

Two years on, investigation into Lokman Slim's assassination hits a 'red line'

'The ruling class wants to just erase all crimes it has committed,' Rasha al-Ameer, sister of the murdered activist, told *L'Orient-Le Jour*.

L'Orient Today / By [Claude ASSAF](#)



Participants at a ceremony dedicated to Lokman Slim in February, 2021, hold placards reading 'We are all Lokman, We are all Lebanon.' (Credit: João Sousa)

On Feb. 3, 2021, Lokman Slim, an erudite publisher and political activist and a fierce Hezbollah opponent, was shot dead in Addousiye (Zahrani, South Lebanon), an area under Hezbollah control.

It was 8:30 p.m. Slim had just left the house of his friend, writer Mohammad al-Amin, in Niha (South Lebanon), after having spent the day there. He was kidnapped and later shot six times, 30 kilometers away, near the Saida-Sur highway. He was 58.

Two years later, the investigation into Slim's murder is still stalled.

In December 2019, 14 months before his assassination, Slim, a staunch defender of human rights, received death threats posted at the entrance of his family residence in the Hezbollah stronghold, Haret Hreik in Beirut's southern suburbs. His family's heritage is also Shiite.

At that time he made a statement calling on the army to protect him against any harm. He also preemptively blamed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and the head of the Amal Movement, Nabih Berri for any violence that might befall him.

One month before his murder, during an interview with Saudi television channel al-Hadath, Slim spoke about Hezbollah's involvement in the import of ammonium nitrate, which triggered the Aug. 4, 2020, Beirut port explosion.

Immediately after Slim's assassination, Rahif Ramadan, prosecutor at the South Lebanon Court of Appeals, Rahif Ramadan, who is close to Berri, took over the investigation, before referring it to South Lebanon investigating judge, Marcel Haddad.

Three months later, in May 2021, Public Prosecutor at the Court of Cassation, Ghassan Oueidat, asked South Lebanon criminal court to transfer the case to an investigating judge in Beirut, on the grounds that basing the investigation in Saida could undermine public security in the city.

In response to the Court of Cassation's request, Beirut's chief investigating judge, Charbel Abu Samra, decided to take over the investigation himself in October 2021.

'Pro forma inquiry'

Judge Abu Samra has been holding "regular" hearings to question witnesses, according to the Slim family Lawyer Moussa Khoury, who spoke to *L'Orient-Le Jour*.

Khoury, along with Slim's widow Monika Borgmann, and his sister Rasha al-Ameer, both political activists in their own right, have attended all sessions.

“At the end of the sessions, according to procedure, I have the right to ask my own questions to the interrogated persons, through the investigative judge, who can either accept or deny my request, depending on his own investigation policy,” Khoury said.

The lawyer added that the probe does not seem to be extensive or elaborate.

“We go on average every month to the hearings, but they seem to me to be just going through the motions,” Ameer said.

Ameer told *L’Orient-le Jour* that she asked the judge if he would issue an indictment soon. He replied that he would, once he gathers enough evidence and proof to draw conclusions – a piece of information that was confirmed by judicial sources well-informed of the case.

The investigation has been slow because “they are coming up against red lines surrounding all political assassinations in the country,” according to Ameer, who did not specify which party was behind these barriers.

“By ‘red lines,’ I understand that any witnesses summoned by the security services or the judiciary would not make any statement implicating certain parties,”

Ali al-Amin, a politically unaffiliated journalist, told *L'Orient-Le Jour*, adding, "but everyone knows who killed Lokman Slim."

Borgmann has no illusions about the situation.

"The case has not been closed and Judge Abu Samra continues his investigations," she said. "But will he get to the bottom of it?"

No one knows. Borgmann says the principal suspects have yet to be summoned to appear before the court.

"I really do not entertain any hope that the investigation will make a breakthrough," she said. "But I hope I'm wrong."

According to the aforementioned judicial sources, there has not been any pressure or interference in Abu Samra's probe into Slim's murder.

The judge is allegedly carrying on with the investigation. A month ago, Abu Samra requested more information from foreign states, via the prosecution's office at the Court of Cassation, knowing that Slim was kidnapped in an area where UNIFIL operates, according to the same well-informed judicial sources.

'Will continue to remember'

For Ameer, her brother's murder is nothing less than a "crime against humanity, just like the Beirut port explosion, the

assassinations of customs official retired Army colonel Mounir Abou Rjeily and amateur photographer Joseph Bejjani.”

Both are said to have had information linked to the Beirut port blast and both were killed in December 2020..

“The ruling class wants to just erase all the crimes it has committed,” Ameer said. “It is responsible for disregarding, destroying, crippling, and killing justice.”

Despite it all, justice “will live on.”

“The current leaders want to make us forget, but we will continue to remember, as we used to do when Lokman was still alive,” Ameer said.

Borgmann concurred. “Since I met Lokman, 20 years ago, I have joined his fight against the culture of impunity,” she said. “I will continue to do so, both for his sake and to prevent [future] political killings.”

“Lokman represents a cause,” Ameer added, urging all judges to be brave and call a spade a spade.

But what if the Lebanese justice system remains idle?

Borgmann would call for the “UN Fact-Finding Commission, already [requested] by Human Rights Watch to investigate the

port explosion, to extend its probe into the killings that are related to the port case.”

Shortly after Slim’s murder, the UN Human Rights Council mandated international rapporteurs to urge local investigators to quickly identify the killers.

“The work of the rapporteurs has a symbolic value only,” Ameer said, adding that “it mainly results in the publication of their recommendations on the UN website, which unfortunately are not being followed up on.”

Experts’ statement

UN experts published Feb. 2 a [statement](#), slamming the slow progress in Slim’s murder investigation.

“A culture of impunity not only emboldens the killers of Mr. Slim. It will also have a chilling effect on civil society, as it sends a chilling message to other activists to self-censor,” the statement read.

“Two years after 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 timeframe,” the report said.

The statement added, “Thus far, national authorities have shown no indication that the ongoing investigations are in line with relevant international standards.”

“We, therefore, urge the Lebanese authorities to give much-needed new impetus to the pending investigation to ensure that those responsible are held accountable without delay,” the experts stressed.

They added, “We stand ready to support the relevant authorities in their efforts to ensure its full implementation in Mr Slim’s case and also call on the international community to provide support and assistance as appropriate.”

Despite the hardships, Ameer will not give up on justice.

“The establishment will fall one day,” she said, referencing the Nuremberg trials against the leaders of Nazi Germany.

This story originally ran in [French](#) in L’Orient-Le Jour, translated by Sahar Ghoussoub.