

# Lebanon Prayer Update, Oct 2021



At long last a new Government for Lebanon was sworn in last month led by Sunni Muslim tycoon Najib Mikati, thus ending a year of bickering over cabinet seats which accelerated the country's economic collapse. This should now open the way to a resumption of talks with the IMF and other international institutions about aid for the struggling country. Talks were suspended in July last year. They at least now have a Government to talk to. A central bank official has been appointed as Minister of Finance. Other ministers are mainly technical experts with little previous public exposure.

The French Government took a lead in efforts to encourage them to come up with an agreed cabinet as well as getting the necessary process started to introduce structural reforms to address the root causes of the crisis, including state corruption and to give confidence to the international community that any assistance would be spent wisely. The parliamentary timetable for doing this is limited as elections are due in the spring of 2022.

Like the outgoing cabinet of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, the new one comprises ministers with technical expertise who are not prominent politicians but have been named by the main parties.

An acute fuel shortage due to the country running out of foreign exchange has increased electricity outages across the country, some places suffering more than 20 hours a day without connection, and led to water supplies and sanitation being affected. Militant group Hezbollah which effectively controls the south of the country has responded by importing fuel from Iran initially overland via Syria but now by sea in tankers, thus breaking US sanctions. Whilst this has helped alleviate internal hardship in Lebanon it will make gaining US support for international aid more difficult. Iran has also offered to rebuild Beirut port and construct two new power plants.

The public inquiry into the Beirut port blast last year has now resumed after being stalled for a second time as former government ministers took legal action to have it suspended as they objected to being asked to appear before it to answer questions and wanted the judge running the inquiry to be sacked. An appeal judge has since overturned their objection.

Whilst all this has been going on Lebanese churches have continued to serve their communities sacrificially helping with rebuilding damaged homes, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless and generally showing the love of Christ.

Please pray for the new Government to be able to succeed in getting the necessary economic reforms in place to give confidence to the international community to fund a recovery programme for the country. Pray also that talks with the likes of the IMF will not be derailed by Hezbollah activity and Iranian support.

Pray that God will have mercy on the people of Lebanon, especially the 75% of the population now below the poverty line and that the churches will not grow weary in well-doing but be able to help the poor survive in co-operation with other NGOs and civil society groups.