



ONGOING MASSIVE ARREST, ABUSE AND TORTURE IN LEBANON

Report - Lebanese Information Center. (August-September 2001)

Facts

Based on reports by Amnesty International, the International Federations of Human Rights, Lebanon's Human Rights associations inside and outside the country, Lebanese members of Parliament, Heads of Lebanon's national Churches, the main Lebanese opposition parties, exiled Lebanese leaders and associations around the world, Lebanese newspapers, student organizations from various political backgrounds, Lebanon's Bar Association, the Medical and Engineers Unions, the permanent observers of our organization inside Lebanon, as well as the international news agencies such as AP, AFP and Reuters, the following facts have been confirmed:

On August 5th - 6th, and while the spiritual leader of the national Church of Lebanon, Cardinal Nasrallah Sfeir was visiting areas in the Shuf mountain, to preach reconciliation and encourage the return of displaced people to their villages, and accompanying his celebration of religious services in those areas, thousands of young Lebanese from Christian and Druze background were waving Lebanese national flags and chanting for the withdrawal of the Syrian Army from Lebanon. In addition, leaflets calling for the cessation of the occupation of Lebanon by Syria and the liberation of political prisoners were distributed during the events. In parallel, and during the same week end, youth in the East Beirut areas were peacefully distributing flyers calling for the implementation of UN resolution 520 calling for the pull out of the Syrian forces.

Starting August 6th and for several days, units of the Lebanese state security forces, and of the Syrian intelligence services operating in Lebanon, waged a massive campaign of brutal arrests, beatings and transfer to detention centres in various locations, including in the Ministry of Defence overlooking Beirut.

Amnesty International alert issued on August 9th, wrote ***"Scores of members of outlawed opposition parties, including students and teenagers, have been arrested by military intelligence over the last three days. All are said to be detained incommunicado, and they are at risk of torture and unfair trial."***

Human Rights and news services have reported that more than 250 persons have been detained, including lawyers, engineers, doctors, journalists, university and college students, human rights activists, as well as political activists. Among the arrested and detained leaders, University Professor Dr Toufiq Hindi, spokesperson for the "disbanded" Lebanese Forces Party", and Mr Nadim Lteif, General Coordinator of the "Lebanese Free Patriotic Current." Dr Hindi was arrested from his home by plain cloth intelligence services' operatives whilst Mr. Lteif was abducted alongside all those attending a meeting at their headquarters in Antelias. They were all transferred to The Ministry of Defence detention centre. It is to note that the arrests have particularly targeted the partisans of the two main opposition currents, the Lebanese Forces Party, whose leader former minister Dr Samir Geagea is

in jail, and the Free Patriotic Current, whose leader, former Prime Minister Michel Aoun lives in exile in France. Members from other Political Parties, such as the National Liberal Party and independent activists were also rounded-up. The arrests included young men and women as well as teenagers. Students were arrested whilst they were in a meeting and their premises systematically destroyed. Reports confirmed beatings during the arrests and brutal transfers to military detention centres.

Moreover, another massive crackdown was reported on Thursday August 9th, when Lebanese and reportedly Syrian intelligence units, in plain clothes stormed a peaceful demonstration by Lebanese youth who were protesting against the mass arrests. The SS-like blitz was staged by the Syrian security and pro-Syrian militiamen with full collaboration of the Lebanese security forces who helped in isolating the victims in small numbers in preparation of their assault. Hundreds of young men and women were beaten and dragged in the streets of Beirut, faces and bodies bleeding. Hospitals in the capital were overflowing by victims of this terror attack against peaceful demonstrators.

The tension remained high as military spokespersons threatened to unleash further violence against the civilians if they persisted in expressing their rejection of the Syrian occupation and resumed criticism against Pro-Syrian President of Lebanon, General Emile Lahoud. Brigadier Jamil el-Sayyid, head of the Lebanese General Security, warned in public statements from further crackdown and oppression in defence of Syria's presence of Lebanon. Information received by the Lebanese opposition confirms that the various security agencies are preparing for wider scope arrests and transfer to detention centres. The information also confirms that ill treatment has already been applied to detainees.

The French NGO *Journalistes Sans Frontieres*, as well as other independent sources, have reported that more persons and journalists were arrested and beaten up, news media have been threatened, and orders were given to pro-Syrian squads to terrorize the civilian population. According to underground sources, the paramilitary elements, unleashed by the regime and the Syrians have already infiltrated and massively deployed in the following areas in central Lebanon: East Beirut, Matn, Kesrouan, Jbail, Baabda, Zghorta, Koura, Becharre, Aley, Chouf, Jezzine and Zahle.

An undetermined number of civilians, particularly youth are in hiding until now inside Lebanon, for fear of persecution.

Consequences

Based on the courageous statements made by Maronite Cardinal Sfeir, Druze leader Walid Joumblat, a number of members of the Lebanese Parliament, journalists and other national leaders, this mass scale abuse of Human Rights indicates clearly that the Lebanese Republic, which is under Syrian military occupation, is falling under a military dictatorship controlled by the country's head of state General Emile Lahoud, his principal assistant, Colonel Jamil el-Sayyed and the various security agencies.

The Lebanese Diaspora and the Lebanese communities in exile are extremely concerned about the widening and the deepening of the brutal oppression of Lebanese youth and civilians and the mass arrest, torture and terror sponsored by the pro-Syrian regime in Beirut. These developments, which are increasing in violence by the day, are reminiscent of the brutal oppression in East Timor where Indonesian security forces and their militias have brutalized the civilian populations causing ethnic cleansing and mass exodus. The Lebanese regime's suppression of liberties and its use of mass violence are comparable to the Pinochet regime's tragedies. The situation in Lebanon is closely coming

to a stage where an entire segment of the society is being targeted and physically abused.

The above-mentioned arrests, particularly of the two leaders, Toufic Hindi and Nadim Lteif, have sparked extreme concerns in Lebanon and worldwide. Amnesty International ***“believes that they may have been detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association, and may be prisoners of conscience. All were held at the Ministry of Defense Detention Center in Yarze where torture and ill treatment of political prisoners is routine.*”**

Official charges and Army released statements carried accusations such as “exploiting the climate of freedom and stability to spread riots and stir up sensitivities through raising insulting slogans against certain authorities-ie President Lahoud.”

The army warned it was unacceptable that such forces be allowed to flourish when the Middle East “has been pushed to the brink of a major explosion because of daily Israeli massacres committed against the Palestinians.”

“The army command will take all legal and necessary steps to restore stability and prevent any threat to national security during this fateful and sensitive phase.”

Public Prosecutor Adnan Addoum said the next day that his office had ordered the “detention of several people suspected of involvement in actions, which threaten national security and reflect disrespect for state authority and for a sisterly country,- a reference to Syria.”

Although most of the detainees have later been released, the danger of violating the individual basic rights in Lebanon remains a painful reality. Nothing indicates that these events will not recur, every time the dictatorial regime feels threatened. Five people still remain in jail: Toufic Hindi, Elie Keyrouz, Selman Samaha, Antoine Bassile and Habib Younes, accused on being in contact with the Israeli enemy. Although no proof against them has been established so far.

Furthermore, last week, new arrests were carried by security and military elements against members of the Opposition from the Lebanese Forces Party. The whereabouts of those kidnapped remain unknown. Credible reports mention they are detained at the Ministry of Defence detention centre and are being submitted to torture and psychological pressure.