



HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN A WEEK

01 - 07 MAY, 2023



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Human Rights are inherent to all human beings, regardless of the nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language or any other status without discrimination. These rights are all universal, inalienable, interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

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LEBANON

Monday
01 May 2023

Syrian Refugees Deported from Lebanon Face Arrest and Conscription, Say Relatives

Syrian refugees detained and deported by security forces in Lebanon have been subject to arrest and forced conscription upon return to their war-ravaged homeland, their relatives and rights advocates have told Reuters. Some said their loved ones were being held by the Syrian army's Fourth Division, which is headed by President Bashar al-Assad's brother and has been sanctioned for rights violations. Amnesty International says the deportations are a "clear violation" by Lebanon of international law under the principle of "non-refoulement," which prohibits nations from forcibly returning anyone to a country where they risk persecution. The Syrian government did not respond to a request for comment. The Lebanese army, which has been carrying out the deportations according to Amnesty International, also declined to comment.

Tuesday
02 May 2023

Protesting Taxi Drivers Block Key Roads Across Lebanon

Protesting taxi drivers blocked several vital roads and highways across Lebanon to voice various demands. The drivers blocked the Saifi road, Beirut-Karantina highway, Jounieh highway, and the main Hamra street following a sit-in at the Riad al-Solh Square. The protesters decried "the continued chaos in the sector and the deterioration of living conditions," calling on authorities to crack down on "violators, drivers with fake license plates, and bikers who transport passengers on their motorcycles." They also called for banning Syrian drivers, tuk-tuks, and those who operate through "WhatsApp groups" and "illegal applications." In a statement issued Monday, the drivers had apologized to "the citizens who will be stranded in their cars," explaining that they no longer have "any other choice."

Wednesday
03 May 2023

Syrian Refugees Fearful as Lebanon Steps Up Deportations

Lebanese officials are cracking down on Syrian refugees against a worsening economic crisis and political stalemate, an escalation that has caused panic among Syrians in the country. "People aren't sleeping in their houses ... and are afraid even to go to work," said a woman from the Syrian province of Idlib living in the Bekaa Valley. Her husband was deported on April 10, along with 28 other men, after a raid on an apartment building in the Beirut suburb of Jounieh, she said, and she hasn't heard from him since. Pressure has increased in other ways. Municipalities have put in place restrictive measures such as curfews for Syrians. The Interior Ministry announced that it ordered municipalities to survey and register their Syrian populations and make sure they are documented before permitting them to rent a property. It also asked the UN refugee agency to revoke refugee status from Syrians who go back and forth between Lebanon and their war-torn country.

Lebanese Government Puts New Restrictions on Syrian Refugees

Lebanon's Ministry of Interior announced a raft of new restrictions on Syrian refugees amid a greater crackdown on the around 1.8 million Syrians living in the country. Minister of Interior Bassam Mawlawi told municipalities to start registering Syrian refugees living in the area and to make registration of legal residency a prerequisite for Syrians wishing to rent or buy real estate. He said that this effort would be part of a national survey to determine the number of Syrians residing in Lebanon. Mawlawi also told UNHCR to revoke the refugee status of any Syrian refugee who goes to Syria and then returns back to Lebanon, but it is unclear if UNHCR has the capacity to monitor which refugees have crossed the border to Syria. The new restrictions on Syrian refugees in Lebanon come as Lebanese authorities have launched a deportation campaign, sending at least 168 Syrians back to Syria in April. Human rights monitors have condemned the deportations, warning that refugees face the possibility of torture upon return. "Most of the Syrians do not have legal residence in Lebanon, not because they do not want it, but because the Lebanese government is not giving it. There is no clear mechanism to apply for asylum in Lebanon," Wadih al-Asmar, president of the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH), told TNA.

Migrant Workers Abused and Ignored Under the Kafala System

According to Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), the latest estimates show that there are around 135,000 migrant workers in Lebanon, most of whom are from Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. The majority are women employed in private homes as domestic workers – cleaning, cooking, and looking after the children of their employers. In Beirut, MSF provides migrant workers with general medical consultations, prescriptions and medication, basic wound care, and minor surgeries. "Many patients, mostly women, have highlighted the poor and unhealthy conditions in which they live and work, leading to negative impacts on their wellbeing," says Hanadi Syam, MSF medical referent for the migrant workers project. With rising inflation and transport costs, access to healthcare has become a challenge for many people, often forcing them to prioritize their need for essentials, such as food, over healthcare. "Most of our patients who do not live in their employers' houses stay in unsanitary or overcrowded homes, and many turn to destructive behaviors as a coping mechanism," says Nour Khoury, MSF psychologist.

Thursday
04 May 2023

Justice Minister Restricts Judges' Freedom

Justice Minister Henri Khoury has reiterated his stance on restricting judges freedom. On April 26, he issued two circulars that restrict the freedom and movement of judges, forcing them to obtain prior permission from him personally before any media appearance and any travel outside Lebanese territories. The circular also prevents judges from communicating with any embassy or organization if the minister is not the intermediary. The first circular, No. 248, forces judges to obtain prior permission from the minister ten days before leaving Lebanon, and prevents them from communicating directly with any governmental or non-governmental association, at home or abroad, or with any embassy "before submitting requests from the party issuing the invitation to the minister of justice." In the second circular, No. 352, Khoury prohibits judges "from appearing in any type of media, and from expressing any public stance on any media, electronic or otherwise, without obtaining prior permission from the relevant authority," i.e. the minister of justice himself.

Friday
05 May 2023

Lebanon Signs Contracts for 11 Solar Power Plants To Address Energy Shortage

Lebanese Energy Minister Walid Fayyad signed contracts with 11 private sector companies to construct solar power plants, each with a capacity of 15 megawatts, according to the National News Agency. The solar energy produced by these 11 power plants will be sold at variable prices, with the Bekaa region's plants charging 5.7 US cents per kilowatt-hour and plants in the rest of the country charging 6.27 US cents per kilowatt-hour. These prices are significantly lower than the cost of power generated by the state-run Électricité du Liban, which currently stands at \$0.17 per kilowatt-hour. Lebanon is grappling with a chronic electricity shortage, causing daily power cuts lasting up to 20 hours. This shortage has been worsened by a scarcity of US dollars, limiting the country's ability to import fuel to operate power stations. Additionally, the prices of private generator services have skyrocketed after the removal of fuel subsidies amid Lebanon's financial crisis. The new solar power plants are a critical step in addressing the country's ongoing energy crisis.

Saturday and Sunday
06 and 07 May 2023

MEPs Call for an Independent Investigation into Beirut Blast, Urge Need for Sanctions

Four Members of the European Parliament from the centrist group Renew Europe, Christophe Grudler, Dacian Ciolos, Salima Yenbou, and Georgos Kyrtzos, visited Lebanon on a fact-finding mission to renew solidarity with the Lebanese people. According to a press release, the MEPs visited Lebanon to assess the fight against corruption since the adoption of the resolution they pushed at the European Parliament in September 2021, which described the situation to be "a man-made disaster caused by a handful of men across the ruling political class." The MEPs underlined the need to have an independent international investigation to find the reasons and the people responsible for the Beirut Port explosion. "We cannot accept impunity on Europe's doorstep, and this starts with respecting an independent judiciary," it stated. Regarding sanctions, they called on European Institutions to implement a "robust" sanctions regime against corrupt politicians, businessmen, bankers, and those involved in large-scale corruption and blocking democratic life. The Renew Europe group also stated that they would ask for a debate with a resolution in the European Parliament regarding "the situation in Lebanon, three years after the explosion in the port of Beirut" as soon as their return to Europe.