



Urgent Statement

on the mass forced deportations of Syrian refugees from Lebanon

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)

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www.achrightrights.org

This April, **the Lebanese authorities deported 64 Syrian refugees following arbitrary raids** conducted in different Lebanese areas. These operations were carried out without considering the legal and political status of these refugees in Syria, thus violating international human rights law, most notably Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as Article 14 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights, and Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture.

On the 10th and 11th of April, **the Lebanese army conducted the mass deportation of 29 Syrian refugees** after raiding their places of residence in Haret Al-Sakher – Jounieh. Through the Masnaa border crossing, they were transferred to an area beyond the Lebanese-Syrian border. According to ACHR's team, these raids were arbitrary. The Lebanese army also carried out another mass deportation of 35 Syrian refugees in Wadi Khaled in Northern Lebanon after the Lebanese army and army intelligence raided their place of residence in Al Mazra'a in Kfardebyan – Keserwan district. They were then moved to Sarba military barracks in Jounieh and transferred to Shadra checkpoint in Akkar before they were handed to the 4th division of the Syrian army.

During raids, the refugees were subjected to ill-treatment in inhumane conditions, even though amongst them were sick people and children. Some were registered at the UNHCR, and even though the refugees deported did not have legal residencies in Lebanon, they had entered Lebanon legally and regularly. Their fate in Syria remains unknown until this day.

We fear that these recent actions result from the plan announced by the Lebanese government in late 2022, in which it declared its intentions to return 15,000 refugees per month to Syria without revealing the plan's content nor the means that the government will follow to implement it. The plan was widely condemned by human rights organizations, including ACHR, in addition to UNHCR, which, on the 29th of July 2022, deleted a statement¹ in which it called on the Lebanese government to respect the conditions of voluntary, dignified, and safe return.

All these operations are conducted within a total media blackout we fear is deliberate and linked to the mentioned plan, for these two mass deportation cases that ACHR has monitored were not reported by any media outlet, unlike what is common in local media agencies: to transmit and cover most incidents happening in Lebanon.

Within its periodic publication, ACHR continues to follow up on the documentation of the cases of systematically deported refugees. ACHR continues to inform UNHCR's offices in Lebanon of cases of deported persons, highlighting the potential dangers for refugees deported to Syria, although one of the primary roles of UNHCR is to deal with forced deportations and to address everything that could pose a threat to Syrian refugees.

Unfortunately, the Syrian refugee file in Lebanon is full of violations, and what happened on the date mentioned above is a dangerous escalation on the part of the Lebanese government and its security institutions towards dealing with Syrian refugees on its soil in methods that fragrantly contradict the International Bill on Human Rights.

¹<https://bit.ly/3MNLgmM>

All individuals have the right to seek asylum and protection from violence and persecution, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Law, including the right, as refugees, to access protection and assistance; their rights should not be violated under any circumstance and in any form. Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that no one shall be subjected to deportation or illegal detention, while Article 14 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights prohibits torture, ill-treatment, and inhumane treatment, including forced deportation. Under Article 3 of the Convention against Torture, states are not permitted to subject anyone to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. States are obligated to apply necessary measures to protect individuals from these forms of treatment. Article 13 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits the forced deportation of any person to any country where they could be subjected to prosecution and allows only for the deportation of foreigners who illegally reside in the country, but this requires fulfilling all the obligations incurred by the state under the relevant international laws and agreements. The state may not take any action that enables it to avoid compliance with these obligations. Countries wishing to deport foreigners must verify that they do not face persecution in their home countries and will not be subjected to torture or ill-treatment.

According to the above, ACHR sees refugees in Lebanon should not be deported nor arbitrarily transferred to Syria, for they might face risks of torture or ill-treatment, in addition to the absence of conditions that guarantee their safety and decent life in their country, which would contradict all international agreements and treaties that guarantee refugee rights. Therefore, it is essential to end these mass forced deportations and allow people against whom deportation decisions were made to appeal them through the appropriate legal methods.

We also call on the Supreme Defense Council in the Ministry of Defense to reverse the decision² issued in April 2019, which significantly impacted legitimizing violations conducted by security services against Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Therefore, we call on the Lebanese authorities again to fully abide by the signed international laws and agreements. We also ask not to issue any decision that does not respect the conditions for voluntary return approved by the UNHCR in its deleted statement, in which it expressed its deep concern regarding the restrictive practices and discriminatory measures against refugees in Lebanon. In this regard, we invite UNHCR to make more significant efforts toward the violations of the rights of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, including arbitrary arrest, forced disappearance, torture, and forced deportation. Lastly, we call on the International Community not to ignore the violations above that expose refugees to direct risks and to activate, in its funding mechanisms, the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) principle, especially concerning refugees subjected to pressures by the Lebanese authorities.

² <https://rb.gy/dhisi>