



Report on Lebanese Detainees in Syrian Prisons
AUGUST 2003

Index:

- A- Introduction**
- B- Why Does Syria Detain Lebanese?**
- C- Official Lebanese and Syrian Positions (1987-2003)**
- D- Missing in Syrian Jails**
- E- From One Detention Center to Another**
- F- Testimonies of Released Detainees**
- G- Human Rights Groups' Positions**
- H- Recommendations**

A- Introduction

On June 25, 2003 Joseph Emile Houeiss, a Lebanese citizen, 43 years old, died in detention in a Syrian jail. His remains were returned to Lebanon six days later and buried hastily in his native village in the Bekaa Valley. It was the fourth case in which the body of a Lebanese prisoner has been repatriated from a Syrian detention center in relative secrecy. Joseph was arrested in Lebanon in 1992 by Syrian Military Forces following a road accident in which 2 Syrians died. He was immediately transferred to Syria where he was serving a 20 years sentence handed by a Syrian Military Court.

This is one example of an on-going tragedy, the one of the many Lebanese illegally detained in Syria.

December 2000 brought first what seemed to be happy news to Lebanese families when Syria released 46 Lebanese detainees from its jails. Human Rights Organizations and Political figures hailed it a good initiative. But soon the mood changed when Syrian Officials declared that there was no more Lebanese detained in Syrian jails. Families rushed to protest the death sentence against their loved ones and demanded the Lebanese Government to assume its responsibility towards its citizens and attempt to locate them or at least acknowledge their presence in Syria. As a result of public and media pressures and the mounting protest to closing the files of detainees, Lebanese State Prosecutor Adnan Addoum suddenly announced that Syria still holds 95 Lebanese Nationals charged with common crimes and that they will not be released until they serve their jail time in Syria.

But, even when counting those who were released and adding those names provided by the Lebanese State Prosecutor, there remain a much larger number of undeclared persons believed to be held in Syrian custody. Their families are devastated and times and times again they ride this emotional roller coaster of being forced to believe that their sons are dead or permanently missing. However, those families are convinced that if they keep pushing, Syria will release prisoners she previously denied holding.

B- Why Does Syria Detain Lebanese?

Since its military incursion into Lebanon in 1976, Syrian forces, military and intelligence, have been summoning, interrogating, detaining and transferring Lebanese (and other foreigners residing in Lebanon) to Syria. Those arrested are deprived of their basic rights, including access to family, legal counsel, they are often tortured, mistreated, and kept in Detention Centers in lamentable condition. There is no clear and transparent legal proceeding, no respect for due process. Number of those arrested remains jailed for years before being brought to Court, if ever. Sentences are swiftly pronounced by Military Courts without right to appeal

Syria deals with the Lebanese in Lebanon as it deals with the Syrians in Syria. It considers any political opposition or any threat to its interests in Lebanon, a threat to its security. Syria does not tolerate any opposition to its presence in Lebanon, and detention is a method among others to curb this opposition.

The accusations used against detainees vary from collaboration with Israel to political affiliation with groups opposed to the Syrian presence in Lebanon.

The Syrian and the pro-Syrian Lebanese Governments often accuse members of the opposition of serving Israeli interest in Lebanon. The Lebanese President Emile Lahoud states that those demanding Damascus withdraw its soldiers from Lebanon are serving Israel, and are working against Syrian and Lebanese interests. Also, Syrian officials declared "Lebanese parties who are launching a campaign against Syrian presence in Lebanon are serving Israel's purposes and interests."

C- Official Lebanese and Syrian Positions (1987-2003)

To better understand how the Lebanese and Syrian governments have dealt with the issue of Lebanese Detainees in Syria over the years, it is necessary to provide this chronology of events and declarations:

- 1- **October 1987:** Amnesty International published a report about Lebanese detained in Syrian Jails
- 2- **In 1993:** Lebanese President Elias Hrawi, a Syrian ally, announced to the BBC that Syria does not hold Lebanese prisoners.
- 3- **In 1995:** the Lebanese Government issued a decree, which considers all missing during the Lebanese War to be legally dead. This decision inhumanly requested the families to initiate this process, thus relieving the Government from the burden of its responsibility towards its citizens.
- 4- **October 1996:** Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, another ally of Syria, denied, while visiting in Washington DC, the presence of any Lebanese detainee in Syria, when asked by Human Rights Watch delegate Houeyda Saad.
- 5- **November 24, 1996:** Lebanese President Elias Hrawi, altered his previous statement and announced in a Press Conference that Syria holds 210 Lebanese Nationals comprised of 200 Muslims and 10 Christians.
- 6- **October 1997:** the "Lebanese Committee of the families of Detainees in Syria" was established to pressure Lebanese authorities to ensure the release of the detainees from Syria or at least to transfer them to Lebanon to be tried in Lebanese courts, in case they committed a crime.
- 7- **February, 28 1998:** the President of the Bar Association in Syria denied the existence of Lebanese prisoners in Syrian detention centers.
- 8- **March 1998:** Syrian authorities admitted the existence of 155 Lebanese prisoners in Syria. They announced that 25 more Lebanese would still be held for collaboration with Israel.
- 9- **March 5 1998:** Syrian Authorities ordered the release of 121 Lebanese detainees. Amongst those, were 10 Palestinians.
- 10- **January 27, 1999:** Amnesty International published a detailed report about Lebanese

Detainees in Syria.

- 11- **September 22, 1999:** Adel Khalaf Ajouri, a Lebanese, died under torture in a Syrian prison. He was kidnapped at a Syrian Checkpoint in Beirut Airport in May 5, 1990. His family received his remains 30 days later.
- 12- **January 21, 2000:** Prime Minister Salim Al Hoss set up a commission of inquiry to investigate "disappearances" during the war between 1975 and 1990. The Commission headed by an Army General and including four members, officers in the Army, the Surete Generale, the State Security and the Internal Security was to look into a total of 17,415 people who are listed missing during the war. It was ordered to report back within three months. No tangible outcome ever resulted from this commission.
- 13- **February 17, 2000:** A conference to address the fate of scores of Lebanese jailed in Syrian Prisons was cancelled after Lebanese Security agents stormed the Conference center and forced it to shut its door to the participants.
- 14- **July 2000:** Lebanese Officials close to Syria stated that there are no Lebanese held in Syria.
- 15- **August 25, 2000:** the Syrian authorities released Cheikh Hachem Minkara, a prominent Islamist activist in Tawhid Movement in Tripoli, North of Lebanon, who disappeared 15 years ago, and whom Syria had previously denied holding. It also released Samir Al-Hassan, military official in Tawhid Movement.
- 16- **September 2000:** Lebanese Human Right Organizations and Dozens of Lebanese Families held a demonstration near the Maronite Christian Patriarchate and accused Syria of having illegally jailed Lebanese opponents. Syria denied the accusation.
- 17- **September 26, 2000:** a statement was released by a large gathering of 99 Syrian individuals, including intellectuals, artists, engineers and journalists calling on the Syrian Government to cancel the state of emergency and the martial law, to grant amnesty for all political detainees and to allow for political freedoms.
- 18- **September 30, 2000:** SOLIDE (Support for Lebanese in Detention and Exile) organized in Lebanon on the road leading to Baabda Presidential Palace a demonstration of 300 relatives of Lebanese detained in Syria. Representatives of the families were finally granted an interview with an official at the Lebanese Defense Ministry.
- 19- **October 1, 2000:** an official Syrian source admitted for the first time that Syria is holding Lebanese prisoners, but said that they number fewer than 50.

20- **December 2000:** Nabih Berri, the Lebanese Speaker of the House, who is also close to the Syrian regime, mentioned after his visit with the Maronite Patriarch, the possible release of Lebanese Detainees from Syrian jails.

21- **December 6, 2000:** Lebanon National News Agency (NNA) published an official statement that the Lebanese President Emile Lahoud received a letter from Syrian President Bashar al Assad regarding the release of “Lebanese detainees” from Syrian jails. This Syrian initiative is a reward to the Lebanese President for his national stands, in regards to the struggle with Israel and to the support of the Syrian presence in Lebanon.

A committee of top Lebanese Security Officials was formed to take charge of receiving the prisoners and studying their files. The Committee was headed by State Prosecutor Adnan Addoum and included Director of Surete Generale, Major General Jamil Sayyed, Director of the Internal Security Forces Major General Abdel-Karim Ibrahim, and Director of Military Intelligence, Colonel Raymond Azar.

22- **December 2000:** Syria hands over to Lebanese Military Officials who traveled to Syria 54 prisoners, 46 Lebanese, 7 Palestinians and one Egyptian. Two buses carrying the freed detainees rolled across the Syrian-Lebanese border at high speed, escorted by seven Lebanese Army jeeps, their sirens wailing. Families who had been waiting at Masnaa crossing point since early morning were left on the side of the road, unable to determine whether their loved ones were on the buses. Photographers could see passengers handcuffed and blindfolded as the vehicles maneuvered their way past the border checkpoint and down the road to Chtoura in Lebanon.

23- **December 12, 2000:** after mounting pressure from the Public and the media, State Prosecutor Adnan Addoum makes public the presence of 95 Lebanese detainees still imprisoned in Syria for non-political crimes. He declared the matter to be “permanently closed.” When reminded that both governments had earlier denied the existence of any Lebanese prisoners in Syria, State Prosecutor Addoum claimed that they had only denied the existence of “detainees,” not those who had been convicted of various crimes.

24- **December 26, 2000:** As a result of continuing protest by the families of the Detainees, a statement was issued by the Lebanese Presidential Palace clarifying that President Lahoud was prepared to “request the Cabinet, in its next meeting, to set down a mechanism for investigating the fate of those missing, based on information submitted by their families to the

competent security authorities.”

- 25- **January 2001:** another special commission was created by the Lebanese government under pressure from the families of the missing individuals. No official report has been issued yet. However, one member of the commission declared to the press that the commission had examined 96 files of Lebanese detainees in Syria.
- 26- **June 20, 2001,** Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad during a visit to France declared that there were no Lebanese prisoners in Syria.
- 27- **June 2001,** soon after this statement by Syria’s President, Syrian Authorities freed 11 Lebanese and delivered the remains of one Lebanese who died in jail Khaled Ezzedine el-Ass. Those released are: Mohammed Ahmed Moussawi, Khalil Ibrahim Hamad, Badreddine Ajaj Ghandour, Ali Abbas Mazloun, Khaled Ezzedine el-Ass, Moussis Bedros Moujalian, Jamil Youssef Hawach, Ali Merhi Khaled, Yehia Hassan Awad, Mahmoud Nasr Chandab et Nabil Abdallah Fawaz.
- 28- **July 22, 2002,** the Association of Families of Lebanese Prisoners Detained in Syria met with the Syrian Minister of the Interior Ali Hammoud and the Director of Syrian Jails Boghos Sarraj, both admitted that a number of Lebanese citizens, specifically Lebanese Army personnel, were being held in Syrian jails. The two Syrian officials promised the families to review the detainees’ files submitted to them and provide answers to the families within a 2-3 months period of time. The families have been waiting since then.
- 29- **October 11, 2002,** Lebanese citizen Henri Badih Daou was arrested at the Syrian border and detained in isolation. The Syrian authorities accused him of crimes committed in Lebanon against the Syrian Army in 1975.
- 30- **November 9, 2002,** the daily Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat published comments made by Prosecutor General Adnane Addoum in which he admitted the existence of 20 Lebanese political prisoners in Syria.
- 31- **December 11, 2002** Lebanese MP Mrs. Nayla Moawad addressed the Commission, headed by Minister Fouad Es-Saad charged with investigating the fate of Lebanese political detainees in Syria, and questioned the fact that it had not yet issued any finding to the families and relatives of the detainees. Ms. Sonia Eid, President of the Association of Families of Lebanese Prisoners Detained in Syria and whose son Jihad has been held in Syria since 1990, was present and spoke at the session of Parliament. Pro-Syrian MPs and Ministers refused to

address the issue in Parliament and accused Mrs. Moawad of taking an anti-Syrian stance harmful to Lebanon's sisterly relations with Syria.

32- **May 11, 2003**, Hanna Youssef Challita who holds dual citizenships, Lebanese and Australian, was arrested at the Syrian border and then incarcerated at the "Palestine Section 235" Investigations Bureau in Damascus for unknown reasons. Mr. Challita was released few days later without being charged.

33- **June 9, 2003**, A delegation of the Association of Families of Lebanese Prisoners traveled to Damascus to meet with the Syrian President and discuss the release of their missing relatives, Although they were originally promised an audience with President Bachar al-Assad, they were later denied the meeting.

34- **June 25, 2003** Joseph Emile Houeiss, a Lebanese citizen, died in detention in a Syrian jail after 11 years of detention following a car accident in Lebanon in which Syrian citizens were killed.

D- Missing in Syrian Jails

The following provides testimonies and background information on a number of detainees in Syrian jails, and whose existence has been repeatedly denied by Syrian (and Lebanese) authorities. Their families insist they have seen them and know their whereabouts.

- **Butros Khawand:** Khawand was kidnapped at 9:00 AM on September 15, 1992, about a block away from his home in Sin-El-Fil, a city controlled by the Syrian Army in East Beirut. His car was intercepted by a squad of eleven gunmen in a red van and two cars who forced him into the van and drove away. He has not been seen since.

In 1982, Khawand was Head of Kataeb Security Council, the anti-Syrian Christian Militia. Shortly after his second marriage in 1986, Khawand resigned from all his duties in the Kataeb, while remaining a member of the party's political bureau

Khawand's family and various Human Rights Organizations confirm that he is currently held in Aadra prison in Syria. Pro-Syrian Lebanese Officials have constantly denied.

- **Beshara Rumiye**: Miranda Rumiye spoke about her son Beshara who was taken by Syrian intelligence agents in the remote town of Riyaq in the eastern Bekaa Valley on March 2, 1978. "They told us that he was detained because he had a pass from the National Liberal Party,"-a Lebanese Party politically opposed to Syrian presence in Lebanon- He was only 16. Miranda Rumiye visited Beshara in a Syrian detention center near the Masnaa main border crossing, once every two weeks over the next 11 months. "The first time I saw him, his feet were swollen because he had been beaten. And every time I visited him, he gave me clothes to wash which were stained with blood," she said. One day, she was told that Beshara and other Lebanese detainees had been transferred to jails inside Syria. That was the last she heard from him. Beshara did not return home, although Elie, his brother, insists that a Syrian intelligence officer had confirmed that his name was among those to be released.
- **Tony Tamer** was born in Tripoli, North of Lebanon in 1969. He was detained by Syrian Military in Lebanon on July 7, 1993. Seven months later, his parents visited him in Mazzeh, a Syrian Prison for the first time, and then they were allowed to see him every three months. Tony hasn't been released yet. Charges against him are so far unknown.
- **Elias Tanios and Elias Abu Ghosn**, 2 Lebanese Internal Security Forces members, were arrested by Syrian elements in Lebanon in 1992. Elias Tanios was arrested in December 15, 1992 when the Syrians surrounded the house where he was staying at Tallet al Khayat and took him with his brother and his cousin Elias Abu Ghosn handcuffed and blindfolded to Hotel Beaurivage in Beirut. His brother was released 24 hours later after being beaten. Elias was taken to Anjar, a Syrian Detention Center in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon and then to Mazzeh Prison in Syria. His father visited him in Mazzeh, seven months after he was taken. The visits then became regular, once per month. One week before the death of the Syrian President Hafez al Assad, the family was informed that Elias had been condemned to ten years in prison on "collaboration charges", ie working for Israel, and that they are not authorized to see him anymore.
- **Joseph Aoun and Tanios Shedid** (cousins) were kidnapped in 1982 by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party- a Pro-Syrian Lebanese group- when they were on their way to Beirut from their hometown in Saghbin, West Bekaa. Both the Aoun family and George Shedid, Tanios' brother, insist they have a complete list of testimonies from eyewitnesses proving that their relatives were seen in Syrian prisons throughout the 1980s, after they were handed over to the

Syrians by the SSNP during Israel's 1982 invasion. Over the years, the Aouns have tried in vain to visit Joseph in prison. After meeting with several high-ranking Lebanese officials, they were told their son was in Syria, charged with being an Israeli agent and therefore they could not see him.

- **Joseph Fares**, a Lebanese Army soldier, was arrested in 1984 by Syrian Intelligence agents in Lebanon, and is still missing.
- **George Shalaweet**: Was abducted in March 30, 1994 by Syrian Forces in Lebanon. Ayoub and Nadia Shalaweet visited their son George “more than 20 times” between 1994-1998 in Syria. “We’d go about once every three months,” said Ayoub. Nadia recalled the site of her shrunken, haggard son the first time they visited him. “From 95 kilograms, he now weighed 30.” she said. “He was handcuffed. His feet were swollen. His hair was overgrown and his beard was down to here,” she added, pointing to her waist.
- **Joseph Hanna Yammine**: born in Aïn Dara in 1960, was arrested in his home in June 1987 by Syrian Intelligence Services of Zahle, in the Bekaa Valley. He was held for three days in Chtoura Syrian Detention Center located in Lebanon. Afterwards, he was taken for five days to Anjar, a Syrian Detention Center in Lebanon and later transferred to the “Palestinian Branch” in Mazzeh Prison in Syria. In 1988, his mother Alice visited him in prison. He was later transferred to Tadmor Syrian Prison and his father visited him there in 1992. Since 1991, released prisoners visited the Yammine family upon Joseph’s request. Mansour Eid from Zahle spent four years with him in prison. “He even described the shirt that I have sent to Joseph”, said Tony, his brother. Rajah Salloum and Najah Kazoun from Kib Elias, former prisoners, also saw Joseph in prison. The last news of Joseph Yammine received by his family were in 1997. He was in Tadmor Prison in Syria.
- **Two Antonin Priests, Fathers Albert Cherfan and Sleiman Abou Khalil** were abducted with their helper Victoria Daccache by Syrian Soldiers on October 13, 1990, in the Lebanese City of Beit Meri. Written testimonies from eyewitnesses who gave the two priests water to drink, state that they were in Syrian military vehicles, transferring them to Syria. Lebanese State Prosecutor Addoum, a staunch supporter of Syria, said that the two priests were buried near the Defense Ministry, along with 25 Syrian soldiers killed in combat in October of 1990.
- **Najib Jaramani** was arrested by Syrian elements in January 24, 1997 and was visited last in

© LEBANESE INFORMATION CENTER – ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Syrian Prisons by his parents in 1997.

- **Six soldiers of the Lebanese Army** then under the command of the General Michel Aoun disappeared on October 13, 1990, following military fighting with the Syrian Army. They are believed to be held in Syrian jails. They are: Corporal Johnny Nassif of Battalion 101, Staff Sergeant Marwan Zoghbi of Battalion 101, Youssef Hasbani, of the Republican Guard, and Privates Joseph Azar, Elie Haddad and Elias Aoun. Violette Nassif, the mother of one of the missing soldiers said “Johnny was 26 years old when he was taken to Syria. The government may have closed the file, but we won’t.”. “I saw him in 1991 and 1994 in Palmyra Prison (in Syria),” Violette insisted, saying she was told that another 146 Lebanese were being held there.
- **Antoine Zakhour and Salem Nassif:** Lebanese Army soldiers were arrested by Syrian Military in the Lebanese Cities of Beit Meri and Dahr al Wahish, on October 13, 1990. Their presence in Syria was confirmed following official documents issued by the Lebanese Ministry of Defense on October 22, 1990. Amnesty International issued a statement on 12/12/2000 requesting information on the fate of both men known to be held in Syria.
- **Samir Mikhayel al Hage:** taken by Syrian Forces from Lebanon and held in Tadmur Syrian Prison for 7 years, now. His parents in Rmeish, a village in South of Lebanon, contacted al Nahar, a Lebanese newspaper, confirming information their son is in a Syrian jail, although Syrian authorities deny it.
- **Karam & Ziad Yussef Morkos (brothers) and Elie Abu Nader,** Flutist and two Violinists ages 40, 35 and 40 respectively. Karam and Ziad are from Zakrit village in the Metn District in East Beirut. On November 21, 1984, the three men were kidnapped on a checkpoint in Beirut by Syrian Intelligence and Palestinian “Saiqa” Militiamen loyal to Syria. They were taken to Anjar, Syrian Intelligence headquarter in Lebanon and then to Saydnayah Syrian Prison. Karam and Ziad were tried in the Syrian Third Military Court and sentenced to 50 years of prison on charges of collaborating with Israel. Elie was sentenced to jail in Saydnayah Syrian Prison.
- **Mohammed Taan Nasrallah, Adnan Zaki Abou Hamdan and Nasser Hussein Abou Hamdan** from Chmestar, Taalabaya and Hazzerta (Lebanese cities) respectively. Their parents confirm that the three men have been detained in Syria for 24 years after being arrested in Deir Zannoun, Lebanon at a Syrian intelligence check-point.

- **Joseph Houeiss**, who was on the list of the 95 prisoners still detained in Syria after 2000, was held in the Damascus Central Prison. The Syrian Military Tribunal on February 4, 1994, condemned Joseph Houeiss to 20 years in jail. He was accused of premeditated murder of two Syrians on the road to Dhour Choueir-Boulogne Forest in Lebanon. He accidentally ran them over with his car on June 2, 1992. Houeiss suffered from nervous problems and severe dizziness, at the time of the accident. Joseph died in detention on June 25, 2003 in a Syrian jail.

The spokesman for Support for Lebanese in Detention and Exile (SOLIDE) Ghazi Aad listed the names of detainees whose presence in Syrian jail was not recognized by Syrian authorities but who were actually visited by their parents, “some as recently as August 2000.” “No one can convince the parents of Najib Youssef Jarmani, Tony Geryes Tamer, George Ayoub Shalawit and Milad Barakat that their sons, whom they saw in Syrian prisons, were figments of their imagination,” he told reporters. “They visited their sons several times ... and no one, no matter how high-ranking they are, can say this file has been closed.”

E- From One Detention Center to Another

After a subject is apprehended in Lebanon by Syrian elements, he/she is taken from one detention center to another. The following is the usual order followed. Between brackets are the names of the Syrian Officers in charge:

- Original Stops: In Lebanon
 - American school in Tripoli - North of Lebanon (General Mohammad Khallouf currently Assistant of General Rustom Ghazaleh, Head of Syrian Intelligence in Lebanon.)
 - Syrian intelligence bureau in Sadat street - Beirut (Colonel Jameh Jameh)
 - Beau Rivage Hotel in Beirut (General Rustom Ghazaleh, Head of the Syrian Intelligence in Lebanon).
 - Syrian intelligence bureau - Near Comfort Hotel – Hazmieh
 - Syrian intelligence bureau - Chtaura - Beqaa (Colonel Toufic Haydar)

- Subsequent Stops:
 - To Anjar, the Syrian intelligence headquarters - Beqaa : (Previously Major General Ghazi Kanaan -currently Head of the Political Intelligence Service in Syria – Now, General Adnan Balloul - Colonel Amir Kanaan - Colonel Burhan Kaddour - Colonel Youssef Al Ahmad - Colonel Youssef Abdallah.)

- Final stop: Syria
 - Palestine Branch(headed by Major General Mazhar Fares,-Military Intelligence Service)
 - Syrian Prisons:
 - Saydnaya Prison
 - Adra Prison
 - Mazzeh Prison : closed in September 2000 .The prisoners were transferred to Saydnaya and Adra prisons according to a Syrian Human Rights Organization.
 - Tadmur Prison (PALMYRE)
 - Telfiteh Prison

F- Testimonies of Released Detainees

The following are some testimonies from released Lebanese prisoners who have endured hardship and torture in Syrian Jails:

- **Joseph Aziz Haleet:** “I am a Lebanese Physician from Hawoush Hala, in Riyak, Lebanon. I was arrested on November 11, 1992 after I attended a lecture at the Lebanese Law School about Peace in the Middle East. After the lecture, I went with some friends to a cafe where a person approached me and said he needed to talk to me. Next thing I knew, he and others were severely beating me. Then, they took me to the Syrian Intelligence Center in Damascus where I spent 1600 days in solitary confinement. They questioned my affiliation with the Lebanese Forces- a Lebanese anti-Syrian Party- and formally charged me with collaboration with the enemy-Israel. I endured all sorts of torture and I used to hear horrible sounds from prisoners being tortured in the Interrogation room. I was allowed 3 trips to the bathroom per day, each for one minute. If I took a second longer, I would be beaten severely. I was allowed to take a bath once every 45 or 50 days for 10 minutes. In 1993, I only took 3 baths. In the entire 4 years, I was only let out of my cell to go to the bathroom, to the interrogation room or to the Military Hospital, where they treated my hands, paralyzed from torture. When I was arrested, I weighed 100 Kg. Few weeks later, I weighed 60 Kg. In the winter, I suffered from the cold temperature in my underground cell with no sunlight. The only means to relatively warm my body was to put plastic bags on my head and feet because I was allowed no extra cloth or blanket. In the summer, I had difficulty breathing from the heat. I used to put my head on the floor and try to breathe from under the door. The only light I had in my cell was the one coming through the narrow opening of the door. I knew what season it was from the clothes the guards wore. My family knew where I was, two years after my detention but was not allowed to visit me until after 4 years. I had difficulties interacting with them because I had forgotten how to speak properly. After four years I was moved to Mazzeh Prison where I spent 310 days and later I was moved to Saydnayah Prison until my release. My family was allowed to see me once every 3 months until January 23, 1999 when I was denied visitations without any explanation.” When asked how many Lebanese with him in prison, he answered: “we were 42 in Saydnayah and later more joined us from Tadmur.”

- **Ali Abou Dihin:** “I am from Hassbaya and I live in Dikkwani. I spent 13 years in jail in Tadmur Jail (in Syria) where they beat us regularly.
- **Naji Harb,** a Lebanese Army Soldier: - “I was a Aounist- supporter of ex-Prime Minister General Michel Aoun. I was arrested in July 1990 by a Syrian checkpoint in Beirut. I was then taken to Mazzeh Prison (in Syria) on January 1, 1991. Then, I was moved to Tadmur Prison (in Syria) before ending in Saydanaya Prison (in Syria) where I spent the last eight years of my detention.”
- **Ibrahim Harshi:** “I am from Tyre. I was arrested in July 1986 on charges of collaborating with the Israelis. I spent 5 years and 8 months in Mazzeh (Syrian Prison) and was transferred to Tadmur Prison (in Syria) in 1992 and then to Saydnayah Prison (in Syria) in 1997.”

G- Human Rights Groups Positions:

- **Between January 26 to February 1 1998,** several French and International Human Rights Organizations, particularly **Amnesty International, the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), Justice and Peace, SOLIDA (Support for Lebanese in Arbitrary Detention), the French Human Rights League, Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture, and International Prison Observation** launched a vast campaign starting from Paris for the release of Lebanese detainees in Syria, and for the disclosure of all information pertaining to any Lebanese arrested by Syrian Forces.
- **Amnesty International** through one of its Official **Abdel-Salam Sayyed Ahmad,** from their Middle East Office in London acknowledged that they did not have a definitive number of Lebanese prisoners in Syria for lack of an official, central source of information. In 2000, Sayyed Ahmed argued that while the fate of those Lebanese arrested by or handed over to the Syrian authorities during the 1970s and 1980s remained shrouded in mystery, this was not the case with those detained after 1990. “Many of these people have been visited by their parents,” he said, “The number of 45 detainees remaining is not accurate. There are many more”. “In fact”, he added, “there are hundreds who are believed to be there, but we are not sure.” He also said that the Lebanese Government has a “duty toward those people and their

families, because even if the ones arrested in Syria for crimes committed in Lebanon, have to be handed over to Lebanese authorities to serve their time there.”

- **SOLIDE** (The Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile) a Lebanese Association has been very active on behalf of the Lebanese detainees and their families. Their President Ghazi Aad organizes meetings, press conferences and repeatedly demands Syrian Authorities to release complete lists, with names, numbers, places and all pertinent information on the status of Lebanese held in Syrian jails. He also asks the Lebanese Government to establish a permanent office where families of missing Lebanese can file their inquiries about their disappeared relatives.
- **The Federation of Human and Humanitarian Rights**, another Lebanese group, has been also vocal on the same issue. Their President Wael Kheir, a Human Rights advocate and attorney says that lists of detainees' names and confirmed numbers were still missing, and indicated the absence of fair and public trials. He also affirms the fact that Lebanese citizens being pulled out of their country and detained abroad "constitutes a violation of sovereignty and international laws."
- **MIRSAD** (Multi-Initiative on Rights: Search, Assist and Defend), another Lebanese Human Rights group says through its President Kamal Batal that “before Syria released 121 Lebanese detainees in 1998, we had only the names of two of them, so you can imagine how many they would be at this time.”
- **In January 2003** the **UN Working Group on arbitrary detention** looked into the case of Georges Ayoub Chalawet after **SOLIDA** (Support for Lebanese Detained Arbitrarily) and the **International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)** submitted the case of Mr. Chalawet to the UN in June 2002. An inquiry was sent to the Syrian authorities who admitted the detention of Mr. Chalawet after he was involved in a car accident in Lebanon in 1992 causing injuries to Syrian elements. Then, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued its conclusion stating: “Georges Ayoub Chalawet has been deprived of his liberty since March 30, 1994 without having been informed of any charge against him, without a court ruling on the legality of his detention and with no contact whatsoever with his family since 1998, which constitutes a series of grave violations. Such detention is in contravention of articles 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of principles 10 to 12 of the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any

Form of Detention or Imprisonment”. The UN Working Group went on to “request the Syrian government to take the necessary steps to remedy the situation”.

- **In January 2003, the European Parliament** debated the human rights situation in Lebanon. In particular, the question of the Lebanese citizens detained in Syria was repeatedly raised by several MPs belonging to different political groups. As part of the ratification proceedings for a Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Lebanese Government, a resolution was adopted by the European Parliament on January 16, 2003, pertaining to the status of Lebanese prisoners illegally held in Syria.

H – Recommendations

In consideration of the above facts and positions and since the pro-Syrian Lebanese Government refuses to carry out its responsibilities in this matter and has never demanded that the rights of Lebanese nationals detained or missing in Syria be upheld, we strongly recommend the following:

- 1- To urge Syrian and Lebanese authorities to publicly disclose all information past and present pertaining to Lebanese Nationals held in Syria.
- 2- To ask Syria to release all Lebanese individuals arbitrarily detained in Syria and to return to Lebanon the remains of those who died while in detention.
- 3- To ensure that all detainees in Syrian jails are granted their basic rights while in detention. In particular the detainees should be allowed visitation rights by their families and lawyers, as well as adequate medical care, and should not be tortured or mistreated.
- 4- To demand the intervention of International Organizations with the purpose of reaching a humanitarian resolution to this tragedy through an effective mechanism of negotiation with the Syrian authorities.

© LEBANESE INFORMATION CENTER – ALL RIGHTS RESERVED