Lebanon and one of the poorest areas) trap birds for consumption. These are also placed next to the sea to catch quail and thrush.

Cages are used to trap song birds and partridges during the breeding season. They are lain out on the ground and used with an attracting bird, calling machine, or baits.

Limesticks are extensively used to trap birds – song birds and other passerines. Although they are forbidden by law, these are sold openly on the Sunday market. They are mostly used in coastal areas.

Calling machines are used by both shooters and trappers in order to attract

birds. Their use is widespread in the country and they are extensively sold in hunting shops. The control of such machines might prove quite difficult should hunting regulations be adopted (according to the new law their use is banned). Calling machines consist of a small CD or tape player associated with speakers and bird calls downloaded from the internet.

Projectors are used on the roofs of houses in order to attract birds at night – thrushes, and other passerines. Hunters usually paint a tree on a white wall and flash the projector on it. Birds are lured and smash into the wall. Another option includes the erection of a barren tree on the roof top, once again flashed with a strong light and often associated with a calling machine.

Cartridges sold in Lebanon are mainly lead shots and are locally and internationally produced. In the past few years hunters have devised new sorts of cartridges – a straw is cut and attached to a cabsoune – creating a small size cartridge that does not make a strong sound when shot. This has been mainly devised by hunters who want to avoid being caught.

Estimated quantities of lead shot entering environment in country (based on number of cartridges sold annually)

The only information available is the result of consultations with the president of the SHAA. It is estimated that around 25 million cartridges are sold per year; however, these are sold for clay pigeon shooting, hunting, and to hunters that travel.

2.5 Types and numbers of hunters e.g. 'sport' shooters, falcon trappers, subsistence hunters

No figures available

2.6 Number of registered and unregistered hunters in country

From 1974 until 1982, the National Hunting Council, an organization independent from the government, was responsible for all issues regarding hunting including issuing permits. By the end of the eighties, they had already registered 14000 hunters. At the survey undertaken in 1994, the figure related to the number of registered hunters remained the same. Today and after 10 years of hunting ban (during which permits were not delivered) there is no clear idea on the number of hunters. According to the hunting organizations, there is a maximum of 60000 hunters in the country. However, other estimates based on the extent of hunting activities indicate that the number of hunters is rather around 300000-400000. Although this might look like a large number, this proportion (50%) was correlated by the results of the hunting opinion poll that has targeted to date 1552 people in all the different areas of Lebanon.

In order to obtain a hunting permit one has to first get a license for carrying guns from the Ministry of Interior (aldakhiliyya). The hunting permit could then be requested from the ka'im makam of the region; however according

to the new hunting law all permits should be processed from the HCH. This Council is currently ineffective therefore no hunting permits can be issued at this time. The permit was priced at 50,000 LL annually, however this figure may change with the new permitting system that should be set in place.

2.7 Names and addresses of national and local hunting groups and details of their membership

During the research undertaken for the sake of this report, it was found that hunting organizations have a membership that is mainly based in Beirut. Only the SHAA has a nation wide representation, as it encompasses most of the retail stores scattered all over Lebanon. For other hunting organizations, it appears that their main membership is made up of influential politicians and businessmen interested in lifting the ban on hunting.

Local hunting groups do not really exist in Lebanon, mostly because (1) hunting is banned and (2) hunting-related activities are usually embedded within the broader work of a local cooperative or association. During the consultation process and later at meetings within Lebanon's main shooting grounds, hunters have expressed their interest in setting up such clubs, NGOs or associations that would be locally responsible for the promotion of sustainable hunting behavior, training and education of new hunters as well as voluntary monitoring of hunting activities.

The main organizations involved in hunting are the following:

The National Hunting Council:

The primary aim of the council was to breed and release partridges into nature after it was clear that the numbers of these birds was decreasing drastically due to uncontrolled hunting. The council's interventions were divided into two parts:

- 1 the introduction of new bird species and animals such as the pheasant, other types of partridges and the bobwhite quail which does not migrate.
- 2 the development of hunting reserves on governmental land

It was established on July 6 1974 by law 8327. The primary source of funding was the collected fees of the hunting permits. They later received a yearly amount of 25 million LL from the MoE and 90 million LL from the MoA. The MoE stopped funding the council because it conditioned its funding to the sole breeding of resident/native birds but the MoA still is.

The National Hunting Council owns farms in the Chouf area and in the North. They raise partridges, pheasants and the American quail, also known as the Bobwhite. Other types include the Grey partridge, RedLeg partridge, Venere pheasant, Ringneck pheasant which are found all over Europe.

Around 10000-15000 partridges are released in locations all over Lebanon:

Hermel, Baalbeck, Zahle, Saoufar, Aley, Zghorta, Ehden, Amioun, Douma, Rayfoun, Baskinta, Beiteldine, Rachaya elwadi, Jezzine, Marjeyoun, and Hasbaya. The reason why they breed these types of birds and not the Black caps and warblers is that the chicks of the partridge, pheasant, and quail eat by themselves as soon as they hatch while the Blackcap and warbler chicks depends on its mother to feed it.

The National Hunting Council consists of reputed politicians and businessmen - most of which are reputed hunters as well:

Mr Sami ElKhatib- President

Dr Cesar Nasr- Vice President

And the following members:

Khalil Hrawi

Nabil de Freije

Paul Ariss

Remond Yazbeck

Karim Alameddine

Charles Aasayli

Waleed Salam

Fouad Nassif

Nazih Abi Semaan

Malek Al Sayyed

Ziad Hreish

Pierre Jalkh

It should be noted that the strategic choices of the council in terms of bred species are largely influenced by its board and the hunting interest of the species.

“Chasse guardée”:

Fouad Nassif, a member of the National Hunting Council, owns two private hunting estates in the Bekaa area. Birds of different kinds are bred and released into a fenced area of approximately 1 million m²; the location also hosts gazelles, rabbits, and hunting dogs. To participate in such hunting the person needs either to be a member or can pay an entrance fee. The hunter also has to pay an amount of money for each shot bird e.g. up to 15000 LL for a quail. This type of hunting is not common in Lebanon because it is expensive.

The Lebanese Federation for Shooting and Hunting:

The Federation works at enhancing the sports of shooting which is considered as an Olympic discipline. The Federation is related to the German Federation of shooting and it has 7 shooting clubs in Lebanon. The average annual membership is around 67US\$ or if someone is not a member then an amount of 6-10US\$/6 plates). It also works with the National Hunting Council and the MoE at improving the hunting law and developing the regulations (decisions and decrees) related to the hunting law.

The Federation would like to be responsible for offering the exams for the hunting permit once the decrees and decisions of the new law are in place. It is willing to assist in the development of around 11 centers in Lebanon whereby both theoretical and practical examination takes place.

The Federation holds annual shooting competitions for different categories, including handicapped shooters. Most shooters are hunters as well and a very small proportion (no more than 5%) practice shooting alone. The clubs are usually equipped with information on safety issues, bird and game species as well as conservation, habitat and legal information. The philosophy of the Federation is that hunters should be knowledgeable about birds and hunting, distinguish in the field between game and protected species and know all the main safety measures regarding the carrying and handling of hunting rifles. The Federation recognizes the importance of applying the hunting law and most importantly of implementing the rules and regulations related to it in order to avoid the state of anarchy and chaos that hunting in Lebanon is currently witnessing.