

*Roaming Charges*  
*Spot the Difference in Downtown Beirut:*  
*A Postscript to ‘Time for Justice?’*



In this photo we see people standing under the friendly gaze of their former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, who, along with 21 bystanders, was killed by a massive bomb blast on 14 February 2005, as discussed by Michelle Burgis-Kasthala in her article ‘Time for Justice? Reflections on Narrative Absences and Presences in the Special Tribunal for Lebanon’s *Ayyash* Decision’, published in EJIL 33:4. While we don’t know who the people are or what they are waiting for, the billboard tells us that it is ‘time for justice’. Are these people in particular waiting for justice? What does justice mean to them? How does the Special Tribunal for Lebanon speak to their sense of ‘justice’?

The billboard and its ticker (located in the top right-hand corner) were erected to focus hearts and minds on the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL). Created in the aftermath of this hugely destabilizing assassination, this image and the Tribunal per se embodied an attempt to bring repair and redress in the form of a criminal trial of a handful of absent co-accused. Yet even before *Ayyash*, the Tribunal’s key decision, was handed down in The Hague on 18 August 2020, the ticker counting down the days to ‘justice’ had broken and the billboard photo then vanished without a trace.



In its place, and in the midst of Lebanon's banking crisis, is this new advertisement promising 'sincere banking' from The Lebanese Swiss Bank. Unlike the warm and personal portrait of Hariri, one of Lebanon's great post-civil war figures who partly made his fortune rebuilding the country, here a faceless, corporate cliché of a man walks with purpose into a future of accelerating growth. Gone from the billboard is any trace of justice, of patrimonial politics or of personal resonance.

Exactly two weeks before *Ayyash* was handed down, Beirut experienced its greatest peace-time disaster in the form of a port explosion that took the lives of 218 people. This event exacerbated already endemic governance challenges in a polity reeling from a variety of unaddressed historic and contemporaneous traumas. Today, Lebanon finds itself – after having waited for and co-financed the STL's 'justice' – struggling to provide reliable electricity provision and garbage collection. Its banks often deny customers access to their savings in the midst of the country's financial collapse.

This photo was taken on 7 September 2022 by Marya, a Beirut herself, who searched for the original billboard and its Hariri photo at Michelle's request. The billboard stand – ironically or not – is located a short walk from *burj al murr* (the tower of bitterness). This still-iconic structure was unfinished when the civil war broke out in 1975 and was taken over by snipers. While it is now used as an army base, this does not dispel folklore that suggests it remains haunted by those killed in its vicinity. Thus, Marya, too scared to cross the street directly opposite the billboard stand, instead asked various family members and passers-by what had happened to the Hariri billboard photo and its ticker. No one seemed to know, including the taxi driver who picked her up after her visit. All he could offer was the suggestion that perhaps the lack of electricity had meant it was no longer possible to power the ticker or to count down the days to 'justice'. This supposition was repeated later when friends weighed in on the matter. In a country lacking basic services, the promise of STL-delivered 'justice' and its \$1 billion price tag,<sup>1</sup> seemed impossible to comprehend. We wonder what photo will appear next.

<sup>1</sup> Nassar, *The Special Tribunal for Lebanon: The Mountain that Gave Birth to a Mouse*, 8 January 2021, available at [Special Tribunal for Lebanon: The mountain that gave birth to a mouse - JusticeInfo.net](https://www.justiceinfo.net/).

