



Urgent Statement

Lebanon Detains and Deports Refugee Doctors, Syrian Activists at Risk

France – Paris
July 4, 2024

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) condemns the detention of Syrian refugee doctors in Lebanon by Lebanese authorities two weeks ago without any official statement from the concerned parties regarding the reason for their detention following an alleged complaint against them filed by the Lebanese Order of Physicians. The doctors are: 1) Dr. Al-Muntaser Billah Nizar Shabaan Qabaqibo, 2) Dr. Ahmad Hussein Al-Najm, 3) Dr. Mohammad Mustafa Al-Akhras, 4) Dr. Ammar Mahmoud Khasara, 5) Dr. Avedis Arteen Ohannes, 6) Dr. Bashar Bassem Mustafa, and 7) Dr. Abdel Hadi Abdel Wahab Khattab.

On June 20, 2024, Lebanese General Security summoned seven Syrian refugee doctors who are human rights defenders residing in Tripoli, northern Lebanon, confiscated their mobile phones, and ordered them to report to General Security in Beirut later. On June 27, the doctors received phone calls summoning them to Lebanese General Security in Beirut under the pretext of retrieving their mobile phones. However, they were detained by General Security without being allowed to contact their families or defense attorneys.

The family of one of the detainees reported that Dr. Qabaqibo, Dr. Al-Najm, and Dr. Al-Akhras are still in custody at Lebanese General Security in Beirut, while another family believed that Dr. Khasara and Dr. Ohannes had been deported. The whereabouts of Dr. Mustafa and Dr. Khattab remain unknown till this day. Their families expressed concern about any potential deportation orders, noting that the doctors face severe security threats in Syria due to their medical and human rights activities in treating war-wounded civilians.

Syrian refugees continue to endure harsh conditions due to extensive security campaigns aimed at pressuring the international community for more funding and support for Lebanon by arresting and deporting Syrian refugees, evicting them from their homes, and intimidating them with military force, specifically targeting human rights activists.

According to ongoing UN assessments, Syria remains unsafe for the return of refugees. Any attempts by Lebanese authorities to forcibly return refugees or compel them to return to Syria directly or indirectly violates Lebanon's commitment to the principle of non-refoulement.

Lebanon's highly politicized local legislation does not sufficiently adhere to due process principles.¹ The only political asylum law in Lebanon is found in Chapter 8 of the 1962 Law of Foreigners,² Articles 26 to 31, which is the primary legal tool governing the rights and obligations of foreigners in the country. However, Article 31 of the law clearly states that "if the expulsion of a political refugee is decided, he may not be deported to the territory of a State where his life or freedom could be threatened." Lebanon, as a signatory to the Convention Against Torture, is bound by Article 3 of the Convention to ensure that individuals at risk of torture are not returned or extradited. Under Lebanese law, deportation orders can only be issued by judicial authority, or, in exceptional circumstances and on an individual assessment basis, by the Director of General Security. Lebanon has violated this principle by repeatedly failing to ensure that individuals at risk of torture are not returned or extradited.

We hold the Lebanese authorities accountable for any harm that may befall them during the investigation and bear full responsibility for their fate should any be proven to have been deported to Syria. We call on the Lebanese authorities to urgently disclose the fate of the doctors, and we demand an immediate halt to all forced deportations of Syrian refugees, particularly activists and human rights defenders, and to fulfill their ethical and legal obligations to protect the rights of all individuals seeking asylum within their borders. The principle of non-refoulement must be respected in accordance with Lebanon's international legal commitments.

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1 <https://icj2.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Lebanon-Migrant-rights-Publications-Reports-Thematic-reports-2020-ENG.pdf>

2 http://77.42.251.205/LawView.aspx?opt=view&LawID=179943#Section_266432