

## Statement

**Lebanon's Forced Repatriation of Syrians Violates  
the Principle of Non-Refoulment of Refugees,  
With 168 Syrian Refugees Returned to Syria  
Since the Beginning of April 2023**

**The Syrian Regime and Iranian Militias Pose a Serious  
Threat to the Lives of Forcibly Returned Refugees**



**Thursday , April 26, 2023**

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

On April 17, 2023, the Lebanese army began carrying out brutal raids targeting areas of the country with a large Syrian refugee population, such as Bourj Hammoud, as well as a number of areas in Beirut city, Rechmaya area in the Aalay district in Mount Lebanon, and the Hammana and Saoufar areas in Mount Lebanon. Those offensives, which are still ongoing as of this writing, involved the mass detention of dozens of people.

The raids targeted Syrian refugees who had been unable to obtain official documents establishing their legal presence in Lebanon, principally those who entered Lebanon in 2019 and since then illegally. However, the raids also targeted the Syrians who were unable to renew their residence. All those detained were transferred by the Lebanese military to the Land Border Regiment which in turn repatriated those refugees to the other side of the Lebanese borders in the border area of al-Masna' between Lebanon and Syria.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has documented the refoulement of no fewer than 168 Syrian refugees in Lebanon since the beginning of April 2023, with almost one-third of this total being children and women. The Syrian regime's Military Security in the al-Masna' border area arrested two individuals from the same family from among those forcibly returned.

We also received reports of 13 other refugees being arrested, which we are still verifying, as we are still trying to reach their families and friends to ascertain this information.

SNHR has documented many violations against the 168 forcibly repatriated refugees by both the Lebanese army and the Syrian army:

- 1 The overwhelming majority of those detained were brutally beaten and insulted during the raids on their houses and places of residence. They were denied the opportunity to take any of their personal belongings to them.
- 2 The refugees had to survive with no shelter after being transferred to the border area between the Syrian and Lebanese borders. The official Lebanese authorities failed to register their names or officially document that they legally and officially left Lebanon via the official borders.
- 3 The Syrian regime refused to allow some of the forcibly repatriated refugees to cross into Syria under the pretext that the Lebanese army or Lebanon's General Security had failed to coordinate with the Syrian side (in this context, it is important to note that the overwhelming majority of those who crossed into Syria are children and women).

- 4 Most of the forcibly repatriated returnees were then subjected to extortion, looting and exploitation by Syrian regime forces in the area separating the two border crossings between Syria and Lebanon. Regime forces demanded that they pay sums of around \$100 per person on average to facilitate their being returned to the Lebanese lands by illegal means and via channels, most of which are operated by members and officers of the Syrian regime's Fourth Division.

Taking precedence over all these issues, however, is the refugees' fundamental right to not be forcibly repatriated to the very country they fled in fully justified fear of persecution by the Syrian regime and its allies, Iran and Russia. The Syrian regime's murderous mentality has remained unchanged since 2011, and the regime is still committing horrendous violations against the residents of Syria, with any returning refugees certain to suffer the same violations. Below are the most notable violations we have documented against refugees who returned to areas under the control of the Syrian regime since the beginning of 2014:

- 1 No fewer than 2,504 cases of arbitrary arrest, including 257 children and 199 women (adult female), were documented against refugees or Syrians who had been living in foreign countries, on their return to Syria. All of these individuals were arrested by Syrian regime forces. Of this number, 1,517 were subsequently released, while 987 individuals remain in detention, including 764 people who are now classified as forcibly disappeared.
- 2 We documented the arrest of no fewer than 984 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who returned to areas under the control of the Syrian regime, including 22 children and 18 women. Of those, 264 people were released by the Syrian regime, while 738 individuals remain in detention, including 472 people who are now classified as forcibly disappeared.
- 3 In addition to numerous cases of forced conscription into the Syrian regime military, the regime also enacted many abusive laws to provide legal cover for its theft of the properties of IDPs and refugees such as, Law No. 63 of 2012, Decree 66/2012, Decree 19/2015, Decree 11/2016, Decree 12/2016, Decree 3/2018, and Law No. 10 of 2018 which was amended through Law No. 42/2018.

Syrian refugees in Lebanon have faced constant campaigns of forced repatriation over the past 12 years. The Lebanese judiciary has failed to launch any investigations into the torture, enforced disappearance, and deaths under torture that Syrian refugees have suffered. Usually, such cases of internationally outlawed forced refoulment cases are preceded by inflammatory instigation campaigns in the media which, in some cases, involve openly racist rhetoric and slanders against Syrian refugees who are blamed for the worsening economy in Lebanon, a shameful inversion of reality which fails to place any blame on the Syrian regime that has committed violations, some of them amounting to crimes against humanity, which uprooted millions of Syrians and drove them to flee their homes. [We have warned in many reports](#) about the arrests of refugees returning to Syria via crossings from Lebanon as part of the nominally 'voluntary program' which was resumed by Lebanon's General Directorate of General Security on September 5, 2022.

SNHR reiterates and underlines the findings of the most recent report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI), that Syria is currently wholly unsafe for the return of refugees. Any refoulment of Syrian refugees while the current Syrian regime remains in power, with its current leadership and the structure of its brutal security apparatus intact, is a violation of the customary laws that bind all world states, including those states that have not ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. As things stand, approximately half of all Syrians are now either IDPs or refugees, and will not be able to return safely to their home country without a political transition being brought about beforehand. The Lebanese government shares legal responsibility for the torture, killings, enforced disappearance, and other violations committed by the Syrian regime against refugees forced to return, in addition, of course, to the Syrian regime's direct responsibility for such violations.



[www.snhr.org](http://www.snhr.org) - [info@snhr.org](mailto:info@snhr.org)