

Lebanese Women Speak - Bearing Witness Under Israeli Bombardment



Introduction

Femena stands in solidarity with Lebanese women, particularly those in southern Lebanon, Beirut's southern suburbs, and other affected areas, who are enduring large-scale Israeli bombardment, displacement, and profound insecurity following the escalation of hostilities that began on 2 March 2026.

Since early March, Israel has been waging an intense campaign against Lebanon through the air and on the ground after the breakout of conflicts at the border area. The extent and nature of these attacks have made this one of the most violent periods in Lebanon in recent times.

Despite international appeals for cessation of attacks, a ceasefire is not yet in place. Although a tentative agreement had been reached in mid-April, 2026, it is still very unstable due to ongoing military action and roadblocks.

By April 2026, the human toll has risen sharply. According to the United Nations, Lebanese authorities, and humanitarian organizations, **over 2,000 people have been killed** since the start of the [bombardment](#), including **at least 170 children**, with thousands more injured. The scale of displacement has been [unprecedented](#): **more than one million people have been forcibly displaced**, with some estimates reaching **around 1.2 million**, including hundreds of thousands of [children](#). This represents a significant proportion of Lebanon's population and reflects the widespread and indiscriminate impact of the violence.

Civilians' [infrastructure](#) has been severely damaged with at least 37,000 houses being demolished, and destruction in education institutions, health care facilities, farmlands, and other important infrastructure. The escalation has rendered some areas in southern Lebanon and beyond uninhabitable owing to the fact that they have either been continuously targeted or evacuated due to constant bombardments and resulting threats to civilian safety.

The crisis faced by Lebanon has been made worse owing to the presence of refugee populations in Lebanon. They are facing additional problems as they have been displaced once again. Their lives are also under increased threat due to the current crisis, especially since they remain marginalized within protection systems and are located in highly vulnerable regions.

The impact on women is severe and deeply structural. Women are disproportionately affected as primary caregivers and heads of households in crisis conditions. They are often responsible for evacuating children, caring for elderly relatives, and sustaining family life under bombardment. Many have been forced to flee with little more than what they can carry, often in the middle of the night and under immediate threat.

The effects of displacement have increased vulnerability for women and young girls. They find themselves in cramped, unsanitary environments without access to medical care or security. These women are not only dealing with their own fears but those of their children, who have been displaced numerous times and witnessed airstrikes. Elderly women feel isolated, especially if they are without their extended families. Women who have lost their homes or husbands bear an added emotional and financial burden, yet remain strong for their families and communities.

At the same time, women, including activists, community leaders, and women human rights defenders, are at the forefront of response efforts. They document violations, support displaced families, and sustain collective resilience under extreme conditions. Yet their voices remain largely absent from international narratives and policy discussions.

In this dispatch, Femena centers the testimonies of Lebanese women and women human rights defenders living through this escalation. These accounts are raw, direct, and grounded in lived experience. The voices presented here represent only a fraction of those affected; their experiences echo across Lebanon. They speak of fear, loss, displacement, and survival, but also of dignity, memory, and the enduring struggle to remain.



Zeinab, 29, and her mother Katia Kiyal, 60:

“I am 29 years old, and my mother is 60. We live alone together in the house.

At 4 a.m., my brother called—he’s been abroad for a year—and told us: ‘Get up, leave, there’s a threat to the village.’

We got up quickly. We were still in our pajamas, and we didn’t even have a car to leave. I called my sister, and we were in a state of fear and confusion—we didn’t know what to do. After a while, our friends from another village called us. When they heard about the threat, they insisted we come to them.

We left just as we were, in our pajamas, and stayed sitting in their living room for two days. Then we moved to a shelter. When the shelling hit the village, we went back to our home.

For days afterward, we couldn’t sleep comfortably. We would wake up at night, afraid to fall asleep and no one would warn us if something happened.”

Samira Zreik, 70:

“I woke up to the sound of gunfire. I went outside, and people were fleeing in their cars. No one stopped, no one explained what was happening.

I got scared and lost. I ran to my sisters’ house, but there was no one. The neighbors were also gone. The streets were almost empty, and there was something heavy in the air that can’t be described.

I stopped the first person I saw and asked him. He told me, ‘The village has been warned, they’re going to bomb it,’ and he kept walking.

I started knocking on doors I knew, one after the other, but there was no answer. In those moments, I felt a great weakness and a harsh loneliness.

Until someone who knew my sisters saw me, called me over, and was kind to me. He let me stay with them until daylight.

But by the noon call to prayer, I decided to go back home. I couldn’t stay away.

I went to pray...

And I don’t remember anything after that except the sound of a very powerful strike.

The world shook, and everything changed in a moment.

I remained...

But the building across from my house was bombed, and my lifelong friend, Loris, was killed.

Since then, I've had a feeling that never leaves me: whatever happens to my people, happens to me."

Amna, 40:

"Terrifying sounds... panic.

Twenty years of memories, I reduced them into a 'small bag.'

Before leaving, I touched the walls as if saying goodbye to a loved one... and we left under bombardment.

After two days, the madness intensified.

The sky filled with aircraft, and there was endless shelling.

My heart tightened; I felt that my home was not okay.

The phone rang: 'Your house is gone.'

A burning tear fell, like blood. I remembered my deceased son's belongings... my trust, burned with the stones.

I returned the next day... the scene was terrifying.

My house had become scattered ash on the road, and blackness filled the place.

I left, tears covering my face, and the village behind me was empty except for sorrow.

I left my life's memories there...

And I came to believe: homes are us... and when a home falls, a part of the soul falls with it."

Rawan, mother:

"My name is Rawan. I want to talk about the first day. We were sitting at home, and suddenly the war started.

Of course, they struck around us in several places, so we had to leave the house. We stayed in what we thought was a safe place.

We slept on the road, and my children slept next to me. My husband too. When daylight came, we felt the situation had become a bit better in our area, so we went back.

After a few days, a strike hit very close to the house. My children were playing outside.

Suddenly, I found them next to me, screaming and covering their heads.

I told them, 'Don't be afraid, don't be afraid, maybe it's just a wall.' But it wasn't—it was a strike very close by, and very strong.

There was smoke, dust, everything. It was very frightening. The sound was extremely loud.

For two days, I had a headache, pressure in my head. The children were deeply affected.

My children weren't afraid before. Even I wasn't afraid. But now we are afraid.

Since the warplanes started coming, we've become more afraid—that maybe, like that time, a strike will happen close to us again.

That's our situation."



Conclusion and Demands:

The testimonies in this dispatch reveal not only the scale of devastation across Lebanon, but the deeply personal toll of war on women's lives, marked by fear, displacement, loss, and resilience. These lived realities underscore the urgent need to recognize women not just as victims, but as central actors navigating survival under worsening conditions.

Yet their voices remain largely excluded from international responses and decision-making. This absence risks deepening harm and overlooking critical pathways to justice and recovery.

Femena affirms that protecting women's rights, dignity, and agency must be central to any response. Bearing witness must be matched with accountability, inclusion, and urgent action.

Femena stands in solidarity with their struggle and joins them in demanding the following urgent actions:

- Ensure an immediate and sustained ceasefire to halt ongoing violence and prevent further civilian harm.
- Uphold international humanitarian law, with particular attention to the protection of civilians, including women, children, the elderly, and displaced populations.
- Guarantee safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all affected areas, ensuring that essential aid, including medical care, shelter, food, and sanitation, reaches those in need.
- Prioritize gender-responsive humanitarian interventions, addressing the specific needs of women and girls, including protection from gender-based violence and access to reproductive healthcare.
- Recognize and include Lebanese women, particularly women human rights defenders and local leaders, in all levels of decision-making, peacebuilding, and recovery efforts.
- Provide targeted support for displaced populations, including refugees and marginalized communities who face compounded vulnerabilities.
- Commit to accountability mechanisms that investigate and address violations of international law, ensuring justice for victims and survivors.