

Extortions and raids:

pressure on Syrian refugees in Lebanon continues

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) regularly reviews the latest development in Syrian refugees' human rights conditions in Lebanon. ACHR's weekly news aims to inform public opinion on the situation of human rights in the country and make the information accessible to Civil Society organizations, donor entities, and decision-makers. The weekly news is followed by monthly reports, regularly published on ACHR's website.

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Following the unfortunate results of the economic collapse and the absence of serious oversight by the authorities in Lebanon, Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) monitored many cases of people who had lost the ability to secure their living needs **pressured Syrian refugees at the ATMs** of the “Lebanese-French” bank in Zahle and the town of Gaza - Western Bekaa. In order to withdraw their financial aid, refugees were forced to pay “extortions,” reaching 800,000 LBP out of the three million they receive as monthly aid allocated to them by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). After following the judicial procedures, the General Directorate of State Security arrested some individuals who carried out these financial extortions; the individuals underwent investigation and were referred to the Public Prosecution Office in Bekaa.

While the number of people lining up in front of ATMs increases, **anticipation prevails among human rights organizations, fearing that these scenes may lead to violent clashes and terrorizing refugees** when they are in dire need of this monthly aid. Moreover, since the beginning of the economic crisis in the country, Syrian refugees are no longer able to withdraw their financial assistance from any ATM because banks stopped facilitating the exchange of withdrawals and non-depositors are no longer allowed to use ATMs, and refugees’ money was restricted to one bank only, the “Lebanese-French” bank. This forced refugees to pay extra transportation fees when they traveled around regions to get their monthly aid, imposing more burdens on them.

As for the deterioration of the human rights and security situation, **members of the State Security raided Camp no. 005 in Majdal Anjar in the district of Zahle and demolished five families’ tents.** The General Security commented on the operation, saying they are destroying uninhabited tents. However, there were no uninhabited tents since many refugees needed tents after increasing prices of house rents or after their tents got damaged during snow storms.

Amidst the aftermath suffering of the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria, **racist statements and hate speech directed toward the Syrian refugees in Lebanon continued.** In addition, several statements by government officials focused on “the necessity of returning the Syrian refugees” and expressed their fears about the earthquake being an obstacle preventing that return.

The crisis in the educational sector in Lebanon **continues as employees of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education carried on their strike for the seventh consecutive week.** The Teachers Union issued a statement holding “the government responsible for the collapse of the educational sector” and called on teachers of all designations to “Stand firm and not come to their workplaces under any pretext.”

The Mena Rights Group Organization earlier submitted a complaint to the UN Special Rapporteur on the extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions. The concerned party agreed to accept the complaint on November 28, 2022. They asked the Lebanese government to provide specific information about the reasons for the detention of Abd Al-Saud, the legal basis for his arrest, whether a detention warrant was issued during the arrest, and if so, which entity signed it. They also requested specific and detailed information about the reasons and circumstances that led to his death in custody hours after his arrest.

According to the document reviewed by ACHR, **they also requested specific information about the forensic investigations conducted on Abd Al-Saud's body after his death in custody,** the progress of the investigation and the results that were communicated to his family, and an explanation of the reasons for transferring the investigations and trial procedures related to his death to the Lebanese military court, and how the requirements of independence and neutrality specified in international standards were respected. The steps taken or intended to be taken to refer the case to ordinary civilian courts were also required. The UN rapporteur gave the Lebanese government 60 days to answer their questions, but the deadline passed without any response from the Lebanese government. The case of Abd Al-Saud dates back to August 30, 2022, when he was arrested by the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp's Internal Security Committee at his residence on the order of the General Directorate of Lebanese State Security for possessing a forged \$50 bill. He was then transferred to the State Security Department in Tibnin, southern Lebanon, where its members tortured him until he died.

The forensic report showed bruises and burn marks in several parts of Abd Al-Saud's body, as well as signs indicating the use of a whip or electric wire. The report concluded that his death was caused by damage to the central nervous system following injuries that caused severe pain and suffering.

On September 2, 2022, **the government commissioner at the military court ordered the detention of five individuals,** including an officer from the State Security branch in Tibnin, and referred them to the military investigating judge, Najat Abu Shakra. On November 29, 2022, she charged them with torture under the Anti-Torture Law of 2017.