

Racism forces the Syrian refugees in Lebanon to return to war

July 15, 2018

Based on the UN registration list Lebanon is hosting approximately 1 million Syrian refugees who have escaped the Syrian war since 2011. Recent developments in Syria – the restoration of control of most of the opposition areas in Damascus and its suburbs to Government of Syria (GoS) forces and their allies - have been accompanied by a rise in the hate speech in Lebanon towards Syrian refugees, most notably:

- Some Lebanese politicians have intensified their demands for the return of the refugees, without taking in consideration the unsafe situation in Syria and without any responsibility for the dangers which the refugees may face. Lebanese politicians do not hold a unified view on this situation; some are against forcible return of refugees, while others have stated that many Syrian areas are now safe and refugees must be repatriated¹.

- The Lebanese Minister of Interior and Municipalities issued a decree to remove Al Batun camps, which includes four camps in Lebanon's Aarsal area. The decision was given to the landowners. The camps are inhabited by 400 Syrian families. Later the implementation was postponed until the provision of an alternative place for the refugees.

- Nine offices raising the flag of Lebanese party Hezbollah have been opened in southern Lebanon and in Labwih town. It has been reported that they aim to register the names of the refugees wishing to return to Syria and coordinate with the Syrian government, and then notify the people who registered that the Syrian government has no problem receiving them back.

Lebanese official stated on July 12, 2018: "Lebanon is working with Damascus to repatriate thousands of refugees who want to return to Syria."

BEIRUT (Reuters)

Incidents of returning the refugees in Lebanon to Syria during 2018:

- In April 2018, a few hundred refugees were transferred from Shebaa in southern Lebanon to Syria in a process supervised by Lebanon's General Security in coordination with Damascus.
- In June 2018, 293 Syrian refugees were returned from Aarsal towards Qalamoun in Syria.
- Earlier in July 2018, 45 refugees were returned from Bekaa to Mu'admiah in Damascus. During the last few days of July, 400 people were returned from Aarsal to Qalamoun. In the coming days it has been reported that a third group is being prepared to return including an estimated 1,200 people.

Commenting on previous cases of return:

- UNHCR said in a statement that it did not participate in organizing "this or other returns at this stage taking into consideration the humanitarian and security situation in Syria".
- The second conference to support Syria and the region was held in April 2018 in Brussels with the participation of 86 delegations including 57 countries. In its final statement the group confirmed that, "The current circumstances are not conducive to the voluntary and dignified return to the homeland, and that there are still risks. The return conditions as defined by UNHCR and in accordance to international refugee law standards have not yet been achieved. Any organized return process must be carried out voluntarily, safely and with dignity. "

Results of unclear government policy towards the Syrians:

Results of government fluctuations in word and deed towards the Syrian refugees makes the situation of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon not better than the situation they fled from in Syria, which does not preserve for them the lowest degree of protection, safety and dignity. This has contributed to the decision to return for many Syrians. The most outstanding results of this policy are:

- Racist comments that motivate violence against the Syrian refugees on media and social communications, the most notable example of which is the presentation by one of the Lebanese channels a video clip that strongly incites hatred against the Syrians without accountability for itⁱⁱ.
- Rules that have been issued by some municipalities described as racist and discriminatory. For example, a curfew after 8pm or providing free municipal cleaning as a condition for residence in the town.
- Documentation of the expulsion from some Lebanese municipalities of Syrian refugees without prior notification to the town Kahalaⁱⁱⁱ.
- Several incidents have been recorded of assault and beatings targeting Syrian refugees, as well as the burning of camps. The most recent such incident was on 8 July 2018 in a camp in the Akkar area.
- The fragility of the legal status of refugees in Lebanon makes them more vulnerable than others in Lebanon, without accountability. This has caused the spread of sexual harassment and rape, which are considered the most common violent incidents. In addition, the incidence of child, early and forced marriage for Syrian girls has increased, which exposes a great number of Syrian refugees to exploitation and human trafficking.



Based on the above, the Syrian Civic Platform demands:

- Countries that have the capacity and ability to absorb refugees must provide all kinds of support to receive refugees and protect them from any risk.
- The international community, the United Nations and international donors must increase their assistance to Syrian refugees through civil society organizations operating in Lebanon and the Lebanese government, under the condition of monitoring expenses.
- The Lebanese government must be pressured to adopt a policy to stop all violations against Syrian refugees and to work on accountability procedures against violators.
- The safe, voluntary and dignified return of the Syrian refugees must be guaranteed, and there must not be any direct or indirect pressure on the Syrian refugees to return. In addition, return must not take place without a peace agreement that guarantees the protection and rights of all the refugees.
- The Syrian refugees in Lebanon must be dealt with separately and neutrally from fluctuations of intra-Lebanese political fluctuations.

<https://ara.reuters.com/article/topNews/idARAKCN1IW2C8> -¹

ⁱⁱ This is the song link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEchaL8pyeE>

ⁱⁱⁱ This is the reportage link about the case: -<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGDA5RCKUM>