

New Threats Facing Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Concurrently with Presidential Elections



Source: BBC

With the current Syrian presidential elections allowed to take place in the Syrian embassy in Lebanon, alerting reported information indicates that Syrian Refugees in Lebanon have been subjected to pressures and terrorization to participate in the election process. Simultaneously, this participation has been exaggerated to be used as a plea to deport Syrian refugees. The politicization of the refugees' file to settle political scores adds to the atrocities against refugees living in constant fear and instability.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 laid out a roadmap for a political transition in Syria under the auspices of the United Nations, which stipulated the establishment of a credible, inclusive, and non-sectarian governance and set a schedule for drafting a new constitution. Afterward, the Resolution stipulated the organization of free and fair elections under the new Constitution.

The Syrian Government has so far shown no willingness to implement the steps outlined in resolution 2254 meaningfully. For instance, the Government delegation to the Constitutional Committee talks in Geneva rejected proposals by the opposition and the UN envoy to move the process forward. Additionally, in complete disregard to the political process, the Syrian Government scheduled a presidential election to take place on May 26th and May 20th for Syrians abroad. While some countries hosting Syrians refused to participate in the overwrite of the UNSC resolution and did not enable the process in their states, Lebanon allowed this process to take place on its soil, leading to numerous protection risks for refugees therein.

Available information indicates that individuals affiliated with Lebanese political parties aligned with the Syrian Government have been using their security and political influence to pressure Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon to support and vote in the upcoming Syrian presidential elections. These practices included threats, collecting national ID numbers of camp residents by camp administrators under aid provision pretenses or after holding banquets for camp administrators.

Concurrently, Lebanese political parties opposed to the caretaker government have called for the departure of all Syrians in Lebanon that participate in the current elections, under the pretext that participants face no threats to their lives in areas under the control of the Syrian Government. Such an approach could open the door to justify the deportation of Syrian refugees on Lebanese soil.

It is well-established that Syrian refugees living in Lebanon face mounting hostility and dire conditions, exacerbated by the ongoing political crisis in Lebanon since October 2019. The politicization of the Syrian refugee issue by the different Lebanese political factions has been the main contributor to the challenges Syrians face in Lebanon. The positions mentioned above and statements by the various Lebanese political officials and leaders mark a continuation of the politicization approach.

With the UN reiterating it is not involved in the Syrian presidential elections, VDSF calls for the following:

- ➔ **UNHCR** must declare a clear position, as per its mandate, and commit to providing protection to all Syrians regardless of their legal status in Lebanon or participating in the elections process since it was not entirely voluntary.
- ➔ **Lebanese authorities** need to recognize, address, and end the practices carried out against Syrians and prevent retaliatory hostilities.
- ➔ **Donor states** to Lebanon to hold the Lebanese state its responsibilities towards Syrians in Lebanon.
- ➔ **The international community** needs to reiterate the consensus that the current presidential elections do not reflect the political orientations of Syrians. Disregarding this reality may lead to dangerous ramifications that may lead to handing over those fleeing the oppression of the Syrian regime to the hands of their torturers.