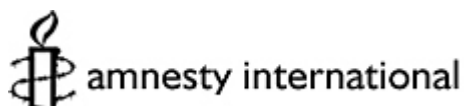


Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	345
Land:	Libanon
Kilde:	Amnesty International
Titel:	Annual Report 2009
Udgivet:	28. maj 2009
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	9. juni 2009

Title	Amnesty International Report 2009 - Lebanon
Publisher	Amnesty International
Country	Lebanon
Publication Date	28 May 2009
Cite as	Amnesty International, <i>Amnesty International Report 2009 - Lebanon</i> , 28 May 2009, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a1faddcc.html



Amnesty International Report 2009 - Lebanon

Head of state: Michel Suleiman (from May)
Head of government: Fouad Siniora
Death penalty: retentionist
Population: 4.1 million
Life expectancy: 71.5 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f): 30/20 per 1,000
Adult literacy: 88.3 per cent

At least 30 civilians were killed in political violence. Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees were reported. Women faced discrimination and were inadequately protected against violence. Migrant domestic workers were exploited and abused. Palestinian refugees faced continuing discrimination although steps were taken to alleviate conditions for some of the most vulnerable. The Minister of Justice proposed a law to abolish the death penalty.

Background

Following renewed political violence between supporters of the government and Hizbullah and other parties, the two sides agreed an accord on 21 May in Qatar which ended an 18-month political stalemate. Parliament then elected a new President. In July, a national unity government was formed and a new electoral law was passed in September. A Human Rights Action Plan was in development. On 15 October, Lebanon and Syria agreed to establish diplomatic relations.

At least 30 civilians were among around 160 people killed in political violence. More than half died as a result of armed clashes between pro-government forces and the Hizbullah-led opposition in May, when about 70 people were killed, and fighting between rival groups in Tripoli in June and July.

- On 13 August, five civilians and 10 soldiers were killed in a bomb attack on a bus in Tripoli.
- On 10 September, Saleh Aridi, a leading member of the Democratic Party, which advocates close ties with Syria, was killed by a car bomb.

Impunity

Little action was taken to address impunity for political killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other abuses committed during the civil war (1975-1990) and since then. The Lebanese authorities said in 1992 that more than 17,000 people had disappeared in the custody of the parties to the conflict.

In March, Milad Barakat was returned to Lebanon after 16 years in prison in Syria. Lebanese security officials had detained him in 1992 and handed him over to the Syrian authorities, who sentenced him to 15 years' imprisonment for fighting against the Syrian army. There was no new information, however, about some 650 Lebanese and other nationals reported to have disappeared in the custody of the Syrian authorities after they were abducted or detained in Lebanon. In August, the authorities said they were "committed to pursuing the issue of Lebanese citizens who are missing or detained in Syria".

No participants from either side of the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah were brought to justice for serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Rafiq al-Hariri case

On 2 December, the 11th report was issued of the UN International Independent Investigation Commission on its investigations into the killing of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and 22 others in February 2005 and 20 other bombings and assassinations. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which will further investigate and prosecute the cases, was scheduled to begin functioning on 1 March 2009.

- In August, Ayman Tarabay and Moustapha Talal Mesto, two of nine men detained without charge since 2005 in connection with the investigation into the killing of Rafiq al-Hariri, were released on bail. The seven others continued to be detained without charge or trial even though the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled in November 2007 that six of them were arbitrarily detained.

Aftermath of the 2006 war

One person was killed and seven others working with clearance teams were injured, as well as 22 civilians, by unexploded cluster bombs fired by Israeli armed forces during the 2006 war. The Israeli authorities continued to refuse to provide the data to assist clearance of unexploded munitions and were still occupying the border village of Ghajar at the end of the year.

On 16 July, the bodies of two Israeli soldiers captured by Hizbullah from northern Israel in July 2006 were handed to Israel in exchange for five Lebanese prisoners, four of them Hizbullah members, and the human remains of almost 200 Arab nationals.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in custody were not independently investigated, and "confessions" allegedly given under torture were used in trials as evidence. On 7 October, a group of human rights organizations listed 27 deaths in custody since 2007, 15 of them in 2008.

In December, Lebanon ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture.

- On 5 June, the trial began before the Military Court in Beirut of Hassan Naba' and

12 others referred to as the "Net of 13". Detained in December 2005 and January 2006, they were charged with "plotting to commit terrorist acts". In court, several of the defendants repudiated "confessions" made while held in pre-trial detention at the Information Branch of the Internal Security Department in Beirut and alleged that they were given under "police brutality and torture", but the court failed to investigate their claims. Three of the defendants were released on bail on 25 September.

No investigations were carried out into credible reports that the majority of 316 suspected Fatah al-Islam members or sympathizers arrested in the wake of the May to September 2007 clashes in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp were tortured in detention. Methods alleged included the *ballanco* (hanging by the wrists tied behind the back), electrocution, having a glass bottle forced into the anus, beatings and religious insults. Tens of detainees said that they gave "confessions" as a result.

Excessive use of force

Seven protesters were killed, reportedly by Lebanese army soldiers and unidentified individuals, on 27 January during demonstrations against power cuts affecting Beirut's largely Shi'a southern suburbs. Eleven soldiers and two army officers charged with "involuntary manslaughter" were among more than 70 people charged in connection with the events.

Violence and discrimination against women

Women migrant domestic workers continued to receive inadequate protection against workplace exploitation and physical, sexual and psychological abuse. At least 45 died from unnatural causes, many apparently as a result of suicide or falling to their deaths while trying to escape from high buildings in which they worked. The authorities generally did not adequately investigate the deaths or any abuse that may have preceded them. On 4 September, Shi'a cleric Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah urged employers not to abuse migrant domestic workers and called on the authorities to provide better protection.

- On 17 January, the body of Ethiopian domestic worker Enate Belachew was found in her employer's house in south Beirut; she had apparently hanged herself.

In February, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that the Lebanese authorities enact legislation to criminalize violence against women, ensure that women and girls subject to violence have immediate access to protection, prosecute and punish perpetrators, and amend the Penal Code to ensure that perpetrators of so-called "honour crimes" do not escape punishment. The Committee also called for marital rape to be criminalized, for enactment of a draft law regulating the employment of domestic workers, who are excluded from the Labour Law, and for women domestic workers to be protected from exploitation and abuse.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

Several hundred thousand Palestinian refugees continued to suffer from discriminatory restrictions affecting their economic and social rights, notably their access to employment, health care, social security, education and housing.

On 19 August, it was announced that some 2,500 "non-ID" Palestinian refugees, who are not registered with the Lebanese authorities or the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and consequently face more restrictions of their human rights than registered Palestinian refugees, had been issued with official temporary ID cards that would enable them to access rights and services previously denied them. A similar number of "non-ID" Palestinians were yet to approach the

authorities for the ID cards, apparently fearing arrest.

Only a small minority of the 27,000 Palestinian refugees displaced from Nahr al-Bared camp by fighting there between May and September 2007 were able to return home.

On 21 February, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, welcomed the government's steps to issue work and residency papers to some 50,000 Iraqi would-be refugees, previously considered illegal and subject to imprisonment and deportation.

Arbitrary detention

The authorities failed to rectify the situation of Nehmet Na'im al-Haj and Yusef Cha'ban, who remained in detention even though the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared in 2007 that they were arbitrarily detained.

Human rights defenders

Human rights organizations were generally able to operate without undue interference from the authorities. However, lawyer Muhamad Mugraby was harassed. On 27 November, he was cleared by a criminal court in Beirut of slander of a public official, relating to a speech on human rights he made at the European Parliament in November 2003. However, the court's decision was appealed in December by the Public Prosecutor. In April 2006, the Military Court of Cassation had dismissed the same charge against him.

Death penalty

At least 40 prisoners were on death row but no new death sentences were imposed and there were no executions.

In October, the Justice Minister announced that he had submitted to the Council of Ministers a law to abolish the death penalty.

In December, Lebanon abstained on a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions.

Amnesty International visits

Amnesty International's Secretary General met President Michel Suleiman, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and Speaker of the National Assembly Nabih Berri in Beirut in July. Amnesty International delegates visited Lebanon in October and November to attend meetings.

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