

Dispatch II

May, 2026



“Fear Has Become Part of Daily Life” - Lebanese Women and the Psychological Toll of War



Introduction

More than two months into the ongoing Israeli attacks on Lebanon, women across affected areas describe a life shaped by constant fear, repeated displacement, exhaustion, and uncertainty. What began as emergency survival under [bombardment](#) has evolved into a prolonged humanitarian and psychological crisis affecting nearly every aspect of daily life.

Across southern Lebanon, Beirut's southern suburbs, the Bekaa, and other affected regions, civilians continue to endure Israeli airstrikes, shelling, and constant drone surveillance under increasingly unstable and dangerous conditions. Although international actors have repeatedly called for de-escalation, and a tentative ceasefire framework was announced in April 2026, military operations and attacks continue, leaving many communities trapped between repeated displacement, destruction, and the ongoing fear of renewed violence.

As of May 2026, the humanitarian toll continues to rise sharply. According to Lebanese authorities, humanitarian organizations, and United Nations agencies, thousands of people have been killed and injured since the beginning of the escalation, including large numbers of women and children. More than one [million](#) people have experienced displacement, many of them multiple times, while countless families remain unable to safely return to their homes due to ongoing attacks, widespread destruction, and severe insecurity. Civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools, hospitals, agricultural lands, roads, and emergency response systems, has sustained extensive damage across affected regions, rendering entire areas unsafe or uninhabitable.

The escalation has further deepened Lebanon's already fragile humanitarian and economic conditions. Displaced families continue to face severe shortages in housing, healthcare, medicine, electricity, clean water, and financial resources. Women and girls remain disproportionately affected by these conditions, particularly in overcrowded shelters and informal displacement settings where privacy, safety, and access to healthcare are severely limited. Pregnant women, elderly women, refugee women, women with disabilities, and women-headed households face compounded vulnerabilities amid shrinking humanitarian capacity and prolonged instability.

At the same time, women across Lebanon continue to carry the burden of sustaining families and communities under extraordinary pressure. Women human rights defenders, activists, journalists, healthcare workers, volunteers, and community organizers remain at the forefront of documenting violations, coordinating relief efforts, supporting displaced families, and preserving community networks, despite enduring the same violence and insecurity themselves.

Yet beyond the visible destruction, testimonies gathered by Femena increasingly point to the enduring psychological toll of living under constant threat. Women describe sleepless nights under the sound of drones, panic spreading through neighborhoods during sudden evacuation

warnings, children experiencing severe fear and distress, and the emotional exhaustion of navigating repeated displacement and uncertainty. For many, the violence is not confined to moments of bombardment alone, but extends into everyday life through chronic fear, grief, instability, and the constant anticipation of danger.

In this second dispatch, Femena centers the voices of Lebanese women and women human rights defenders documenting and surviving this ongoing reality. These testimonies reflect not only experiences of loss and displacement, but also the emotional burden of prolonged violence, the labor of survival, and the determination to remain visible, connected, and resilient amid continued attacks and erasure.



Sawssan Abou-Zahr, Lebanese feminist journalist and writer, an expert in peacebuilding and peace journalism.

"I am writing with the Israeli drones buzzing over Beirut, terrorising its citizens almost 24/7. I am writing from my house, five minutes walk away from one of the sites of the devastating synchronised Israeli attacks on Beirut on 8 April 2026. Everything was shaking and I watched live on television as everywhere in Beirut was being bombed. It took me minutes to realise the whole of Lebanon was hit, including my hometown Sidon in the South and my own neighborhood in Beirut.

That day was further brutal evidence of the colonial genocidal nature of Israel terrorising Lebanon since 1948 and the doctrine of killing civilians that the world has been watching and ignoring in Palestine and Lebanon for years. Israel kills children, the elderly, journalists, aid workers, everyone, and the complicit West calls the ongoing crimes against humanity, "self-defense".

The night of 8 April was equally traumatising. The neighbourhood was filled with rumours and chaos. Several buildings were evacuated out of fear without any verification of a real Israeli threat. Fear is contagious and paralysing. I left my house with my close neighbours. Each of us took the cash we had at hand, the identity cards, and passports. They were in their pyjamas. I had jeans and a shirt on. I called one of the emergency numbers to get directions and support. Unfortunately they had no reassuring response, and I would say their answer was ridiculous. Uncertainty was high. However, I encouraged my neighbours to come back shortly before 3 am. We experienced firsthand the horrors that more than one million Lebanese had gone through when they had to leave their houses under bombs, once more. Many are still internally displaced since the 2024 Israeli war on Lebanon.

Many lost everything in seconds, their houses, lands, shops and their loved ones. Many are still on the streets, enduring heavy rain under light tents. Even those fragile tents are not safe. Israel targeted them once on the beach of Beirut. Those tents, as experienced in Gaza, are not suitable for the wellbeing of children and women, especially pregnant women. Even in shelter centres, some pregnant women lack sleep on the cold floor. Those who delivered in those centres lack the proper care.

Every house, school, hospital, ambulance, and land across Lebanon remains vulnerable to Israeli attacks. The human losses are immense. There are still people missing under the rubbles and many unidentified bodies. Devastated relatives are removing the rubble with their bare hands. Whole families ceased to exist, killed by Israel. A horrifying genocidal doctrine that has unfolded with Israeli impunity in Gaza, and has now been repeated in Lebanon.

The humanitarian needs are overwhelming and the means are so little. Some people who rented houses at unreasonably high rents, had to leave them when they ran out of money. They too are under tents now. They are insecure and feel left behind by the government and their fellow citizens. The day after is hard for them, to start from scratch, once more, and to be detached from other Lebanese. The already fragile civil peace is at risk more than ever.

Tomorrow is not easy as the so-called fragile and manipulative ceasefire is simply an ongoing Israeli "business as usual" of killing, bombing and terrorising; and unfortunately an American sponsored licence to legalise the massive new occupation of the South. This a West Bank scenario after the Gazan one."



R.D, 33:

“The impact of the bombing and displacement has not been limited to physical destruction; it has left deep psychological scars on us as women. Many women today are living in constant fear, waiting for the sound of warplanes or explosions at any moment. Mothers carry the burden of protecting their children in the absence of safety, while they themselves struggle with anxiety, insomnia, panic attacks, and a constant feeling of helplessness. Forced displacement has stripped many women of privacy and stability, forcing them to live in tents or overcrowded shelters that lack the most basic standards of dignity and psychological and medical care.

For many women, home is no longer a safe place, and even sleep has become impossible without fear. Some women have lost their husbands, children, or family members, while others have been forced to carry enormous responsibilities alone under bombing, displacement, and poverty. This ongoing violence does not only kill people physically, but also leaves long-term psychological wounds that will follow an entire generation of Lebanese women living through trauma every single day, in the absence of any real support or international protection.”

A.A, 37:

“War does not end when the bombing stops. For many Lebanese women, the war now lives inside their bodies and memories. Any loud sound can bring back moments of terror, and any plane in the sky can trigger panic. Some women can no longer sleep, leave their children alone even for a moment, or feel safe inside their own homes. The psychological trauma does not simply fade away, because the fear itself is still ongoing, as if the body has not yet been convinced that the danger is over.”

H.E, 42:

“The trauma Lebanese women are living through today is not just a passing moment of fear; it is a constant state of anticipation, terror, and insecurity. The sounds of bombing and warplanes, scenes of destruction, the loss of loved ones, and repeated displacement all leave deep psychological scars that are difficult to erase. Many women suffer from insomnia, panic attacks, constant fear, and the feeling that they no longer have control over their lives. Even in moments of silence, the body remains tense and the mind stays trapped in survival mode every single day.”

Conclusion and Demands:

The testimonies gathered in this second dispatch reveal that the impact of ongoing attacks on Lebanon extends far beyond immediate physical destruction. Women across affected communities describe living under continuous psychological strain marked by fear, exhaustion, uncertainty, displacement, grief, and the constant anticipation of violence. These realities expose the long-term human consequences of prolonged insecurity and repeated attacks on civilian life.

At the same time, women continue to sustain families, support communities, document violations, organize relief efforts, and preserve collective resilience despite immense emotional and material pressures. Women human rights defenders and activists are bearing witness while surviving the very violence they are documenting.

Yet these experiences remain insufficiently recognized within international responses and political processes. The absence of meaningful accountability and protection mechanisms continues to deepen harm and instability for civilians across Lebanon.

Femena reiterates its solidarity with Lebanese women and women human rights defenders and joins their calls for urgent action:

- Ensure an immediate, sustained, and enforceable ceasefire to halt ongoing attacks and prevent further civilian harm.
- Uphold international humanitarian law and guarantee the protection of civilians, including women, children, elderly people, displaced populations, journalists, healthcare workers, and humanitarian responders.
- Guarantee safe, rapid, and unhindered humanitarian access to all affected communities, including access to healthcare, shelter, food, water, sanitation, and essential medicines.
- Provide sustained gender-responsive humanitarian support addressing the specific needs of women and girls, including protection from gender-based violence, reproductive healthcare, and psychosocial support.
- Recognize and support the work of Lebanese women human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and women-led organizations responding to the crisis under extremely dangerous conditions.
- Ensure meaningful inclusion of Lebanese women in humanitarian planning, recovery efforts, peacebuilding initiatives, and political decision-making processes.
- Commit to independent accountability mechanisms that investigate violations of international law and ensure justice for victims and survivors.