

MENA

Lokman Slim's family ask UN to see if assassination linked to Beirut blast

► Two years on from the intellectual and prominent Hezbollah critic's death, his family are calling for a UN fact-finding mission



Lokman Slim was a well-known Lebanese intellectual and vocal critic of Hezbollah. AP



Nada Maucourant Atallah
Haret Hreik, southern Beirut

The family of murdered intellectual and prominent Hezbollah critic [Lokman Slim](#) on Friday called for the UN to investigate the motive for his killing and find out if it was linked to the 2020 Beirut blast.

The call came during a memorial attended by prominent figures including several ambassadors at his family home in the Haret Hreik neighbourhood of southern Beirut to mark two years since his death.

“I would like [the UN fact-finding mission] to look into the port explosion and also into the three assassinations that follow and could be linked,” said his widow, Lebanese-German filmmaker Monika Borgmann.

The two other killings were of Col Munir Abu Rjeili, a retired customs officer, on December 4, 2020, and photographer Joe Bejjany who was shot by masked assailants outside his home about two weeks later on December 21.

Mr Slim, 58, was shot dead in his car on February 4, 2021, in southern Lebanon, a stronghold of the powerful [Lebanese Iran-backed militia](#) and political party Hezbollah, of which he was fiercely critical.

In one of his last public appearances, Mr Slim accused the Syrian regime of having ties to the ammonium nitrate shipment that detonated at the port on August 4, 2020.

“The area of escaping accountability is over, never to return, the area of compromising justice is over, the area of fear is over,” his wife said on Friday.

Surrounded by tight security, the Slim family residence in the Hezbollah-dominated district was crowded with friends, fellow activists and officials gathered to pay tribute to his vision.

Several foreign ambassadors, including from the US, Germany and the UK, spoke at the commemoration.

“With the technical means of today, it should be possible to get closer to those who committed this crime, the investigation needs to proceed without delay,” said German ambassador Andreas Kindl.

'Continued impunity'

The investigation into his [assassination](#) by Lebanese authorities has not yet discovered who killed Mr Slim or why.

His family said they have been kept in the dark about any developments in the case.

"I come every day to the office of the judge in charge of the investigation to ask about the case. He keeps saying that he will issue the conclusions of his preliminary investigation, but so far, we have seen nothing," Mr Slim's sister, Rasha Al Ameer, told *The National*.

"How can justice be served in a country plagued by corruption?" she said.

A lack of accountability is common in Lebanon, where local investigations are often stalled by political interference.

The investigation into the [Beirut port blast](#) has failed to hold even a single culprit accountable two and a half years after the explosion wiped out part of the city and killed hundreds.

The judge leading the probe has been stalled by senior judges and petitions filed by the accused, preventing him from carrying out his job.

Ms Borgmann told *The National* that Lebanon has a history of "unresolved political assassination".

Lebanon experienced a wave of killings of vocal critics of Hezbollah's and Syria's influence in the country after Damascus withdrew forces from the country in the face of mass rallies in 2005 after the killing of former prime minister Rafic Hariri.

The former leader was killed in a car bomb that a UN investigation found was carried out by four members of Hezbollah.

The last high-profile assassination was of Mohammad Chatah, a former minister and a prominent opponent of the Syrian regime, who was killed by a car bomb in 2013.

Ms Borgmann said she wants the UN investigation to run parallel to the ongoing efforts in Lebanon.

“We are calling for the UN investigation to complete the local one, not to replace it,” she said.

Mr Slim had spoken out about death threats he had been receiving in December 2019, when calls for his assassination were plastered on the walls of his home.

In a public statement, he said Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah should personally be held responsible for any attack against him or his family.

UN human rights experts slammed the lack of progress in the investigation on Thursday.

“Two years following the killing of Mr Slim, no one responsible for his assassination has been identified and there is little prospect that current investigations will be successfully completed within a reasonable time frame,” the UN experts said.

“Shedding light on the circumstances surrounding the death of Lokman Slim and bringing those responsible to justice is also part of the state’s obligation to protect freedom of opinion and expression,” they said.

Ms Borgmann told *The National*: “They killed Lokman, but they were not able to kill his work and his legacy still lives on.”

The three-day ceremony is intended to “celebrate the life of Lokman, his vision, and his courage, and to emphasise the urgent need to end impunity”, according to Umam Documentation and Research, an NGO funded in 2004 by Mr Slim and his wife.

There will be an awards ceremony and a series of talks under the slogan “Justice Even If The Heavens Fall”, in a bid to rekindle public debate on Lebanese politics, economics and justice.

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