



# STATEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND THE HUNGER STRIKE IN ROUMIEH PRISON

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Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) expresses its deep concern about the ongoing hunger strike by over 100 Syrian refugees detained in Roumieh Prison. The hunger strike, which began on February 11, serves as means of peaceful protest to make various demands including that Syrian detainees are handed over to Syrian authorities to either be released, continue to serve their sentences or to face trial in Syria. The detainees have also sought to draw attention to the inhumane and illegal conditions of their detention in Lebanon and demand better treatment.

The Government of Lebanon (GoL) has long threatened to transfer<sup>1</sup> all Syrian detainees to Syria at a time when detainees would have faced significant security risks<sup>2</sup> from the former Assad regime.<sup>3</sup> The GoL at the time cited inadequate funding<sup>4</sup> to continue to detain them. After the fall of the Syrian regime on December 8th, 2024, the former Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Mikati discussed with Ahmed Al-Sharaa, the new Syrian President, the possibility of transferring<sup>5</sup> all Syrian detainees to Syria. This was welcomed by some detainees and their family members and is an articulated demand of some that are on hunger strike.

Detainees in several ill-reputed Lebanese detention centers, including Roumieh Prison, have long faced systemic injustice and inhumane conditions, including the denial of basic human rights and inadequate essential services such as healthcare, food supply, and medicine<sup>6</sup> Many of these detained refugees have been subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention,<sup>7</sup> prolonged pre-trial detention without proper due process, unfair military court trials, mistreatment, and, in several cases documented by ACHR, severe torture. ACHR has recorded three incidents of hunger strike in Roumieh Prison since 2020. These ongoing demands and the dire situation of those detained highlight the inhuman conditions Syrian refugees face in Lebanese prisons in general, and in Roumieh Prison in particular. ACHR findings reflect a pattern of abuse in Roumieh Prison and beyond that requires urgent intervention from the Lebanese authorities and the international community.

### **Arbitrary arrests, detention and unfair trials:**

Syrian refugees have faced ongoing arbitrary arrest campaigns during security raids, prolonged pre-trial detention with no due process and little clarity or transparency on the specific charges. Due to draconian anti-terrorism laws<sup>8</sup> – which are more restrictive in terms of time periods of legal detention (unlike other charges) and is subjected to a military court trial - Syrian refugees have been arbitrarily detained and systematically denied access to legal assistance and legal rights and subjected to military trials based on different security-related accusations, including terrorism.<sup>9</sup> Violations reported include the denial of the right to a fair trial before an impartial and independent court, mistreatment including in some cases leading to deaths in custody,<sup>10</sup> and some cases of detainees being held despite the end of their sentences.<sup>11</sup> Some Syrian families have also reported being denied visiting rights and restrictions accessing legal representatives.

1- <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2024/05/syrian-prisoners-in-lebanon-face-deportation-risk/>

2- <https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/4893326-suicide-attempts-among-syrian-prisoners-put-lebanon-s-deportation-standards>

3- <https://bit.ly/3Qu6BCp>

4- <https://bit.ly/4hSsAyY>

5- <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2025/02/demands-for-the-release-of-syrian-detainees-in-lebanon/>

6- <https://sites.aub.edu.lb/outlook/2024/01/17/between-bars-and-bites-examining-food-supplies-in-prisons-amid-lebanons-crisis/>

7- <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/25/lebanon-stepped-repression-syrians>

8- <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2022/lebanon/#:~:text=Legislation%2C%20Law%20Enforcement%2C%20and%20Border,terrorism%20were%20passed%20in%202022.>

9- [https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde18/3671/2021/en/?fbclid=IwY2xjawlkivdleHRuA2FibQxMAABHWDileYYwzmCx7K8j7Z\\_z5XlwoeSzDF25PnmoMO4inwd1Xbx0S67Cuy45w\\_aem\\_h6HILXHBm2Nn4Uvnm41x4C](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde18/3671/2021/en/?fbclid=IwY2xjawlkivdleHRuA2FibQxMAABHWDileYYwzmCx7K8j7Z_z5XlwoeSzDF25PnmoMO4inwd1Xbx0S67Cuy45w_aem_h6HILXHBm2Nn4Uvnm41x4C)

10- <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/20/lebanon-deaths-alleged-torture-syrians-army-custody>

11- <https://ccis-lebanon.org/urgent-action-needed-to-prevent-extradition-of-yassin-al-eter/?fbclid=IwAR1gISi8AoCyKucb6RtICsZQLNq-k3120uqh6mo9AOmnTBaTLcCTEWB9FIY>

## **Inhumane conditions, mistreatment and torture:**

ACHR has documented<sup>12</sup> 26 cases of detainees being tortured by Lebanese officers, some were in attempt to obtain confessions. Confessions under torture or coercion is prohibited by law and the confession extracted is considered to be highly unreliable and not admissible in courts of law.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), Roumieh prison was created to hold 1,200 prisoners but currently holds around 4,000 prisoners<sup>13</sup> suggesting a situation of severe overcrowding. Overcrowding has led to a deterioration of conditions and standards of Roumieh prison as well as other prisons in Lebanon, leading to a lack of basic sanitation, inadequate ventilation, lighting, and lack of adequate and nutritious food<sup>14</sup> due to the government's failure to pay outstanding bills. A lack of adequate nutrition and unhygienic conditions makes prisoners more susceptible to health issues and complications, additional psychological and mental stress, and often compounds pre-existing problems. The prisons have also reportedly faced significant shortages in health and medical personnel, medication<sup>15</sup> and challenges managing the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>16</sup> including acquiring basic PPE.

## **Lebanese and International Law:**

A number of established and recognized international human rights law provides clear frameworks relating to detention conditions including in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>17</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)<sup>18</sup>, Human Rights Committee General Comment 35, Article 9 (Liberty and Security of Person)<sup>19</sup>, the body of principles for the protection of all persons under any form of detention or imprisonment<sup>20</sup> and a standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners<sup>21</sup> ("Nelson Mandela Rules"). Both the right to adequate food and to medical treatment and other basic rights are stipulated as necessary conditions of those that are detained or imprisoned.

In addition to the aforementioned international provisions and customary international law, Lebanon joined the Convention against Torture<sup>22</sup> in 2000 as well as the Optional Protocol<sup>23</sup> forbidding torture and cruel or degrading treatment of detainees. The Lebanese Parliament passed Law No. 65/2017<sup>24</sup> in September 2017, which criminalizes torture but, as stated by multiple human rights organizations, falls short of fulfilling Lebanon's obligations under the Convention. As such, the aforementioned inhumane conditions, ill-treatment and lack of basic standards of those in Lebanese prisons indicates multiple violations under both international and Lebanese law.

12- <https://www.achrights.org/2020/04/06/10662/>

13-<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/23/lebanon-harrowing-prison-conditions#:~:text=Roumieh%20prison%20near%20Beirut%2C%20Lebanon's,of%20the%20Beirut%20Bar%20Association.>

14- <https://bit.ly/4bfgyxw>

15- <https://hlh.who.int/ab-detail/providing-essential-noncommunicable-disease-and-mental-health-services>

16- <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/lebanon-government-must-urgently-release-more-prisoners-to-prevent-spread-of-covid19/>

17- <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

18- <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>

19- <https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/GC/35>

20- <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/DetentionOrImprisonment.aspx>

21- <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/TreatmentOfPrisoners.aspx>

22- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading>

23-<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel>

24- <https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/AntiTortureLaw.pdf>

## **ACHR's recommendations:**

### **● To the Lebanese authorities**

- Release Syrian detainees who have been detained without legal basis and immediately transfer Syrian detainees who are willing to be repatriated to Syria.
- Fast track pre-trial detention cases, guarantee basic legal rights and freedoms including the right to legal representation and assistance and ensure the right to a fair trial in civilian court that is independent and impartial.
- Take immediate action to address the conditions in prisons including addressing challenges arising from overcrowding and guaranteeing adequate food and medical care in line with international standards.
- Abide by international and Lebanese anti-torture laws and ensure that all cases of torture that are reported are independently investigated and that preparators are held accountable.
- Allow independent human rights organizations, NGOs and UN agencies access to monitor the human rights conditions in Roumieh prison and other prisons to ensure that the rights of detainees protesting are being upheld.

### **● To the Syrian authorities**

- Prioritize diplomatic engagement on the issue of the detainees with the Government of Lebanon, including establishing mechanisms to review the legal files of all Syrian detainees that are willing to be repatriated to Syria. Further, ensure that family members of the detained inside Syria are guaranteed the right to contact those detained and visit the detained.
- Guarantee the safety of the transferred detainees and ensure that conditions of prisons inside Syria are in line with the international human rights standards.
- Ensure ongoing communication with the GoL to ensure that the rights and freedoms of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not violated and are upheld.

Syrian refugee detainees' hunger strike in Roumieh Prison is an alarming cry for justice. Protestors and other detainees, including non-Syrians, have endured years of injustice and mistreatment. We stand in solidarity with all detainees demanding their rights and call for immediate action by both Lebanese and Syrian authorities to ensure justice and prevent further suffering.