

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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## Lebanon: Discrimination against Palestinians must end without delay

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) released its concluding observations on Lebanon's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 2 June, following its examination of the country's third periodic report in May. The CRC expressed its concern over "the persistent *de facto* discrimination faced by ... Palestinian children ..." as well as other vulnerable groups, "especially with regard to their access to adequate social and health services and educational facilities."

Amnesty International has previously expressed concern about legal and other discrimination against Palestinian refugees in Lebanon on several occasions – including in a briefing submitted to the CRC last April (Lebanon: Limitations on Rights of Palestinian Refugee Children, *AI Index: MDE 18/004/2006*), which described discrimination faced by Palestinian refugee children in their access to adequate housing, social security, education, and in their right to be registered.

Discrimination against Palestinian refugee children is one aspect of the long-standing discrimination and abuses of fundamental economic and social rights of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. In relation to employment, Palestinian refugees have restricted access to work opportunities and diminished protection of their rights at work. A law regulating property ownership is formulated in such a way as to ban Palestinian refugees specifically from owning property. Furthermore, the Lebanese authorities prohibit the entry of any building or maintenance material to camps in the south of Lebanon. The CRC stated that "it continues to be deeply concerned about the harsh social and economic living conditions of Palestinian refugee children in refugee camps, their limited access to public services, including social and health services and education, and exposure to violence at home, in schools and in the wider community."

Within Lebanon there are several thousand so-called non-ID Palestinian refugees who are required to live under even more severe restrictions than the other Palestinian refugees because they do not possess valid identification documents or legal residency. The CRC recommended that "in order to secure the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by children in Lebanon" the government should "ensure that all children within its territory, including the children of non-ID Palestinian refugees, are registered immediately after birth. Meanwhile, children whose births have not been registered and who are without official documentation should be allowed to access basic services, such as health and education, while waiting to be properly registered."

There are close to 400,000 Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, mostly people who arrived in 1948 or their descendents. They fled or were expelled from their homes or lands in what is now Israel, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, and have since been unable to return. The Lebanese authorities often justify restrictions on the rights of Palestinian refugees in relation to the preservation of Palestinian refugees' right to return. For example, in relation to the prohibition of expansion or renovation of existing refugee camps, Lebanon's state party report, which was examined by the CRC, explains that this is to "prevent the

consolidation of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon and implicitly accept the forced resettlement and destroy the principle behind the right of return.” Such justifications are both unfounded and incompatible with Lebanon’s human rights obligations.

The right to return is a right protected under international law; other human rights do not contradict it and their fulfilment does not negate it. Palestinian refugees, including those in Lebanon, should be able to enjoy their human rights to the fullest possible extent until such time when their right to return is fulfilled. Any delay in ending discriminatory measures against Palestinian refugees represents a continued violation of Lebanon’s human rights obligations.

Amnesty International continues to urge the Lebanese government to take all necessary steps to end all forms of discrimination, both *de facto* and *de jure*, against Palestinian refugees, including in their enjoyment of the right to work and rights at work, the rights to adequate housing, social security and education. The authorities in Lebanon should also, without delay, take all necessary steps to register all non-ID Palestinian refugees and to ensure that all Palestinian refugee children are able to fully enjoy their human rights on par with Lebanese children. In this context, Amnesty International calls on the Lebanese authorities to fully implement the CRC’s recommendations without delay.