

With the launch of the Tribunal, our battle for justice has only just begun

Contributed by Dailystar
Sunday, 01 March 2009

Sunday's launch of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon represents a milestone for the Lebanese people, but this country's pursuit of justice and the rule of law has only just begun. The court will eventually try - and hopefully convict - suspects in the killing of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 22 others, and it may also expand its mandate to include other high-profile assassinations that have occurred since 2005. But much remains to be done before this country can rid itself of a long-entrenched culture of impunity in which murder and other crimes have gone unpunished - or have never even been seriously investigated.

In fact this status quo has frequently served as an argument for those who have questioned the need for the tribunal. Many have argued that pursuing justice for one elite group of martyrs, while ignoring other assassinations and crimes against other leaders, ordinary citizens, foreign nationals or refugees, seems like a politically selective application of justice. The only flaw in this argument is that it betrays a cynical form of acceptance of the way things currently are. The goal should not be to prevent justice - even if it is selective - but rather to promote the consistent application of the rule of law.

Upholding the rule of law in Lebanon is nearly impossible under the current circumstances, because the country's judiciary is in a state of disrepair. Lebanon's courts currently lack the ability to act independently of the executive or legislative branches, or to render verdicts without coming under some form of political pressure. Ordinary citizens have so little faith in the ability of the judiciary to deliver fair and impartial rulings that they have frequently resorted to extra-judicial means of resolving disputes or exacting justice.

Parliamentary majority leader MP Saad Hariri has pledged that he and his allies in the March 14 Forces will accept the results of the Tribunal process, whatever they might be. These remarks send a strong signal that he and his allies are not seeking revenge, but are instead striving to bring the era of impunity to an end. These words will resonate with Lebanese citizens all the more if they are matched with action. The alliance will soon release a political platform ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections, and one hopes that their agenda will prioritize the need to enhance the independence of the judiciary. Such a gesture would go a long way toward demonstrating their commitment toward ensuring justice for all.

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