General Allegation

137th session (15-24 September 2025)

Lebanon

The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (hereinafter referred to as "the Working Group") has received information from various sources concerning the implementation of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (hereinafter referred to as "the Declaration") in Lebanon.

1. Between 1975 and 1990, Lebanon endured a fifteen-year civil war marked by intense conflict among various militias, foreign forces, and their local agents. Cases of enforced disappearance and acts tantamount to disappearances were widespread during this period. Civilians were frequently targeted, being abducted at checkpoints, in the streets, or from their homes. Today, approximately 17,000 people remain missing as a result of the Lebanese civil war, and there have been no tangible developments in the attempts to establish their fate and whereabouts.

2. In November 2018, the Law No. 105 on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons was promulgated, establishing for the first time a formal legal framework that recognizes the rights of missing persons and their families, in line with international human rights treaties. The law defines the crime of enforced disappearance and establishes penalties on any person involved in the crime, including instigators, perpetrators, or accomplices. It also established the National Commission for Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons in Lebanon, as an independent body with legal personality and financial and administrative autonomy, allowing it to function independently of any other State authority. It was granted a broad mandate to access information, receiving reports, hearing oral testimonies, verifying and storing information, establishing an information database, and identifying and exhuming burial sites.

3. Despite the significance of Law No. 105, the Government has reportedly failed to fully operationalize the Commission, ensure its independence, or guarantee the meaningful participation of the families of the disappeared - particularly female relatives - in its composition and decision-making processes. These challenges have been further compounded by chronic financial and human resource constraints affecting the Commission, which have been exacerbated by the deepening socioeconomic crisis in Lebanon since 2019.

4. Furthermore, the Working Group was informed that no public information is available regarding the number of cases, the progress of investigations, or the outcome of trials of perpetrators of enforced disappearances or acts tantamount to enforced disappearances pursuant to Law No. 105/2018.

5. Based on available information, the Independent Commission for Missing Persons is currently investigating 12 complaints of enforced disappearance relating to the period

2023-2024 filed under Law 105/2018. These include three cases involving the Internal Security Forces, three cases involving the General Directorate of Public Security, and six cases involving the Lebanese army. One case concerns the disappearance of M. Rafaat Falih, a former member of the Syrian army who had sought refuge in Lebanon two years prior and was registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. He was detained? on 10 January 2024 at a checkpoint in Tripoli, and secretly transferred to Syria, despite serious concerns that he would be subjected to torture and enforced disappearance. Several complaints were submitted to the Lebanese authorities and international bodies to ascertain his fate and whereabouts, until his family was able to visit him at Sednaya Prison in Syria on 14 May 2024. On 8 December 2024, Mr. Falih was released from Sednaya Prison following the collapse of Bashar Al-Assad's Government.

6. The Working Group has also received information concerning alleged widespread campaigns aimed at deporting Syrian migrants and refugees in Lebanon in violation of the non-refoulement principle. Moreover, there are reports of Syrians in Lebanon being subjected to abduction, human trafficking, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, sexual harassment, and forced deportation.

7. In this regard, the Special Procedures transmitted two joint communications to Lebanon concerning these allegations (LEB 3/2022 and LEB 2/2017). The Working Group expresses its appreciation to Lebanon for its responses, such as the Note Verbale from the Permanent Mission, dated 3 March 2023, which provided extensive information in reply to the aforementioned communications.

8. According to the information received, during 2023 there were 1,080 arbitrary arrests of Syrians in Lebanon, and 763 of them were forcibly returned to Syria, despite some of them being wanted by the Syrian authorities for exercising their freedom of expression, evading military service, or participating in demonstrations against the Syrian Government. These operations were reportedly carried out in coordination between the Lebanese army and the Syrian army, or between the Syrian army's Fourth Division, smugglers and individuals in the Lebanese army. These forced returns were reportedly carried out without due process or judicial safeguards, and without individualized assessments of protection needs that could militate against return - thereby increasing the risk of serious human rights violations. During 2023-2024, the Working Group also received information indicating that non-State armed groups exercising government-like functions contributed to the above-mentioned operations. These operations reportedly resulted in the disappearance of numerous returnees to Syria after they were handed over to the security services there, and there is no information about their fate or whereabouts.

9. According to the latest 2023 Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, conducted jointly by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the United Nations World Food Programme, only 19.7% of Syrians in Lebanon have legal residency. In 2023, the Lebanese army deported and returned more than 13,000 Syrians. In 2024, the Lebanese army returned more than 1,400 Syrians to Syria, and the General Security more than 300. Reportedly, such forced returns are often

carried out under summary procedures, without court orders, and without giving refugees the opportunity to defend their right to protection or appeal against deportation orders.

10. In this regard, the Working Group was informed of new measures taken by Syria and Lebanon to strengthen cooperation in the search for disappeared persons and support to their families. In September 2025, two joint committees were reportedly established to clarify the fate of Syrian detainees in Lebanon and Lebanese nationals disappeared in Syria. The initiative also addresses border-related issues and aims to enhance information sharing, judicial coordination, and family assistance.

11. With regard to the allegations hereby contained, the Working Group wishes to draw the Government's attention to the following provisions of the Declaration:

Art.2
1. No State shall practise, permit or tolerate enforced disappearances.
2. States shall act at the national and regional levels and in cooperation with the United Nations to contribute by all means to the prevention and eradication of enforced disappearance.

Art.3
Each State shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent and terminate acts of enforced disappearance in any territory under its jurisdiction.

Art.6
1. No order or instruction of any public authority, civilian, military or other, may be invoked to justify an enforced disappearance. Any person receiving such an order or instruction shall have the right and duty not to obey it.
2. Each State shall ensure that orders or instructions directing, authorizing or encouraging any enforced disappearance are prohibited.
3. Training of law enforcement officials shall emphasize the provisions in paragraphs 1 and 2 of the present article.

Art. 8
1. No State shall expel, return (refouler) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds to believe that he would be in danger of enforced disappearance.
2. For the purpose of determining whether there are such grounds, the competent authorities shall take into account all relevant considerations including, where applicable, the existence in the State concerned of a consistent pattern of gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights.

Art. 13
1. Each State shall ensure that any person having knowledge or a legitimate interest who alleges that a person has been subjected to enforced disappearance has the right to complain to a competent and independent State authority and to have that complaint promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigated by that authority. Whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe that an enforced disappearance has been committed, the State shall

promptly refer the matter to that authority for such an investigation, even if there has been no formal complaint. No measure shall be taken to curtail or impede the investigation.

12. Moreover, the Working Group wishes to recall the obligations of the State pursuant to the 2019 Guiding principles for the search for disappeared persons; the General comment on the right to truth in relation to enforced disappearances (A/HRC/16/48, para. 39); the Thematic report on standards and public policies for an effective investigation of enforced disappearances (A/HRC/45/13/Add.3); the Thematic report on enforced disappearances in the context of migration (A/HRC/36/39/ADD.2), and the Thematic report on enforced disappearances in the context of transnational transfers (A/HRC/48/57 paras. 38-60).

13. The Working Group respectfully requests the Government to provide its observations and comments on the following paragraphs:

    (a) Please provide any additional information and comments on the above allegations.

    (b) Please provide detailed information on the safeguards in place to prevent enforced disappearances in the context of operations aimed at managing international borders and migration and dealing with Syrian refugees, whether they have legal residence or not.

    (c) Please provide detailed information about the measures taken by the Lebanese authorities to prevent violations against Syrian refugees by non-State actors, including arbitrary arrests or acts that maybe tantamount to enforced disappearance and similar acts, and to document the arrest and transfer of Syrian asylum seekers to the Syrian border.

    (d) Please provide information on any measures taken to ensure cooperation between the Lebanon and Syria to assist families in search for disappeared persons.

    (e) Please provide information on the measures taken and protocols adopted to ensure the search for disappeared persons, both before and after the enactment of Law No. 105/2018.

    (f) Please provide detailed information on cases brought before the Lebanese judiciary relating to the application of Law No. 105/2018.

    (g) Please provide comprehensive statistics on migrants and refugees who have been arrested or deported by the Lebanese forces, broken down by gender, age, and marital status, to help assess the measures taken by the Lebanese authorities and evaluate policies aimed at reducing violations against Syrians and others.

    (h) Please provide detailed information on measures taken to ensure respect for the principle of non-refoulement, including legal measures taken to conduct risk-assessment, training and capacity-building programs, and the groups benefiting from them.

The Working Group requests your Excellency's Government to provide a response to the above questions within 60 days. The text of the general allegation will be published along with the Working Group's post-sessional report and on its website, where also any response received by your Excellency's Government will be made public.