

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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LEBANON: INVESTIGATION INTO FINDINGS OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT ON TORTURE OF SYRIAN REFUGEES MUST BE INDEPENDENT

On 23 March, Amnesty International released the report “‘*I wished I would die*’, Syrian refugees arbitrarily detained on terrorism charges and tortured in Lebanon”, documenting how Lebanese security forces tortured or otherwise ill-treated Syrian refugees detained on terrorism-related charges and subjected them to a wide range of violations of the right to fair trial. The security forces identified in the report responsible for this torture include the Military Intelligence and General Security agencies.

On 29 March, Lebanese Public Prosecutor Ghassan Oueidat announced an investigation into the findings of Amnesty International’s report, including arrest, torture and other ill-treatment of Syrian refugees. He referred the investigation to the military justice system based on the Torture Law 65 of 2017.

Amnesty International calls on the Lebanese authorities to refer the investigation to the civilian justice system. Torture and other ill-treatment are human rights violations that should only be investigated by the civilian justice system. The right to trial by an independent and impartial tribunal would be undermined should the military justice system investigate its own members.

International human rights law standards today state that the criminal jurisdiction of military courts must be limited solely to trials of members of the security forces for infractions of military or police discipline and must not, under any circumstances, be extended to violations of human rights nor to crimes of international law. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has stated that cases of human rights violations involving members of the security forces should be excluded from military courts.

Amnesty International follows a rigorous methodology in its documentation and seeks the government’s response as part of that methodology for inclusion in its publications. The findings in this report were based on 24 direct interviews with former and current detainees and corroborated by reviewing legal documents and by interviewing Lebanese lawyers who defended hundreds of Syrian refugees.

On 17 February 2021, Amnesty International sent letters to the acting Ministers of Defense, Justice and Interior ahead of the report’s release presenting the findings and requesting a written response, however the organization did not receive an response on these points for inclusion in the report. The organization also specified in the letters sent in February that we would welcome the opportunity to meet Lebanese officials to share our findings and recommendations to ensure that the violations documented in the report are fully investigated and the right to a remedy is ensured.

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