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Lebanon: Release Joseph Sader, abducted year ago today

The abductors of Lebanese national Joseph Sader, whose fate and whereabouts have been shrouded in uncertainty since he was snatched from a road in Beirut one year ago today, must release him without delay, said Amnesty International.

Joseph Sader, aged 57, was abducted by unidentified men on the morning of 12 February 2009, while travelling from his home in Maghdoushe, 50km south of Beirut, to the Middle East Airlines (MEA) office near Beirut's international airport, where he worked as MEA's IT operational services director.

According to Amnesty International's information, having alighted from a minivan taxi on a bridge in the Cocody area of south Beirut, he was walking to the highway leading to the MEA office when he was intercepted by a white Chevrolet Venture car. Two men in plain clothes reportedly jumped out of the car and forced him into it, through its sliding door; the car, driven by a third man, then sped off.

Joseph Sader has not been seen since then, nor has he been permitted contact with his family or others, prompting grave fears for his safety. However, information gathered by Amnesty International indicates that Joseph Sader has been held against his will and at an unknown location by members of a non-state armed group.

Those responsible for his abduction and unlawful detention apparently suspect him of providing information to Israel's intelligence services.

Amnesty International wrote to the Lebanese authorities last December to request information on steps taken by the Lebanese authorities to secure Joseph Sader's release. It also said that, if there was evidence to indicate that he might have committed espionage or other crimes, he should be charged and promptly brought to trial by the state authorities in proceedings that are in line with international fair standards and have no recourse to the death penalty.

Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud responded to Amnesty International in January to say that the Lebanese authorities were conducting ongoing investigations into the abduction in co-ordination with the Lebanese army and intelligence services, that the case had been entrusted to the competent judicial authorities and that his family had been given assurances that the authorities attached the highest importance to resolving the matter.

Background

Over the course of 2009 and early 2010, the Lebanese authorities have announced that they have been uncovering a number of spying networks working for Israel. At the same time, at least 70 individuals suspected of being part of these networks have been arrested, charged and, in most

cases, remain in detention awaiting trial. They were generally arrested by Lebanese security forces, but at least one individual, Marwan al-Fakih, was reportedly apprehended, detained and questioned first by Hizbullah, an armed group and political party, before being handed over to the Lebanese authorities.

While there have been a number of other cases in recent years of armed groups unlawfully apprehending, detaining and questioning individuals before releasing them or handing them over to the Lebanese authorities, these have been sporadic incidents in comparison with events following the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon in May 2000. Then, scores of suspected collaborators with Israel were apprehended by Hizbullah and Amal, another political party, in the south of the country. Some were held briefly in detention facilities belonging to these groups before being released. Others were held captive for weeks, and in some cases months, before being handed over to the Lebanese authorities. They were often subsequently charged and tried, usually before military tribunals.

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