

**LEBANON Asylum seekers from Sudan, Iraq, Somalia and possibly Eritrea**

The Lebanese authorities are forcibly returning people to countries where they may be tortured and killed, in violation of international law. On 8 March security forces surrounded the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) office in the capital, Beirut, and arrested 10 asylum seekers and refugees, mainly Sudanese. They and many others now face forcible return.

In August 2000, the Lebanese authorities gave "illegal" residents two months to regularize their status or face deportation. This was extended until the end of February.

Since this announcement over 300 asylum-seekers have reportedly been forcibly returned to their countries of origin, more than 100 of them in February and March alone. Almost all had been arrested on charges of illegal entry and residence in Lebanon. Some had reportedly been recognised as refugees by the UNHCR, while others had been registered, and their cases were pending. Some were reportedly beaten or otherwise tortured or ill-treated in custody.

Among those in custody facing deportation is Sudanese asylum-seeker Mageer Aro, apparently recognized as a refugee by the UNHCR, who was reportedly beaten on 8 March. He and his wife, Rogaih, have been in custody for around five months.

More than 100 Sudanese asylum-seekers and refugees have reportedly been forcibly returned so far this year.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Lebanon supports a large population of asylum-seekers and refugees, mostly from countries suffering from war or systematic human rights violations, such as Iraq, Sudan and Somalia. Hundreds of them now face arrest, torture in custody and forcible return. There have been reports of asylum-seekers being tortured to force them to drop their asylum claims and leave Lebanon.

Although Lebanon is not a state party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, of which Article 33 sets out the principle of *non-refoulement*, it is a member of the UNHCR's Executive Committee (EXCOM), the main international body setting standards on refugee protection. There has been a UNHCR office in the country since 1963.

Like all other countries, Lebanon is bound by international customary law, including the principle of *non-refoulement*: countries may not forcibly return people to countries where they might face serious human rights violations.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic or your own language:**

- asking the authorities to confirm reports that over 100 asylum-seekers and refugees have been returned to Sudan during 2001, and over 300 returned to various countries since September 2000;
- urging the authorities not to forcibly return asylum-seekers and refugees to countries where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations, which is a violation of international law;
- expressing concern that asylum-seekers and refugees are being arrested in Lebanon, including the 10 arrested outside the UNHCR offices in Beirut on 8 March;

- urging the authorities to allow all asylum-seekers and refugees access to the UNHCR;
- expressing concern at reports that asylum-seekers have been tortured and ill-treated, and asking for assurances that those now in custody, including those arrested on 8 March, (naming Sudanese refugees Deng Deng and 'Abdallah Nuok Deng), will be properly treated in custody;
- reminding the Lebanese authorities of their obligations under the United Nations Convention against Torture, which it ratified in May 2000.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency President Emile Lahoud  
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Ba'abda Palace  
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Lebanon  
**Telegram: President Lahoud, Beirut, Lebanon**  
**Fax: +961 1 425 393**  
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**Salutation: Your Excellency**

His Excellency Nabih Berri  
Speaker of the National Assembly  
National Assembly  
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**Fax: +961 1 342 270**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

Judge 'Adnan 'Addoum  
Prosecutor General  
Palace of Justice  
Beirut  
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Maj Gen Jamil al-Sayyed  
Director of General Security  
c/o Ministry of the Interior  
Grand Osérail  
Rue des Arts et Métiers  
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and to diplomatic representatives of Lebanon accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 April 2001.