



Joint Statement

**The Lebanese Army should
Immediately Stop Arbitrary Arrests
and Forced Deportations of Syrian
Refugees in Lebanon**

NGO Stand with Syria Japan (SSJ), based in Tokyo, conducts human rights advocacy and humanitarian assistance in north-western Syria. Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR), based in Beirut and Paris, advocates for the human rights of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Together, we are releasing a joint statement in response to the continuation of arbitrary arrests and forced deportations of Syrian refugees by the Lebanese army in Lebanon.

We strongly condemn the actions of the Lebanese government as well as its army and call for a prompt suspension of the arbitrary arrest and forced deportation of Syrian refugees. Furthermore, we call upon the cooperation of the Japanese government to use all diplomatic means to put a stop to this apparent breach of international human rights law.

Since the wake of the Syria crisis (March 2011), Syrians who stood up for freedom and justice have been brutally oppressed by the government of the Syrian regime and they were exposed to air strikes, which led to mass massacres, and hundreds of thousands of Syrians were subjected to enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and torture, among other grave violations. Approximately 14 million people have been forced to flee their homes and 6.8 million are currently refugees in foreign countries, around 1.5 million of them are staying in Lebanon¹ 805,326 registered in the UNHCR², a country bordering Syria from the west; 90% of them live in extremely poor conditions³. Refugees in Lebanon also witness difficulty in securing the basic needs of their families, as a result of the deterioration of the economic and living conditions in the country, the scarcity of aid provided to them, and the lack of response to their demands by the UNHCR in Lebanon.

From a legal perspective, since 2015, the Lebanese government instructed UNHCR to stop the registration of Syrian refugees, meaning that the government now does not recognize the refugees' right to their status under international law. Therefore, refugees without a residence permit are considered illegal immigrants in the country, which exposes them to various violations and deprives them of their right to live in dignity and safety in a foreign country. The authorities are not only complicating the measures to be taken for Syrians to obtain a legal residency but also actively hindering their access to residencies by unlawfully refusing to grant residencies to those who submit all the required documents. As a result, more than 80% of Syrians do not hold legal residencies.

Furthermore, Lebanese political parties and ministers in the caretaker government issued inciting statements stirring up Lebanese people against refugees, exploiting the refugee file as a scapegoat for the worsening economic crisis in Lebanon, completely disregarding the harmful consequences of such a narrative on the relationship between the Lebanese population and Syrian refugees, noting that the current and previous Lebanese governments have neglected the need to develop clear policies to organize the stay of refugees in the country⁴. In addition, the Lebanese authorities are spreading false information about Syrian refugees which leads to an increase in violence against them.

The last security campaign targeting the dwellings of refugees is an implementation of the decision of the Supreme Defense Council, which provides for the deportation of refugees who entered Lebanon illegally after 24 April 2019. Under these circumstances, the Lebanese Army Forces and the Army Intelligence arbitrarily arrested 841 Syrian refugees between April 1 and June 2023 and forcibly deported 365 of them to Syria. 17 of those who were arrested and 12 of those who were deported had valid residency permits⁵. Thus, in reality, the Lebanese army is conducting the deportation regardless of whether the refugees have residency permits or not.

Forced deportation operations could undermine Lebanon's commitment to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1984⁶, to which it is a party⁷. It is reported that Syrian refugees are being pressured to sign statements claiming they are voluntarily returning to Syria⁸. This contradicts the principle of non-refoulement, which is stipulated in Article 3 of the Convention⁹. It also contradicts Article 14(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."¹⁰

Today, Syrian refugees have chosen not to return to Syria because of the great risks they might face upon their return including detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and death. There is also no guarantee of the return of Syrian refugee families from Lebanon to their original areas from which they fled in Syria. It is crucial to note that Syria is far from a safe country for refugees.

As of July 2023, the arbitrary arrest and deportation of Syrian refugees continue in Lebanon. SSJ and ACHR express their concern over the series of actions taken by the Lebanese Army and urge the army and Lebanese government to halt the arrests and deportations. We also call upon the cooperation of the Japanese government to actively take all diplomatic means to put a stop to the violations and protect Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

To the Lebanese government:

- Cease the implementation of the publicly announced plan to return 15,000 refugees per month to Syria, commit to the principle of non-refoulement, recognize Syria as an unsafe country, and revoke all resolutions allowing the deportation of refugees, including decision no. 50/س/د ا ج م/ع/أ, issued by the Higher Defense Council on the 15h of April 2019, and decision no. 43830/ق.م.ع issued by the GDGS on the 13th of May 2019.
- Take immediate measures to halt any incitement against refugees done by members of parliament, their respective parties, ministers, and political officials.
- Establish clear policies on dealing with refugees and arrivals from Syria that align with the Lebanese constitution and Lebanon's obligations under international law.
- Grant all refugees residing on Lebanese territory the right to apply for legal residency permits and appeal against rejection without imposing onerous conditions that hinder their access to this right.

To the Japanese government

- The violation of human rights of Syrian refugees in Lebanon that we witnessed is a clear breach of international law and a threat to human security which Japan insists on. Take all diplomatic means to put an immediate stop to the arrests and deportations of Syrian refugees by the Lebanese army.

To the UNHCR:

- Activate the role of UNHCR's protection office, provide legal representation, ensure its presence and accessibility all around the country, and answer urgent requests for help for Syrian refugees at risk of deportation.
- Confirm that UNHCR will always prioritize the protection of vulnerable refugees at risk of deportation to Syria over the request for individual data by the Lebanese government.
- Conduct a proper needs assessment process for registering/suspending refugees in Lebanon, following the official protocols/procedures to support their legal presence in the country.

To donors and the international community:

- Pressure the Lebanese government to make strict decisions to fight forced deportations and protect human rights and urge Lebanon to reverse decisions of forced deportations and arbitrary arrests against refugees, human rights defenders, journalists, and lawyers.
- Enhance the international community's role in monitoring the country's human rights situation and facilitate opportunities for conducting comprehensive reviews of the human rights situation in international conferences.

¹ UNHCR, "UNHCR Lebanon at a glance," <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/at-a-glance> (visited 28th May 2023)

² 805,326 of the 1.5 million Syrian refugees who were registered with the UNHCR office in Lebanon are receiving protection from UNHCR. But the UNHCR stopped the registration of the Syrian refugees in 2015 because the Lebanese general security requested to stop registering the refugees and many unregistered refugees receive little protection from UNHCR.

³ UNHCR, "Lebanon", <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/lebanon> (visited 4th July)

⁴ ACHR, "Lebanon's Violation of Human Rights Through The Forced Deportation Of Refugees," <https://www.achrightrights.org/en/2023/05/19/13160/> (visited 28th, May 2023).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1465, p.85

⁷ UN Treaty Body Database, n.d., "Ratification Status for Lebanon" <https://bit.ly/3rbNrVZ>.

⁸ Global Detention Project, "Country Detention Report Immigration on Detention in Lebanon: Deprivation of Liberty at the Frontiers of Global Conflict", February 2018, <https://bit.ly/3IUeq9q>.

⁹ United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1465, p.85. Article 3

¹⁰ UN General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III), available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html>