

LEBANESE OFFICIAL SAYS BEIRUT AIRPORT NEEDS "IMPROVEMENT"

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A Lebanese official on Friday acknowledged European concerns about safety regulations at the Beirut airport, saying the facility needs improvement but adding that recent reports that the airport does not meet international safety standards are "exaggerated."

Mohamad Kabbani, head of Parliament's public works and transport committee, also said that Lebanon will use part of a \$25 million Saudi grant to buy scanners and other new inspection machines to ensure more security in and around the airport.

His comments follow reports that France and Britain are considering boycotting the Beirut airport due to safety concerns. Kabbani also called on the Lebanese government to appoint a new administration of civil aviation.

"The airport needs improvement, this is something we know and this is something we acknowledge," he told The Associated Press.

He said the committee was putting pressure on the government to appoint an independent civil aviation body. "The airport cannot continue as part of the government, of the ministry of transport, it has to be under the authority of an independent body," Kabbani added.

Lebanese Interior Minister Nohad Mashnouk told the daily As-Safir newspaper last week that the airport has "serious problems that should no longer be overlooked."

He said London and Paris have suggested they may halt flights to the Rafik Hariri International Airport, named after Lebanon's former premier who was assassinated in 2005, but that they have not made a final decision pending measures taken by Beirut.

Early last year, the European Union sent a memo to the government informing it of a decision to stop transporting goods from the Beirut airport after Lebanon failed to meet EU standards for air transportation safety.

British Airways became the first to implement the EU's decision and banned cargo flights from Beirut on March 1.



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