

Mr. Dimitrij Rupel
President of the Council of the European Union

Brussels, 15 February 2008
Our ref. B747

Dear Mr. Rupel,

Subject: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

In light of the upcoming EU-Lebanon Association Council meeting on 19 February, Amnesty International urges the EU to raise the continuing discrimination faced by Palestinian refugees with the Lebanese authorities.

Around 300,000 Palestinian refugees reside in Lebanon, most of whom (or whose ancestors) were expelled or otherwise fled from their homes nearly 60 years ago. Amnesty International recognizes the efforts made by the Lebanese authorities to accommodate refugees, and the various costs that this has imposed but is concerned by continuing restrictions on their exercise of economic, social and cultural rights, including the rights to housing, work and health. It is high time that the Lebanese government took concrete steps to address the appalling social and economic conditions suffered by Palestinian refugees, to end all forms of discrimination and to fully protect and uphold their human rights. The international community also has a responsibility to help the Lebanese authorities find a durable solution for refugees that fully respects and protects their human rights, including their rights to housing, to work and to education.

Non-ID refugees

Some 3,000-5,000 Palestinian refugees are not registered with either the Lebanese authorities or UNWRA although many have been resident in Lebanon for many years, and face even greater restrictions on their rights. They cannot register their children at birth and obtain official identity documents for them, and children of non-ID fathers cannot acquire Lebanese nationality even if their mothers are Lebanese citizens. Without official registration, non-ID refugees' children cannot formally access the education system and attend schools. Non-ID refugees also cannot register their marriages under the law, among other restrictions.

Recent reports suggest that the Lebanese authorities are seeking to resolve this issue and improve the situation of non-ID refugees. The EU should encourage the authorities to complete this process speedily, and to urge the Lebanese authorities to:

- Regularize the status of all non-ID Palestinian refugees, including by taking measures to register them under Lebanese jurisdiction, provide them with official identity documents, and ensure that they can register their marriages under Lebanese law and that their children have access to free and compulsory primary education.

Right to Housing

More than half of the 300,000 Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon live in 12 official Palestinian refugee camps. The area of land allocated for these camps has remained largely unchanged since 1948, despite significant population growth. In some households, families of 10 share a single room.

Palestinian refugees are denied the right to adequate housing including legal security of tenure and protection from forced eviction and other harassment and threats; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy. In camps in the south of Lebanon, unreasonable restrictions have been imposed on refugees' right to repair or improve their

homes. Some refugees have been intimidated, fined and detained simply for seeking to build a brick wall to protect their home from the elements. The EU should therefore press the Lebanese authorities to:

- Lift the ban on the entry of building materials to Palestinian camps in south of Lebanon.
- Remove the legal restriction on the ability of stateless people in Lebanon to register legal title or inherit housing and land.

Right to Work

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have restricted access to the Lebanese labour market either by law or prejudice, and continue to suffer discrimination and marginalisation, contributing to high levels of unemployment, low wages and poor working conditions. By law, they are banned from working in 20 professions such as medicine, engineering, law and pharmacy. In addition, Palestinian refugees are denied membership in professional associations and are not allowed to own their own businesses.

The lengthy, complicated and expensive process for obtaining work permits for non-banned professions constitutes yet another obstacle to their access to employment. In cases where Palestinians do obtain work permits, they still do not qualify to receive benefits from the social security system to which they are required to contribute. The EU should therefore press the Lebanese authorities to:

- Ease the regulations imposed on the work of non-nationals.
- Lift the ban on the 20 remaining restricted professions that require compulsory membership in unions and facilitate the access of Palestinians to employment in the 50 professions that were restricted to them prior to the 2005 announcement by the Minister of Labour.
- Amend Article 9(4) of Lebanon's Social Security Law to include Palestinian refugees who can not fulfil the "reciprocity of treatment" requirement.

Right to Education

The children of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon by law do not have the right to free primary education, have limited access to public secondary education and most do not have the financial means to benefit from private education. Non-ID children are also denied recognition of educational achievement in Lebanese secondary schools as identification documents are required for sitting the Lebanese state exams, which in turn give access to higher levels of education. The lack of employment prospects has also led to a high drop-out rate for Palestinian schoolchildren. The EU should therefore press the Lebanese authorities to:

- Amend Law No. 686 of 1998 so as to ensure the right of everyone, including non-ID Palestinian refugees, to free and compulsory primary education without discrimination.

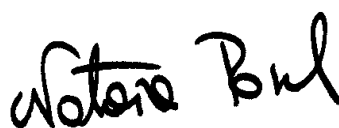
Amnesty International urges the Presidency to use the opportunity of the Association Council meeting to discuss these concerns with the Lebanese authorities. Further information on these and other issues can be found in the Amnesty International report "*Exiled and Suffering: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon*", published in October 2007, which examines the wide range of restrictions that continue to impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees. We look forward to hearing from you as to the outcome of these discussions.

Yours sincerely,



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