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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 August 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human rights violations and conflict increasing in Lebanon as conflict from Syria spills-over into country

Lebanon still suffers from a chronic political crisis and sectarian tensions. These elements have resulted in an increasing number of human rights violations throughout the country since the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Spill-over from the current conflict in neighboring Syria has increased tensions between political blocs and lead to clashes between armed militias. In this context, human rights violations have witnessed an alarming increase in Lebanon.

Spill-over of Syrian conflict into Lebanon deepens

As the conflict in Syria continues to escalate, the spill-over effect into Lebanon has intensified. Despite the policy of self-dissociation advocated for by Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, internal clashes and political tension within Lebanon have reached an all-time high since the start of the Syrian revolution.

Clashes leaving fifty three people dead and hundreds of people injured have been ongoing since May 2012 in the neglected and impoverished Northern city of Tripoli, particularly between neighborhoods of Bab El Tebbaneh, whose residents are mostly Sunni and opposed to the government of Bashar El Assad and Jabal Mohsen, which is predominantly Alawite and in support of the Syrian government. The posting of the Lebanese Army in different parts of the city has not managed to restore calm and gunmen of different factions are still deployed in the city. Fighting has flared up again recently in August, with 12 people being killed since intense fighting resumed.

Tensions in the North of Lebanon in the Akkar and Wadi Khaled region have also been registered, with several incursions and shelling into Lebanese territory being carried out by the Syrian Army chasing members of the Free Syrian Army crossing the border to Lebanon. These incursions have resulted in the death of at least 10 civilians, both Lebanese and Syrian.

On the 20th of May 2012, Sheikh Ahmad Abdel Wahid, a prominent Lebanese Sunni cleric opposed to the Assad government, and his aide Mohammed Merheb, were killed at a Lebanese Army checkpoint in Kweikhat near Akkar under unclear circumstances. These killings resulted in demonstrations and the blocking of roads by local citizens, angered at the death of a prominent Sunni cleric from this mostly Sunni Muslim region, prompting the army to withdraw from Akkar and launch an investigation into the behavior of the 22 soldiers who were at the checkpoint.

Syrian workers in Lebanon mostly work informally on construction sites. The numbers of Syrians working in Lebanon informally has dramatically increased since the beginning of the revolution as they flee the conflict. Some Lebanese municipalities, such as Bhamdoun, have forbidden said workers to step out of their accommodation from 8PM until 6AM, claiming it is for the safety of the town. This discriminatory curfew applies only to Syrians and reinforces the stigma Syrian workers already suffer from in Lebanon. If they are caught in the streets during these hours, they can be expelled from the municipality, therefore losing their job. These measures constitute a blatant violation of their freedom of movement.¹ Cases of beatings and harassment against workers have also been reported.²

¹ Rania Massoud, A Bhamdoun, les ouvriers syriens soumis à un véritable couvre-feu, 16 August 2012, http://www.lorientlejour.com/category/%C3%80+La+Une/article/773608/A_Bhamdoun,_les_ouvriers_syriens_soumis_a_un_veritable_couvre-feu.html.

An increase in the use of kidnapping by militias has also resulted from heightened tensions within the country. As reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, seven of the 11 Lebanese Shia pilgrims that had been abducted by the Free Syrian Army in Syria in May have been wounded following the Azaz bombing, provoking the anger of their families who have been taking to the streets, burning tires and demanding the Lebanese government ensure the release of their relatives.

Moreover, the powerful Bekaa valley tribe of Al Mokdad has launched a series of kidnappings following the abduction in Damascus of Hassan Al Mokdad, a member of the group, purportedly by the Free Syrian Army. So far, the armed militia associated with the family is claiming to have kidnapped over 50 Syrian citizens and one Turkish citizen, claiming the Turkish citizen would be the “first victim” if their relative was not released. Hatem Al Mokdad, the spokesperson of the tribe has declared: “More kidnappings are to come. ‘We will start kidnapping Arab nationals whose countries are backing the rebels, if our brother Hassan is not released’”, prompting KSA, the UAE and Qatar to urge their citizens to leave Lebanon immediately.³

Prime Minister Najib Mikati has called for an emergency meeting on Thursday the 16th of August to discuss the kidnappings. However, Lebanese authorities appear to be unable to ensure adherence to the rule of law. The inability of Lebanese authorities to disarm various militias, tribes and families in Lebanon increasingly threatens the stability of broad segments of Lebanese society.

Human rights violations of Syrian refugees

Lebanon also faces an increased flow of Syrian refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that roughly 47 000 Syrian refugees are currently in Lebanon, a figure that is likely significantly lower than the actual number of Syrian refugees in the country as many of these refugees have not registered with the UN or the Lebanese Government.⁴ According to unofficial estimates between 90,000 and several hundred thousand refugees have entered the country.

Syrian refugees along the Syrian-Lebanon border continue to be subjected to shelling by the Syrian government in the context of clashes with members of the Free Syrian Army. A growing humanitarian problem exists among these refugees with an increasing shortage of basic services and housing, especially in Northern Lebanon, considered among the poorest and underdeveloped regions in the country. In this area, aid is currently being provided mostly by NGOs and UN aid agencies with limited assistance by the Lebanese government.

Growing numbers of Syrian refugees has increased the possibility of refoulement by the Lebanese government. On the 1 August 2012, despite strong objections by human rights groups, the Lebanese government deported 14 Syrian citizens back to Syria on the grounds that “they represented a threat to the security of the State.” The Lebanese government asserted these 14 individuals were criminals who had been sentenced for crimes such as theft, attempted rape and assault committed in Lebanese territory. However, according to creditable sources some of the deportees had expressed fear of persecution and abuse on

² Nowhere to hide: being a Syrian in Lebanon, 18 August 2012, <http://www.albawaba.com/editorchoice/syrians-lebanon-kidnappings-438808>.

³ Arab countries evacuate citizens from Lebanon over kidnappings, 16 August 2012, <http://en.trend.az/regions/met/arabicr/2056759.html>.

⁴ Near 47,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon: UNHCR, 19 August 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-08/19/c_123600504.htm.

their return and at least one of them claimed to be an activist opposed to Bashar El Assad's rule.⁵

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) calls on the Lebanese government to:

- Ensure respect for the rights of Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon, including providing all necessary humanitarian assistance.
- In accordance with article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Ensure respect for the freedom of movement of Syrian immigrants and refugees by lifting restrictions on their movement established by some municipalities.
- Respect article 3 of the Convention Against Torture and avoid the refoulement of Syrian refugees where they risk being tortured.
- Take appropriate measures to release citizens who have been kidnapped in Lebanon and hold the responsible parties accountable.

Moreover, CIHRS calls on member states and relevant bodies of the United Nations:

- To ensure all required assistance to the government of Lebanon and United Nations and non-governmental aid agencies to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees within the country, and strongly urge the government of Lebanon to begin to more actively provide for the needs of these refugees.
- To ensure a human rights monitoring component of any United Nations humanitarian assistance mission within Lebanon that can report to UN member states and bodies concerning human rights challenges and violations facing Syrian refugees within Lebanon.

⁵ EU urges Lebanon not to send back Syrian refugees, 4 August 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/0/49499/World/0/EU-urges-Lebanon-not-to-send-back-Syrian-refugees.aspx>.