



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**ON THE REPORT**

# **“WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE FORCED DEPORTATION OF REFUGEES FROM LEBANON?”**

**29 JANUARY 2024**



On Monday January 29, 2024, Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) issued an investigative report revealing the details of the ongoing random security campaign implemented by the Lebanese authorities that aims to forcibly deport Syrian refugees from Lebanon during 2023. ACHR has documented 1,080 cases of arbitrary arrest, and 763 cases of forced deportation to Syria since the beginning of 2023 until December 30.

The report focused on monitoring the arbitrary security campaign launched by the Lebanese army last April on a large scale, which targeted the homes and camps of Syrian refugees in several Lebanese regions. As part of this campaign, male and female refugees and their children were subjected to cruel and degrading treatment, in addition to torture, sexual harassment and ill-treatment during arbitrary detention. The report showed that the Lebanese army used its military vehicles to transport refugees from camps and residences to the military barracks to conduct investigations with them. They were then taken towards the Syrian border and forcibly deported, where they were placed beyond Lebanese borders, and in some cases, the refugees were handed over directly to the Syrian authorities.

The report revealed 13 testimonies of Syrian refugees who were forcibly deported to Syria, most of whom later returned to Lebanon, out of 299 interviews that were conducted by the field researchers in 2023. Out of the 13 deportees, it was confirmed that 10 of them entered legally, one of them had a regular residency permit. Also among these refugees were two minors and four women. 12 of them are also registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as refugees.

The report showed that the number of individuals forcibly deported and documented by Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) increased by up to 496% in 2023, compared to 2022 when 154 people were documented to have been deported. The percentage of individuals who were arbitrarily arrested or detained increased by about 384% in 2023, compared to 2022 where 281 cases were documented.

The report narrates the testimonies of victims, survivors, and/or their families, who clearly expressed real concerns about their forcible return to Syria. They stressed that the way back was full of risks, as it required bribing Syrian authorities and/or human smuggling and trafficking gangs and facing other harsh conditions that almost led to death.

The report pointed out the importance of investigating real doubts narrated by testimonies about the possibility of a joint coordination between the Syrian authorities, the Lebanese army, and human smuggling and trafficking gangs. This is attributed to the dire circumstances to which Syrian refugees are exposed, which indicate that coercive and arbitrary measures have been taken against them, including forced deportation, as the investigation should reveal any interaction or cooperation that may exist between the parties at hand.

The report holds the Lebanese government responsible for the serious violations to which refugees were exposed during the Lebanese Army campaign and demands the conducting of serious and transparent investigations and the accountability of those members of the Lebanese Army involved in illegal activities. It also points to the responsibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and holds it fully accountable to the international community regarding any violations regarding the principle of non-refoulement by the Lebanese government where it agreed to hand over refugee data to the General Directorate of Lebanese General Security. The report called on the international community and donor countries to investigate violations by the Lebanese army and security services and to verify that the support provided to the Lebanese government and the Ministry of Defense does not contribute to committing violations against human rights.