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Amnesty International

Lebanon

Covering events from January - December 2004

Scores of people, including Islamist activists and members of opposition groups, were arrested for political reasons. Most were released after short periods. Trials of Sunni Islamist activists accused of "terrorism" and other state security offences continued. There were reports of torture and ill-treatment, and at least two detainees died in custody. There was an apparent increase of violence against women. Attacks on freedom of expression and association continued. At least three people were sentenced to death and three executions were carried out. Human rights groups and members of parliament stepped up their campaign for the abolition of the death penalty.

Background

In September the authorities amended the Constitution to allow an extension of President Emile Lahoud's term of office. The government's proposed amendment was supported by a majority in parliament. Opponents rejected it as unconstitutional and linked it to undue interference by Syria in the internal affairs of the country. The amendment was passed one day after the UN Security Council issued Resolution 1559 sponsored by the USA and France calling for the respect of Lebanese sovereignty, the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the country and the disbanding of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. Four ministers resigned from the government in protest at the amendment. In October Marwan Hamadah, one of the ministers who resigned in September, escaped with injuries requiring surgery when a bomb planted in his car exploded. His bodyguard, Ghazi Abu-Karrum, was killed. The case was referred to the investigating military magistrate.

A new government led by 'Umar Karami was formed following the resignation in October of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, which included for the first time two women ministers.

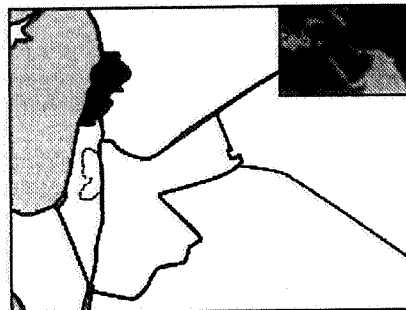
Syria withdrew some 3,000 troops during the year.

A draft law calling for the abolition of the death penalty was presented to parliament by seven members of parliament as part of a national campaign to end the death penalty. A new "terrorism law" was passed in the context of the government's move to introduce a new Penal Code, a draft of which was being considered by parliament. A campaign led by human rights group Hurriyyat Khasah (Private Liberties) to promote respect for the rights of lesbians and gay men was stepped up during the year. It included calls for reform of provisions of the Penal Code that criminalize homosexuality.

Arrests

Scores of people, mostly Sunni Islamist activists and members of opposition groups, were arrested for political reasons. Among them were members of two banned opposition groups, the Free Patriotic Movement and the Lebanese Forces, most of whom were released after short periods. Dozens of members of the banned Islamist Hizb al-Tahrir (Liberation Party) were detained for days or weeks and released on bail pending trials including before the Military Court. They were arrested for the peaceful expression of their political and religious opinions, including organizing a sit-down in July in Tripoli, northern Lebanon, to protest against the visit to Lebanon of the interim Iraqi Prime Minister, Iyad 'Allawi.

- Dozens of Sunni Islamist activists arrested in September without due legal process and detained incommunicado in secret detention centres remained held without access to their lawyers and families. They were arrested following raids carried out by the security forces in different parts of the



Lebanon

Lebanese Republic

Head of state: Emile Lahoud

Head of government: 'Umar Karami (replaced Rafiq al-Hariri in October)

Death penalty: retentionist

International Criminal Court: not signed

UN Women's Convention: ratified with reservations

Optional Protocol to UN Women's Convention: not signed

Further information

Lebanon: Samir Gea'gea' and Jirjis al-Khoury - Torture and unfair trial

(AI Index: MDE 18/003/2004)

All AI documents on Lebanon

country, including the south and the Beqa' Valley. The former Interior Minister accused them of involvement in "terrorism" and plots to bomb embassies, the Justice Palace and other places. The detainees included Ahmad Salim al-Miqati, Nabil Jallul, Jamal 'Abd al-Wahid, Shafiq al-Banna and Isma'il al-Khatib. Two women – Latifa al-Khatib, the sister of Isma'il al-Khatib, and An'am Jallul, the sister of Nabil Jallul – were released, apparently without charge, following public protests against the serious violations surrounding the arrests and the subsequent death in custody of Isma'il al-Khatib (see below).

Trials

Trials of Sunni Islamist activists before the Justice Council and other courts on charges of "terrorism" and other state security offences continued during the year. Trials before the Justice Council of dozens of Islamist activists, known as the Dhinniyyah detainees, charged with "terrorism" and other state security offences entered a fourth year. Proceedings fell short of international standards. There appeared to be no prospect of the detainees receiving a fair trial. The charges against them carry the death penalty.

- In March the Military Court sentenced a group of Islamist activists, including six Palestinians, a Yemeni national and a Lebanese national, to up to 20 years in prison on charges of "terrorism", including operating a "terrorist" network and involvement in bombing US fast-food restaurants. Mu'ammarr 'Abdallah 'Al- 'Awami was sentenced to 20 years in prison with hard labour; Usamah Lutfi Salih, Usamah Amin al-Shihabi, and Amin Anis Dib were given 15 years in prison with hard labour; and 'Ali Musa Masri was sentenced to five years in prison. 'Ali Muhammad Qasim Hatim and Muhammad 'Abd-al-Karim al-Sa'di (also known as Abu-Muhjin), the alleged leader of the banned Sunni Islamist group 'Usbat al-Ansar or League of Supporters, were tried in absentia and sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour and 15 years in prison with hard labour respectively.

Torture and deaths in custody

There were reports of torture and ill-treatment, and at least two detainees died in custody.

- In September Isma'il al-Khatib died in custody after more than 10 days' incommunicado detention at a secret location. Following his arrest (along with dozens of Sunni Islamist activists) he was described by the authorities as the leader of an al-Qa'ida network in the country. An official medical report stated that he died of a heart attack and that he had suffered, among other things, difficulty in breathing, swollen feet and liver problems. The report was repudiated by the family, including his sister who had been detained with him and said she heard him screaming in pain. Photographs taken of Isma'il al-Khatib after his death showed serious wounds on his body. The government ordered an investigation into his death.

Violence against women

There was apparently an increase in violence against women. At least six women were killed during the year, mostly by male relatives, as a result of family crimes or other forms of violence against women. Such crimes continued to be committed by men with near impunity facilitated by lenient sentences for killings carried out in a "fit of fury". Information was received on alleged torture, including rape, of Filipina maids working in Lebanon.

- A 27-year-old Palestinian man killed his sister by cutting her throat for allegedly having pre-marital sexual relations with her fiancé. The attack reportedly took place in October in a Beirut hospital where the woman worked. The man handed himself in to the authorities.
- Seventeen-year-old Fadela Farouq al-Sha'ar died on 5 February in Tripoli apparently after being strangled, allegedly by her brother. He was said to have confessed to the murder before disappearing. She was apparently killed for allegedly eloping with a man she wanted to marry without the consent of her family.
- A Filipina woman, Catherine Bautista, one of thousands of maids reportedly working in difficult conditions in Lebanon, died on 4 May. Her body was found almost naked in the garden of the building in Beirut where she worked. An investigation ordered by the authorities closed the case in July apparently after concluding that she had died after jumping out of her employers' apartment.

Freedom of expression and association

Attacks on freedom of expression and association continued during the year.

- In May at least five civilians were killed, including a photographer, and at least 27 others injured when the Lebanese army apparently used excessive force to suppress a demonstration organized by the

General Workers' Union in al-Sallum neighbourhood in southern Beirut. Following an official investigation, the government promised compensation for those injured.

- In April a dozen people were injured during the peaceful build-up to a demonstration outside the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) offices in Beirut organized to submit a petition calling for the release of Lebanese political detainees held in Syria. The injuries were caused when security forces used batons against the demonstrators. Human rights defender Ghazi 'Aad, who uses a wheelchair, was beaten. No investigation was known to have been carried out.
- In March a professor at the Lebanese University, Adonis Akra, appeared several times before the Publications Court in Beirut in connection with the publication of a book that included details of his incarceration in a Syrian jail and the torture techniques used against him. He was charged with undermining Lebanon's relations with a friendly country and tarnishing the image of its leaders. In February 2003 Adonis Akra had been detained by the security forces for seven hours and forced to cancel the launching of the book. The book was subsequently banned in Lebanon, copies of it were confiscated, and charges were brought against its publishers, Dar al-Tali'ah.

Refugees

Palestinian refugees continued to be discriminated against despite calls by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) for their rights to be protected.

- In March CERD expressed concern "with regard to the enjoyment by the Palestinian population present in the country of all rights stipulated in the Convention [on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination] on the basis of non-discrimination, in particular access to work, health care, housing and social services as well as the right to effective legal remedies." CERD urged Lebanon "to take measures to ameliorate the situation of Palestinian refugees with regard to the enjoyment of the rights protected under the Convention, and at a minimum to remove all legislative provisions and change policies that have a discriminatory effect on the Palestinian population in comparison with other non-citizens."

Death penalty

At least three people were sentenced to death. Three men – Ahmad Mansour, Badea' Hamada and Remi Antoan Za'atar – were executed in Rumieh prison in Beirut in January. The executions were the first since 1998.

AI visits

AI delegates visited Lebanon several times during 2004.

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