

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1887
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Amnesty international og Human Rights Watch
Titel:	Lebanon: Halt summary deportations of Syrian refugees
Udgivet:	11. maj 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	26. juni 2023

Document #2091767

AI – Amnesty International, HRW – Human Rights Watch, SNHR – Syrian Network for Human Rights, MENA Rights Group, The Legal Agenda, The Syria Campaign et al.
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Lebanon: Halt summary deportations of Syrian refugees

The Lebanese Armed Forces have recently and summarily deported hundreds of Syrians back to Syria, where they are at risk of persecution or torture. The deportations come amid an alarming surge in anti-refugee rhetoric in Lebanon and other coercive measures intended to pressure refugees to return, said a group of 20 national and international organizations today.

Since the beginning of April, the Lebanese Armed Forces have been carrying out discriminatory raids on the houses of Syrian refugees in neighbourhoods across Lebanon, including Mount Lebanon, Jounieh, Qob Elias, and Bourj Hammoud, and then immediately deporting most of them. Many of those forcibly returned are registered or known to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Deportees told Amnesty International they were not given an opportunity to speak with a lawyer or UNHCR, and they were not afforded the right to challenge their deportation and argue their case for protection.

“The Lebanese authorities have deliberately mismanaged the country’s economic crisis, impoverishing millions and denying them their basic rights. But instead of adopting much-needed reforms, they have instead resorted to scapegoating refugees for their own failures. Nothing justifies taking hundreds of Syrian men, women and children by force from their beds in the early hours of the morning and handing them to the government they fled from,” the organizations said.

Interviewees, including refugees registered with the UNHCR since 2012, told the organizations that the Lebanese Army drove the deportees to the border and handed them directly to the Syrian authorities. Some of them were arrested or disappeared upon their return to Syria.

Local and international organizations continue to document horrific violations committed by Syrian military and security forces against Syrian returnees, including children, such as unlawful or arbitrary detention and torture and other ill-treatment, rape and sexual violence, and enforced disappearance.

The deportations have been accompanied by other measures intended to coerce Syrian refugees to return to Syria. Several municipalities across Lebanon have imposed discriminatory measures against Syrians, such as curfews to curtail their movement and restrictions on their ability to rent housing. Moreover, some local authorities have required Syrians to share their personal information, including their identification documents, residency cards, and proof of residence, and have threatened to deport them if they fail to do so.

The coercive and hostile environment for refugees has been exacerbated by an alarming rise in anti-refugee rhetoric, in some cases fuelled by local authorities and politicians.

Lebanese media outlets have been criticized for their use of language about Syrians, sparking increasing tensions between host communities and refugees.

These recent developments have led to an atmosphere of hostility, creating anxiety and panic among the Syrian community in Lebanon. Refugees in Lebanon reported that they are living in fear of being deported or being victims of attacks, and many said they have not left their houses in weeks.

“The rise in anti-refugee rhetoric, much of which is based on misinformation, is contributing to violence and discrimination against refugees. Media outlets and political figures should be protecting the rights of everyone in Lebanon, including refugees, not inciting violence against them,” the organizations said.

As a party to the Convention Against Torture, Lebanon is obligated not to return or extradite anyone in danger of being tortured. Lebanon is also bound by the customary international law principle of nonrefoulement not to return people to a place where they risk persecution or other serious human rights violations

Under Lebanese law, deportation orders can only be issued by a judicial authority or by decision of the General Director of the General Security in exceptional cases and based on an individual assessment.

Lebanon should halt summary deportations to Syria, which are in breach of the principle of non-refoulement. Authorities should refrain from imposing discriminatory measures and from using derogatory language against Syrian refugees. They should respect due process and ensure that anyone at risk of deportation to Syria has the opportunity to see a lawyer, to meet with UNHCR and to argue their case for protection and against deportation in a competent court. Courts should prohibit any deportation that amounts to refoulement.

The international community should also fulfil its obligations, including by stepping up its assistance, particularly its resettlement and alternative pathways programmes, to help Lebanon cope with the presence of an estimated 1.5 million refugees in the country. In 2022, 13 countries resettled only 7490 Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon.

Signatories:

Amnesty International

Human Rights Watch

The Legal Agenda

The Syria Campaign

The Syrian Network for Human Rights

MENA Rights Group

Refugee Protection Watch Coalition (Access Centre for Human Rights, ALEF- Act for Human Rights, Basmeh & Zeitooneh, Le Centre Libanais des Droits Humains (CLDH), PAX, Women Now, Upinion, 11.11.11)

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ecoi.net description:

Joint NGO statement on the summary deportation of hundreds of Syrian refugees to Syria by Lebanese armed forces following arbitrary raids on refugee camps in Lebanon since the beginning of April 2023

Countries:

Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic

Sources:

[AI – Amnesty International](#) , [HRW – Human Rights Watch](#) , SNHR – Syrian Network for Human Rights, MENA Rights Group, The Legal Agenda, The Syria Campaign et al. (Author)

Original link:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/lebanon-halt-summary-deportations-of-syrian-refugees/>

Document type:

Appeal or News Release

Language:
English

Published:
11 May 2023

Available on ecoi.net since:
12 May 2023

Document ID:
2091767

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

