

Press release

Old Policies and Practices into new forms: The Lebanese Inter-Ministerial Committee Ignores the issue of arbitrary detention and deportation

Beirut, 8/9/2010

Frontiers (Ruwad in Arabic) regrets that the Lebanese Inter-Ministerial Committee charged last April to find a solution to end the practice of arbitrary detention of foreigners including refugees and asylum seekers failed to bring any changes and improvement to the old governmental policies.

The creation of the Inter-Ministerial Committee was welcomed by the human and refugee advocates believing it would bring Lebanon's policy and practice in line with international human and refugee rights and standards, particularly in relation to putting an end to the practice of arbitrary detention of all foreigners including refugees and asylum seekers and the "forcible return" under the cover of "voluntary return" .

The conclusions of the Inter-Ministerial Committee, endorsed by the Government were published in the Lebanese press on the 7th of this month. The conclusions states that Lebanon is not "a country of asylum, neither temporary nor permanent"; that illegal entrants should be penalized and deported; as for refugees and asylum seekers they would be treated similarly, with a grace period of two months pending the determination of their refugee status. UNHCR is given a short time – maximum one year – to resettle recognized refugees in a third country, and to determine the asylum seekers' refugee claim.

We regret that the conclusions of Inter-Ministerial Committee condoned the illegal practice of arbitrary detention and deportation of refugees and asylum seekers despite several court rulings this year that considered the detention of foreigners after the end of their prison sentence as arbitrary and contrary to the law; nor took into account any of the recommendations for a minimum refugee protection framework submitted to them by the human rights associations such as Frontiers and the UN Refugee Agency.

Further, the conclusions contain some regression in Lebanon's policy. The statement that " Lebanon is not a country of asylum contradicts the essence of the Lebanese Constitution that embedded the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its preamble and consequently the right to seek asylum.

We regret that by not bringing a change to its policy, Lebanon continues to violate its own Constitution and laws as well internationally recognized human and refugee rights, particularly the right to seek asylum, the right to protection and not be detained solely for entering the country illegally to seek asylum, and the right to personal freedom and not to be arbitrarily detained, and finally the right not to be refouled according to the principle of non-refoulement and Article 3 of the Convention against Torture which prohibits returning anyone to any country where they are likely to be subjected to torture.

Finally, we call upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to ensure ongoing communication with the relevant authorities to ensure that no refugee or asylum-seeker is being deported and to guarantee the release of all refugees and asylum seekers who are still arbitrarily detained in Lebanon.