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Lebanon: Mass Graves - Exhumations must be in line with international standards, and perpetrators brought to justice

Following the discovery of mass graves in Lebanon, Amnesty International is urging the Lebanese government to take immediate action to ensure that the evidence at the sites is properly preserved, that the victims are identified, and that the evidence is used to bring suspected perpetrators to justice in fair trials.

Since 2 December, Lebanese security forces and forensic scientists have been exhuming a site in a field in 'Anjar, in the Beqa' Valley, about one kilometre from the former Syrian military intelligence headquarters in Lebanon. Over 20 bodies have been found. Another mass grave was discovered in November at al-Yarze, next to the Lebanese Ministry Of Defence.

However, Amnesty International has received reports that the exhumations are not being carried out with the appropriate level of care and there are fears that bodies may be damaged and potential evidence lost. Exhumations at mass grave sites and ensuing investigations should be carried out in line with international standards, in particular the UN Model Protocol for Disinterment and Analysis of Skeletal Remains, which provides detailed guidelines for governments to follow when exhuming human remains.

During and after the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war, mass human rights abuses were committed with impunity - including killings of civilians, abductions and "disappearances" of Lebanese, Palestinian, and foreign nationals, and arbitrary detentions - by various armed militias and Syrian and Israeli government forces.

In 1991, an Amnesty Law came into force in Lebanon under which those responsible for crimes committed before 28 March 1991, other than in a few exceptions, were granted immunity against prosecution. This law, which Amnesty International has opposed throughout, would probably need to be repealed or amended before the perpetrators of the killings of those whose corpses have now been discovered can be prosecuted in the Lebanese courts.

