

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: MDE 18/001/2012

18 October 2012

Human Rights Organizations Demand the Lebanese authorities to put an end to Security Agencies' violations against foreigners

Illegal and racist practices against foreign workers or refugees in Lebanon are on the rise. The latest example in this regard took place on the evening of 7 October as members of the Lebanese Army raided the homes of 70 Syrian, Egyptian and Sudanese workers in Beirut in response to a complaint by some residents against these workers of "harassing the girls and disturbing the residents". The workers were beaten during the raid.

Infringement on people and their sanctities is totally unacceptable regardless of whether it was done by nationals or foreigners. Those attacked have the right to seek recourse with the competent public authority to stop the attack and prosecute the perpetrators. However, acting outside the rule of law or demonstrating an exaggerated form of reaction is unacceptable – whether it involved nationals or foreigners. Use of force by security forces is not admissible unless there was an extraordinary and exceptional necessity to do so – such as violent resistance or attacks on the security forces and public safety that cannot be stopped save through the use of force as long as it proportionate with the act or risk at hand. We express our concern that such an incident might have been prompted by the fact that the "defendants" are foreigners who are looked down upon and suffer marginalization and lack of protection.

By all means, what has taken place is to be regarded as a human rights violation, for such a case involves the following inherent violations:

I. Lodging a complaint against some individuals who might have disturbed the residents does not mean that all members of the group the defendants belong to should be targeted with punishment, or any foreign worker who might have been present in the area at the time of the raid. The way the assault took place conveys a sense of xenophobia, including the content of the statement released by the Orientation Directorate at the Lebanese Army that emphasized "the continuation of raids and investigations in areas suspected of harbouring workers of various nationalities who abuse citizens and violate their privacy" .

II. the competent authority to conduct investigation in alleged crimes is the "judiciary police" as duly mandated and supervised by the judiciary. The Judiciary police may – in exceptional and emergency circumstances – ask for the support of the Lebanese Army; yet we do not see in the said incident any political or security-based justification for the Army to intervene.

III. the fact that the security forces have the duty to stop "abuses against citizens and violation of their privacy" should not give them the right to punish the perpetrators, otherwise these forces would be acting as if they have issued a final judgement or ruling against the perpetrators and enforced the punishment whereas the only entity that has the right to issue and enforce the rulings and sentences is the judiciary. The latter acts after concluding a professional forensic investigation, and receiving a judicial ruling duly issued in the name of the Lebanese people.

IV. the two statements released by the Orientation Directorate-Lebanese Army signal a serious twofold dilemma; firstly, a violation of delegated powers and launching military and security operations without referring to the law or competent political and judicial authorities – a serious issue indeed that can

only take place under totalitarian regimes where the rule of law is absent. Secondly, the xenophobic attitude that permeates the statements, including the one released on 11 October in which the Lebanese Army called upon “all those who suffer abuses of any kind to contact the security and military forces that can act swiftly and conclusively to stop such abuses” and emphasized that it will continue to conduct its security operations to attend to “citizens interests” – disregarding thus the role of the prosecutor’s office.

The undersigned organizations denounce such infringement upon the safety and freedom of individuals, and demand that the executive authorities that oversee the security forces and Lebanese army to live up to their responsibility to provide protection for citizens and foreign nationals alike against any attacks.

We also demand that the judiciary intervene to put an end to such practices, promptly open an investigation into the events of 7 October and penalize all violators and perpetrators regardless of the agency they are affiliated with – including the security and military forces. We also call upon all authorities to uphold and respect the Lebanese Constitution and Lebanon’s obligations under the international standards as well as its local laws – particularly the right to personal and physical safety, the principle of all is equal before the law, the right to enjoy all rights and obligations with no discrimination on the basis of colour, race, ethnicity, political opinion or any other considerations for that matter. We also call for the respect of the principles of accountability and separation of powers, and those enshrined in the UN convention against torture and other forms of cruel, inhumane or humiliating treatment or punishment.

Signed (Organizations):

Nahwa al-Muwatiniya

Anti-Racism Movement in Lebanon

Lebanese Observatory for the Rights of Workers and Employees

Legal Agenda

Human Rights Watch

Amnesty International

Frontiers Ruwad Advocacy

The Foundation for Human and Humanitarian Rights Lebanon (FHHR/L)

Nasawiya

Alkarama Foundation

Kafa (Enough) violence and exploitation

ANND

CLDH

ALEF