



Virtual Panel Discussion

# Crisis in Lebanon



**Event Report**  
World Refugee & Migration Council

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### World Refugee & Migration Council

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## ▶ Virtual Panel Discussion: Crisis in Lebanon

On August 4, 2020 a large amount of ammonium nitrate exploded in the port of Beirut, Lebanon. The blast injured more than 6,500 individuals and killed upwards of 200 people – 34 of whom were refugees. The explosion also caused massive, wide scale infrastructure damage to a country already dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic on top of ongoing economic and political crises. On September 9, 2020, the **World Refugee and Migration Council** hosted a [virtual panel discussion](#) addressing the impact of the multiple crises in Lebanon on refugees, migrants, and forcibly displaced people in the country.

The panel discussion was moderated by **Susan Harada**, Associate Professor at Carleton University and former CBC reporter. Our panelists were: **Lloyd Axworthy**, Chair, World Refugee & Migration Council; **Elizabeth Ferris**, Vice President of Research, World Refugee & Migration Council; **Lama Mourad**, Assistant Professor, Carleton University; **Maha Shuayb**, Director, Centre for Lebanese Studies; **Maha Yahya**, Director, Carnegie Middle East Center; and **Marwan Muasher**, Vice President for Studies at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and World Refugee & Migration Council member.



Seaport of Beirut on August 8, 2020; Image credit: European Union (photographer: Bernard Khalil)

## ► Responsibility Sharing and Governance

The webinar highlighted the Council's work on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and the displaced in general as well as in the region itself. Importantly, the discussion addressed the systemic issues that have led to hardships for refugees, the forcibly displaced and migrant workers that the August 4 blast and COVID-19 have simply compounded. Finally, much of the discussion revolved around the Council's thematic priority areas of responsibility sharing and governance, and how to best address these issues in Lebanon.

Both responsibility sharing and governance are crucial for refugees and migrants to receive the aid and support they need to deal with the situation they find themselves in Lebanon. However, due to widespread political corruption and nepotism, panel participants noted that international donors must find a way to creatively interact with local actors and parts of civil society that are free of corrupt practices in order to ensure any assistance ends up in the hands of who it is supposed to. To this end, participants discussed the

appetite of the international community to bypass state institutions through an international support fund that uses trusted civil society groups such as professional organisations of lawyers or engineers and even the judiciary to aid in the identification, allocation and distribution of international financial assistance.

The Council seeks to transform how we deal with the current refugee system and as such panelists stressed the need for the international community to engage with refugees using a “bottom-up” approach. Here, community involvement takes centre stage as it has the ability to bypass systemic problems including embezzlement by the state and discrimination in the allocation of aid. Panelists noted that the international organisations – in particular the United Nations – should be working here, but instead are largely silent. However, panelists expressed the need for caution when working with local actors as civil society is fundamentally political, made up by different groups with competing interests. Moreover,

local groups have long been undermined and ignored with other aid efforts, and they cannot be expected to get to scale with helping out locally, which will ultimately lead to failure. Here, the international community needs to work with groups and monitor their activities while providing support to their efforts to assist in aid efforts.



Refugee camp in Sabra, Beirut; Image credit: Hans van Reenen



## ► Recommendations

*The webinar produced several recommendations and policy prescriptions essential to getting Lebanon back on track to adequately address the refugee and migrant situations within its borders.*

The last few years have seen a paradigm shift from a humanitarian discourse to a development discourse, but when plans are developed (such as those drawn up by the United Nations) for Lebanon they are still couched within a humanitarian frame. Now is the time to **categorically shift to a developmental discourse** that encompasses both humanitarian and developmental issues, promoting accountability and transparency.

There is a need for an **international emergency fund** that includes local actors that work with the international community on both the identification of needs in Lebanon and oversight in the distribution of financial aid. It is crucial for the international

community to work with local organisations already in the area but to urge and coax reform from what may be considered discriminatory or bad practices, such as discriminatory aid allocation. In the wake of the Beirut port blast, it is particularly important that refugees and migrants in Lebanon have support in the same way as Lebanese nationals and aid is delivered to both groups without bias.

A **reformed judiciary** can assist in the oversight of aid procurement. To this end, there is a current law in the Lebanese parliament that, if passed, will provide a tremendous tool to fight the corruption and leakage that is prevalent in Lebanon today. Another way to help put a stop to the leakage in Lebanon is for the central bank to conduct a **forensic review** to discern where money has been diverted from its original purpose of supporting refugees and migrants.

The international community has a responsibility to engage in an **equitable approach to burden sharing**. The community needs to work to find an equitable political solution to help those affected by the conflict in Syria. To this end a **legal status for refugees** that goes beyond a humanitarian lens is crucial as the current system places current refugees at risk with unmonitored deportations.

New **mechanisms for resettlement** are needed so that those who do wish to go back are able to do so in a safe and dignified way and are not at risk of violence or traumatising, and those who stay must be able to live a dignified life. In a similar vein, the current kafala (or sponsorship) system in Lebanon must be reformed. The legal contracts and current system that effectively holds migrant workers in slavery should be abolished. The Council currently has a project on corporate social responsibility for refugee and migrant workers.

## ▶ Panelists



**Susan Harada**, Moderator  
[@SHarada3](#)

Susan Harada is an Associate Professor of Journalism with Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication, where she served for six years as the head of the Journalism program, first as Associate Director of the School and then as Interim Director. She is currently the Chair of J-Schools Canada / Écoles-J Canada, the national organization that brings together post-secondary journalism programs in Canada. She joined the School in 2003 after a long journalism career spent mainly with the CBC as a current affairs reporter, documentary journalist, Parliamentary correspondent, news anchor and host. She has written for *The Walrus* and *Policy Options*, contributed regularly to the Canadian Federal Election series, and produced chapters on a number of subjects, including the Supreme Court of Canada and its relationship with the media.



**Lloyd Axworthy**, Chair, World Refugee & Migration Council  
[@LloydAxworthy](#)

The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy is the chair of the World Refugee & Migration Council and one of Canada's leading voices on global migration and refugee protection. After a 27-year political career, where he served as Canada's minister of Foreign Affairs and minister of Employment and Immigration, among other postings, Mr. Axworthy has continued to work extensively on human security, refugee protection and human rights in Canada and abroad. He was presented with the Pearson Peace Medal by the Governor General of Canada in May 2017. In his term as president and vice-chancellor of the University of Winnipeg, Mr. Axworthy initiated innovative programs for migrant and aboriginal youth communities, and has also done a great deal of work on refugee reform as a Richard von Weizsäcker fellow at Germany's Robert Bosch Academy.



**Elizabeth Ferris**, Vice President of Research, World Refugee & Migration Council

Michael Camilleri is Director of the Peter D. Bell Rule of Law Program at the Inter-American Dialogue. An international lawyer and former diplomat, he served in the Obama administration from 2012 to 2017 as the Western Hemisphere adviser on the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff and as Director for Andean Affairs at the National Security Council. Prior to joining the U.S. government, Michael was a human rights specialist at the Organization of American States and a senior staff attorney at the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL). He also worked with a coalition of civil society organizations in Guatemala and at a large international law firm.

## ▶ Panelists (continued)



**Lama Mourad**, Assistant Professor, Carleton University  
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Lama Mourad is an Assistant Professor at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University. Her research interests are focused on the intersection of forced migration, local governance, and the politics of borders, with a regional focus on the Middle East. Professor Mourad previously held fellowships at Perry World House, University of Pennsylvania, and with the Middle East Initiative at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Her research has been supported by a number of institutions and agencies, including the Harvard Kennedy School's Middle East Initiative, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Her work has been published in both academic and public outlets, including the Journal of Refugee Studies, Middle East Law and Governance, Forced Migration Studies, the European Journal of International Relations as well as The Atlantic, Lawfare, The Washington Post's Monkey Cage, and The Toronto Star.



**Maha Shuayb**, Director, Centre for Lebanese Studies  
[@MahaShuayb](#)

Maha Shuayb is the director of the Centre for Lebanese Studies since 2012. Prior to that she was a Senior Fellow at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. Maha has a PhD in education from the University of Cambridge. Maha also teaches part-time at the Lebanese American University. She was a visiting scholar at various universities including University of Cambridge and the American University of Beirut. Maha's research focuses on the sociology and politics of education particularly equity and equality in education and the implications of the politicization of education particularly on marginalized groups.

## ▶ Panelists (continued)



**Maha Yahya**, Director, Carnegie Middle East Center  
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Maha Yahya is director of the Carnegie Middle East Center, where her work focuses broadly on political violence and identity politics, pluralism, development and social justice after the Arab uprisings, the challenges of citizenship, and the political and socio-economic implications of the migration/refugee crisis. Prior to joining Carnegie, Yahya led work on Participatory Development and Social Justice at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA). She was previously regional adviser on social and urban policies at UN-ESCWA and spearheaded strategic and inter-sectoral initiatives and policies in the Office of the Executive Secretary which addressed the challenges of democratic transitions in the Arab world. Yahya has also worked with the United Nations Development Program in Lebanon, where she was the director and principal author of The National Human Development Report 2008–2009: Toward a Citizen's State. She was also the founder and editor of the MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies.



**Marwan Muasher**, Vice President for Studies at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and World Refugee and Migration Council member  
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Marwan Muasher is vice president for studies at Carnegie, where he oversees research in Washington and Beirut on the Middle East. Muasher served as foreign minister (2002–2004) and deputy prime minister (2004–2005) of Jordan, and his career has spanned the areas of diplomacy, development, civil society, and communications. Muasher began his career as a journalist for the Jordan Times. He then served at the Ministry of Planning, at the prime minister's office as press adviser, and as director of the Jordan Information Bureau in Washington. In 1995, Muasher opened Jordan's first embassy in Israel, and in 1996 he became minister of information and the government spokesperson. From 1997 to 2002, he served in Washington again as ambassador, negotiating the first free-trade agreement between the United States and an Arab nation. He then returned to Jordan to serve as foreign minister, where he played a central role in developing the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East roadmap.





## World Refugee & Migration Council

Chaired by former Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, the World Refugee & Migration Council offers bold thinking on how the international community can respond to refugees through cooperation & responsibility sharing.

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