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Lebanese authorities must halt unlawful deportations of Syrian refugees

The Lebanese authorities must immediately stop forcibly deporting refugees back to Syria, Amnesty International said today, amid fears that these individuals are at risk of torture or persecution at the hands of the Syrian government upon return.

Last week, the Lebanese Armed Forces [raided](#) houses occupied by Syrian families in different locations across the country, including Bourj Hammoud in Beirut, and deported to Syria dozens of refugees who had entered the country irregularly or held expired residency cards.

Mohammed, the brother of one of the refugees deported by the Lebanese army, told Amnesty International that he managed to contact his brother, who informed him that the Lebanese army drove the refugees directly to the border and handed them over to the Syrian army. He said that many of them are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“It is extremely alarming to see the army deciding the fate of refugees, without respecting due process or allowing those facing deportation to challenge their removal in court or seek protection. No refugee should be sent back to a place where their life will be at risk,” said Aya Majzoub, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Lebanon is obligated under the customary international law principle of non-refoulement not to return anyone to a country where they would face a threat of torture or persecution. Instead of living in fear after escaping atrocities in Syria, refugees living in Lebanon should be protected from arbitrary raids and unlawful deportations.”

Over 100 refugees, held on the Syrian side of the border since Wednesday, will learn their fate tomorrow according to Mohammed’s brother. Amnesty International and other rights groups have documented how refugees who returned to Syria faced grave human rights violations, including torture and enforced disappearance, at the hands of the Syrian government.

Mohammed told Amnesty International that his brother is wanted by the Syrian government for evading military service. The Lebanese army drove him, his wife and his daughter directly from their house in Bourj Hammoud to the Syrian border. Despite being registered with the UNHCR, Mohammed

said his brother was not offered the right to challenge his deportation order. Mohammed also said the UNHCR was informed.

Mohammed said that the recent wave of deportations has caused him and his family to live in fear and avoid leaving the house.

“While there is no excuse for Lebanon violating its legal obligations, the international community should step up its assistance, and particularly its resettlement and alternative pathways programmes, to help Lebanon cope with the presence of an estimated 1.5 million refugees in the country,” said Aya Majzoub.

The principle of non-refoulement is a binding customary rule of international law that prohibits states from returning people to a place where they would be at risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations. Anyone at risk of deportation should be given an opportunity to access legal counsel, meet with the UNCHR, and challenge their deportation in court.

Background

In 2019, Lebanon’s Higher Defence Council, the body responsible for implementing Lebanon’s national defense strategy, instructed security agencies to deport Syrians entering Lebanon through illegal border crossings. In a December 2020 letter to Amnesty International, the Directorate of General Security confirmed that the authorities had deported 6,002 Syrians since May 2019, including 863 in 2020. Deportations were partially halted in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a September 2021 report, Amnesty International [documented](#) a catalogue of horrific violations committed by Syrian intelligence officers against 66 Syrian refugee returnees, including 13 children. The majority of the children had returned from Lebanon, including two who were deported.

Syrian intelligence officers subjected women, children and men returning to Syria to unlawful or arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, including rape and sexual violence, and enforced disappearance. These violations were a direct consequence of their perceived affiliation with Syria’s political opposition, simply because of their refugee status.

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Numerous Syrian refugees handed over to Syrian armed forces by Libanese army following searches in several locations, including Bourj Hammoud in Beirut

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