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Lebanon

# Statement of condemnation and clarification by the Socialist Forum

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### **This statement was issued by the Socialist Forum in Lebanon on 16 July 2017.**

On Friday June 30th, 2017 at dawn, a faction of the Lebanese Army raided two Syrian refugee camps (Nawar and Qareiah) in the town of Aرسال, in what was officially designated as a "preventive raid" in search of "terrorists" based in the camp.

As a result, several people were killed, amongst them a child, and several soldiers were wounded due to a suicide bombing inside the camps. This was followed by the arrest of more than 350 Syrian refugees based on their alleged potential link to "terrorist" organizations. Soon after, photos of the detained held under inhumane conditions and subject to torture and humiliation, were circulated in the press.

A few days later, on Tuesday, July 4, 2017, the army announced that four Syrians who had been arrested during the raids on the camps on Friday (June 30th) died in detention as a result of "chronic diseases and climatic conditions." However, the images that were circulated through social media channels clearly revealed bruises, wounds and the effects of torture on the bodies of the victims.

The Army's statement about the circumstances that led to the death of the detainees was rendered even more dubious when they exerted pressure on the families of the victims to bury the bodies immediately, without the right to a coronary or forensic examination, access to lawyers, or even photographing the deceased.

In addition, the Military Intelligence intervened on July 7th, 2017 to disrupt a judicial decision issued by the Judge for Urgent Matters in Zahle, authorizing the examination of samples from the autopsies. Military intelligence personnel confiscated the evidence held at Hotel Dieu hospital from the lawyer granted power of attorney by the families of the victims, in a clear case of judicial obstruction by the military courts in order to withhold evidence related to civilians who were not definitively shown to have been involved with any terrorist associations.

This attack on Syrian refugees is not the first of its kind. It indicates a dangerous escalation within the framework of an organized racist campaign against refugee populations by ruling class parties, who are using various state apparatuses in Lebanon to impose curfews, close the border to those fleeing the war in Syria and deprive them of their most basic rights, which are universally guaranteed under international law. Furthermore, the General Security has imposed impossible conditions for the renewal of residency permits since the beginning of 2015. These conditions are only aimed at turning refugees into illegal aliens, making them easier to exploit and increasing the precarity of their living conditions. This policy of limiting mobility has gone hand in hand with raids, evictions and arbitrary arrests over the last two years, as well as the continuing threat of forcible repatriation to a country still embroiled in war.

Within this context, a large group of Lebanese activists gathered on July 13, 2017 to organize a solidarity rally for Syrian refugees, against racism, and against the repression that occurred following the events in Aرسال. The goal was to attempt to restore, and strengthen, the relations between Lebanese and Syrians, hoping to counter the discourse of hatred and racism. The Socialist Forum called for a sit-in in solidarity with Syrian refugees to take place on Tuesday July 18th, 2017 at the Samir Kassir Square in Beirut. Three members of the organisation were in charge of getting the permit clearance from the Municipality of Beirut, following the usual legal procedures for organizing a protest in Lebanon. However, given the atmosphere of fear and intimidation that followed the widespread incitement campaign that was launched by a shady intelligence Facebook page called the "Syrian People's Union in Lebanon",

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and taking into account the numerous threats received by some of the organizers, the Socialist Forum decided to cancel the sit-in.

However, it is important for us to clarify that contrary to what is being circulated in the media and on some social media platforms, the Socialist Forum is not attempting to incite against the Lebanese Army. As per its statement on July 13, 2017, the Socialist Forum is simply asking for:

1. A transparent and independent investigation to uncover the causes of the suspects' deaths.
2. A strict public accountability for all those involved in torture, murder, and other forms of abuse.
3. Revealing the fate of the remaining arbitrary detainees, their release and compensation.
4. The end of the exploitation of the refugee issue for political manipulation, and to stop treating it as a security threat.
5. Abolishing all racist decisions against refugees, and the end of practices that forces them to return against their will to brutal killings and massacres, as the regional and international community remains suspiciously and criminally silent.

We, at the Socialist Forum, condemn all the rumours and accusations made against our comrades in the media and through social media or social networking platforms. We strongly condemn the leaking of the protest permit request document from the Beirut Municipality which mentions the names of three comrades and their telephone numbers. We also condemn the bias media coverage and the circulation of the a names and photos (and Facebook pages) of our comrades by many of the local television channels. The circulation of this leaked document has put the three activists under serious and severe danger reaching death threats. The Socialist Forum would like to point out that Beirut Governor, Ziad Chebib, specified to the news that the protest permit request has nothing to do with the "Syrian People's Union in Lebanon", and that the protest request had no mention of the Lebanese Army, but was rather planned as a sit-in against racism towards the refugees, as opposed to what rumours are claiming.

Despite the fact that the Socialist Forum has organized numerous solidarity meetings with Syrian refugees over the years, this is the first time that the call for a sit-in has received so many open threats. We believe that this incitement is aimed at paving the way for an all-out war in Aarsal, and imposing a deal with the Syrian regime within the framework of a settlement that would require the forcible transfer of Syrian refugees to so-called "safe-zones" within Syria.

Therefore:

1. We categorically reject any alterations to the objectives of the sit-in that puts it in the context of a confrontation against the Lebanese Army, especially that the Socialist Forum has previously condemned the bombings that targeted the Lebanese Army in Aarsal on June 30, 2017. It also condemned the kidnapping of the soldiers and security forces in that region and called on the Lebanese state to take responsibility on this issue.
2. We call for the Beirut Municipality to provide an explanation for the publication of the permit request document in such a way, to cause incitement and marginalization, and we hold it responsible for any harm that might be inflicted on members of our political organization.

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3. We ask media outlets to circulate a clarification containing the accurate statements and information, including the calls for the sit-in and this clarification statement.

4. The Socialist Forum shall resort to the Lebanese judiciary at any time it sees fit to prevent any bodily or physical harm on its members .

*The Socialist Forum in Lebanon*

*Beirut*

*16-07-2017*

*PS:*

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