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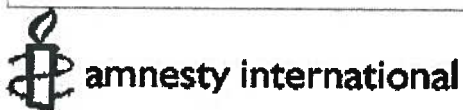
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Amnesty International Report 2014/15 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Lebanon

Lebanese Republic

Head of state: vacant since May, when Michel Suleiman's term ended

Head of government: Tammam Salam

Pressures generated by the armed conflict in neighbouring Syria continued. There were new reports of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees. Lebanon hosted more than 1.2 million refugees from Syria but took steps to restrict the entry of refugees from Syria including Palestinians. Palestinian refugees long resident in Lebanon continued to face discrimination. Women remained subject to discrimination in law and in practice, and were inadequately protected against sexual and other violence. Foreign migrant workers, particularly women domestic workers, faced exploitation and other abuse. More than two dozen men faced prosecution for alleged consensual same-sex conduct. Some progress was made in clarifying cases of enforced disappearance dating back decades. The death penalty remained in force; there were no executions. The trial in their absence of five people in connection with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri opened before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Syrian government forces and armed groups based in Syria carried out indiscriminate attacks along the border.

Background

Political infighting resulted in failure to agree a new President to replace Michel Suleiman, whose term of office ended in May. In February, however, the rival alliances agreed to form a national unity government with Tammam Salam as Prime Minister.

Lebanon avoided being drawn fully into the armed conflict in Syria, despite political, religious and social divisions, the continuing influx of refugees from Syria, and the participation of some Lebanese persons, notably members of Hezbollah, in the Syrian conflict. However, the conflict remained an ever-present threat.

Political tension remained high throughout the year, exacerbated by the Syrian conflict. By the end of the year, Lebanon hosted more than 1.15 million Syrian refugees and around 50,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria, swelling the population by a quarter and straining the country's resources. Tensions related to the conflict sparked repeated bouts of violence, especially in Tripoli, causing scores of deaths. The Syrian army periodically shelled the Bekaa valley and other areas inside Lebanon's border, and armed groups fired rockets from Syria into Lebanon's eastern border region, where abductions were also rife. In August, members of the Islamic State (IS) armed group posted videos on the internet showing them beheading two Lebanese soldiers whom they had taken hostage in fighting around Arsal, a Lebanese border town briefly seized by IS and other armed groups including Jabhat al-Nusra, who reportedly executed two other hostages in September and December respectively. A series of bomb attacks in Beirut and elsewhere also appeared to be connected to the Syrian conflict.

Torture and other ill-treatment

There were reports of torture and other ill-treatment of detained suspects. One detainee held by General Security in May reported after his release that interrogators had beaten him on his hands and legs with electric cable, trodden on and verbally insulted him. The authorities failed to undertake credible investigations into allegations of torture, including those made by a boy aged 15 and other people detained after clashes between the Lebanese army and armed groups in June 2013 in the Sidon area.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

Refugees faced restrictions on their right to seek asylum and other rights. Lebanon was not a party to the UN Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol.

At the end of the year, according to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, and UNWRA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, Lebanon was hosting more than 1.2 million refugees from Syria. In May, the government effectively closed the border to most Palestinians entering from Syria, and announced in June that it would only allow the entry of Syrian refugees from areas bordering Lebanon. In October, the authorities brought in further restrictions and asked UNHCR to stop registering refugees except for humanitarian cases. New regulations announced on 31 December required Syrians to apply for one of six types of entry visa in order to enter Lebanon. Instances of Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria being sent back to Syria, in violation of international law, were documented.

The high cost of renewing annual residency permits, combined with opaque policies for the renewal of permits for refugees from Syria, led many refugees to become irregular in status, placing them at risk of arrest, detention and deportation. Some municipalities subjected refugees to curfews that limited their freedom of movement, prevented refugees from establishing informal tented settlements, or imposed additional taxes on local landlords who rented property to them. The Lebanese army and the Internal Security Forces also dismantled some informal tented settlements, ostensibly on security grounds.

The presence of so many refugees put Lebanon's health, education and other resources under enormous strain. This was exacerbated by inadequate international funding, and left many refugees unable to access adequate health care, shelter, education and other services.

Thousands of Palestinian long-term refugees continued to live in camps and informal gatherings in Lebanon, often in deprived conditions. They faced discriminatory laws and regulations, for example denying them the right to inherit property, the right to work in around 20 professions, and other basic rights.

Women's rights

Women faced discrimination in law and in practice. Personal status laws regulating issues such as marriage prevented Lebanese women with foreign spouses passing their nationality to their children. In April, a new law specifically criminalized domestic violence for the first time. Among other deficiencies, it failed to criminalize marital rape, although it provided for the establishment of temporary shelters and measures to strengthen police and prosecutors' effectiveness in addressing domestic violence.

Migrant workers' rights

Migrant workers faced exploitation and abuse, particularly women domestic workers whose rights at work – including to fixed days off, rest periods, wages and humane conditions – were not protected by law, leaving them vulnerable to physical, sexual and other abuse by employers. Domestic workers were employed under contracts tying them to employers acting as their "sponsors", under conditions that facilitated abuse.

Employers frequently retained possession of workers' passports to prevent them from leaving abusive working conditions. In June, for the first time, a judge ordered an employer to return a domestic worker's passport, ruling that its retention by the employer violated the worker's freedom of movement.

Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people

Article 534 of the Penal Code, which prohibited sexual intercourse "contrary to the order of nature" was used to prosecute various consensual sexual activities, including sex between men. In January a judge ruled that Article 534 was not applicable in the case of a transgender woman having sexual relations with men. In August, the authorities arrested 27 men at a Beirut bath house and charged them with offences under Article 534 and provisions relating to "public decency" and prostitution.

In January, five men arrested on suspicion of consensual same-sex sexual activity were reported to have been subjected to anal examinations by a doctor, despite the Lebanese Order of Physicians declaring in 2012 that it was impermissible for doctors to carry out such examinations, which violate the international prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, and a circular from the Minister of Justice in the same year, that called on public prosecutors to cease this practice.

International justice

Special Tribunal for Lebanon

The trial of four defendants accused in connection with the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005 opened in January before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) in the Netherlands. The four defendants, and a fifth whose trial was joined to theirs by the STL in February, all remained at large and were tried in their absence. In April, the STL brought contempt charges against two Lebanese journalists and their respective media outlets for disclosing confidential information about witnesses in the trial of the five accused.

Impunity – enforced disappearances and abductions

The fate of thousands who were forcibly disappeared, abducted or otherwise unlawfully deprived of their liberty during and after Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war, mostly remained undisclosed. In March, however, the Shura Council ruled that the full, as yet unpublished, report of the 2000 Official Committee of Inquiry to Investigate the Fate of Kidnapped and Missing Persons in Lebanon should be made available to the families of those missing. After the dismissal of appeals against this decision, the full report was provided to a lawyer representing the families in September.

Lebanon signed the International Convention against enforced disappearance in 2007 but had yet to ratify it.

Death penalty

Courts continued to impose death sentences for murder and terrorism-related crimes, including some in the absence of the defendants. No executions had been carried out since 2004.

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