

## Commemorating the Beirut Blast: An Exhibition by Plan International

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The one-year mark for the Beirut blast was fast approaching and I was thinking, how can Plan International mark this very sad day for all of Lebanon while staying very respectful for the people who lost their lives and for the people who are still struggling till today whether physically or mentally.

Then the idea came to mark the Blast through the eyes of the girls and young women who lived it and at the same time were at the forefront of the response. Despite being directly affected, young women and girls were on the ground responding to the tragedy, supporting the wounded, and aiding the search and rescue. They were there distributing water and food, along with other essential items, and they were at the fore of the rebuilding process. Despite the gender barriers and limitations facing them, they led the response. Plan International's exhibition, then, would serve as a thank you to each of these young women and girls who broke these barriers to become the essential, first-line responders to the Beirut Blast.

Those portrayed in this exhibit were identified from each of the following organizations: Lebanese Civil Defense, Beirut Fire brigade, Offre de Joie, Live Love Beirut, Amel Association, Himaya, Nation station, Base Camp, and our own team members from Plan International. In addition, we spoke with those directly affected by the Blast. In total, 25 young women and girls were interviewed by Plan International.<sup>1</sup>

*Below is an excerpt from the interviews conducted by Plan International in the aftermath of the Beirut Blast, including three portraits from the exhibition.*

- “After the blast, I couldn't sleep for weeks, but after I received help, I learned to accept what had happened.” Celine, 17 years old

- “I wasn’t feeling well after the blast happened, the specialist helped us go through our memory until we no longer felt afraid.” Saman, 15 years old
- “I cannot believe it’s a been a year. There are things until today that have not been fixed. Other than the trauma that will take a long time. I feel, however, that I am a strong woman. And women have to be strong to survive in Lebanon.” Layal, a woman survivor from Karantina
- “The August 4 response proved that women are ready and willing to work on difficult matters” Sarah, from Live Love Beirut
- “The things and stories of people we were exposed to were saddening. It was hard to believe and even imagine that such things had happened. We had to put on a strong face to carry out our work. It was also difficult to nuance our reaction to people’s stories.” Marwa, Field Coordinator at AMEL Association
- “We did our best to help people in the surrounding area, all when our center has suffered immense damage. We helped people stuck under rubble or in their homes and drove people to the hospitals. The memory of August 4 is one of blood, damage, people crying, and excruciating wait.” Chimene, a Civil Defence member of the Achrafieh Branch
- “Even though the whole station was damaged, we started responding directly after the explosion, all members of Beirut firefighters came to support, and we never stopped for a minute. It was very hard then and is still hard: we used to be 25 women and now we are 23. We lost Sahar to the explosion and one emigrated.” Riwa, Paramedic at Beirut Fire Brigade.
- “After one year I can still hear broken glass, I can still smell the scent of blood and death. Although there was a lot of noise, there was also silence, as if the world was mourning.” Anne-Marie, Plan International





## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Interviews were conducted by Marguerita Sejaan and Raghida Hamieh.