

Urgent humanitarian call to stand on the harsh conditions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon

**Violation Documentation Center in Syria (VDC)
Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)**

January 24, 2020

The Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC) and Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) have received numerous distress appeals from Syrian refugees in Lebanon about the harsh living conditions and restrictions they undergo by the Lebanese authorities, which included all aspects of daily life.

On December 18, 2019, dozens of refugees began a series of sit-ins in front of the headquarters of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the city of Tripoli in Northern Lebanon, in order to pressure the agency to respond to their demands.

On Monday, 20 January 2020, thirteen refugees began an open-ended hunger strike near UNHCR headquarters because UNHCR officials did not respond to the demands of the sit-in. The strike continued until Friday 24 January 2020, when it had to stop after the Lebanese security forces dismantled the strike tent as a result of a memorandum submitted to the security authorities by the Commission.

During the hunger strike, VDC has recorded three urgent health incidents requiring immediate medical treatment. On January 21st, a woman on hunger strike lost consciousness and fell on the ground, which required the intervention of the Red Cross ambulance to carry out the necessary first aid. The second accident recorded is that of a man who had sudden raised blood pressure because of the psychological pressure he was going through. Finally, on January 22nd, a Syrian refugee broke his finger when falling on the ground after he lost consciousness and his health deteriorated.

The VDC and ACHR appeal to all international and human rights organizations to assist the hunger strikers, whose both health and psychological conditions have deteriorated due to the harsh conditions they are living.

According to United Nations statistics, more than 50% of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in insecure places, and 70% of them live below the poverty line, which forces them to resort to harmful coping strategies such as reducing the number of meals, sending their children to work, or moving from homes and safe shelters to tents, warehouses or site buildings in substandard condition. Today, Syrian refugees represent a quarter of the Lebanese population and most of them live in extreme poverty in makeshift camps across the country.

Lebanon's residency policies make it difficult for Syrians to maintain legal status, as 80% of them lack legal residency, which exposes them to an increased risk of exploitation and abuse and limits the refugees' ability to access work, education and health care, in addition to the risk of arrest.

Moreover, the Lebanese authorities permanently renew their call for refugees to return to Syria and work to organize returns in parallel, despite the ongoing conflict in Syria and the justified fears of persecution of many refugees.

The department responsible for the documentation of violations against refugees at VDC, and ACHR, recorded a marked deterioration in shelter conditions and an increase in the number of refugees living in non-permanent structures, where hundreds of families live in non-residential facilities. Also, the majority of Syrian children born in Lebanon do not have any kind of documentation to prove their birth, neither a birth certificate from the hospital, nor from the midwife or from the mukhtar (head of the village).

To make the situation worse for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the UNHCR has reduced its assistance aid, and has removed a large number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon from the list of the beneficiaries. Accordingly, the institutions that sign this statement require the UNHCR to listen, study and take seriously into consideration the demands of the protesters which are summarized as follows:

- **Provide adequate shelters for housing**, in a context where the Lebanese authorities force the refugees who live in semi-permanent housing in agricultural lands to dismantle the concrete walls and roofs of these shelters, and replace them with less protective materials, otherwise the Lebanese army demolishes them -- or what is known as "forced housing dismantling" according to an order issued by the Supreme Council of Defense that makes refugee housing less suitable for the harsh climatic conditions. Therefore, the Lebanese government should abide by its obligations to guarantee the right to adequate housing for everyone in the country.
- **The Lebanese government and the UNHCR alike must fully respect the principle of non-refoulement to the state of persecution**, which binds states within the framework of the United Nations Convention of 1951 not to return refugees to a potential danger. Lebanon should not create pressures that compel refugees to return to insecure or undignified

conditions, and should secure legal protection for them, as returnees might face the risk of arrest, torture and abuse by the Syrian government, especially since Lebanon has a history of forcibly returning Syrian refugees and handing them over to the Syrian government.

- **UNHCR must reassess the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and grant humanitarian assistance** to those who deserve it, especially the widows and orphans, in addition to providing protection and full assistance to refugee women and ensuring that they are not exposed to any kind of exploitation.
- **Donor countries should prioritize the protection of refugee rights**, share the responsibility for ensuring humanitarian needs, and fulfill all pledges made with the Lebanese government to help them withstand economic and social burdens.

Signatory organizations and institutions:

Physicians across continents Turkey
SEMA
Jana watan
La justice et le développement durable.
IYD
Alghad Charity
Iamsat ward
WOMAN SUPPORT ASSOCIATION
Horan Foundation
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION
International humanitarian relief
Ataa Humanitarian Relief Association
violet organization
Anti racism movement
Sewar
Refugees=Partners
Humena for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
LDHR Lawyers and doctors for human rights
Syria Relief

