

Open letter to his Excellency, Labour Minister,

Mr. Sejaan Azzi

Date 24th of April 2015

Concerning the Renewal of Work Permits for Palestinian Refugees

Respectful greetings,

Your Excellency,

The civil society organizations, working within Palestinian communities in Lebanon, have monitored and documented a number of cases of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon whose work permits were not renewed; in particular the cases of employees in international and local relief and development, non-profit organizations. This non-renewal of work permits is viewed as a violation of the right to work for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon. Furthermore, it contradicts the essence of the amended Labour and Social Security Law of 2010, and does not conform with the consecutive declarations made by the Council of Ministers (COM), since 2005. These declarations aimed to improve the socio-economic situation of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon. Furthermore, these declarations were aimed at upholding, even if only partially, Lebanon's international commitments concerning human rights generally and in particular the rights of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon.

In keeping with the spirit of this amendment and these declarations, Lebanon should have published these declarations and issued decrees to ensure their implementation and hereby address the gaps in Article 59 of the amended Labour Law (No. 129/ 2010). This amendment defines Palestinian Refugees as foreigners, despite the fact that they have been refugees in Lebanon for over 67 years and most of them were born in Lebanon. These gaps in the amended law allow for legal interpretation which deprives Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon from the full enjoyment of their right to work, and deprives them of their right to live in dignity.

- The non-renewal of work permits was applied in violation of Article 3 (1) of Minister Decision (1/197) of the 12th of December 2014.
- "The Palestinian Refugees born in Lebanon and officially registered with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities are included in the provisions of Article 2¹ of same Minister Decision, but are excluded from working in the Liberal Syndicate professions. The by-laws of the Liberal Syndicate Professions prohibits non-Lebanese from working in these professions"².

¹ This article mentions the professions that may only be practiced by Lebanese citizens.

² Translated from the Arabic minister decision

- http://www.labor.gov.lb/_layouts/MOL_Application/Cur/%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%20D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%82%20D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%87%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A8%20D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8

- In addition, your Excellency did not abide by the same provision Article 3 (3) that gives you the authority to give exceptions to employ certain foreigners with certain expertise, when there are no Lebanese individuals with the required expertise for these jobs. The Palestinian Refugees whose work permits were not renewed are considered to have expertise in the development of Palestinian Refugee camps, and they belong to Palestinian refugee community. Furthermore these individuals, who were refused permits, are well aware of the needs and challenges facing these communities; and have easy access to the camps. It must be noted, that many Lebanese individuals would prefer not to work in the Palestinian Camps; as they have to visit even if they are in managerial positions.
- It is beneficial for the Lebanese Government to allow the Palestinian Refugees to work in Lebanon. These refugees will spend the money they earn, in Lebanon and hereby contribute to the Lebanese economy. This is one of the strongest indicators of economic development, while not giving them this work opportunity would result in them being a burden in Lebanon at the economic and social level, and could increase the risk that they could become a security threat.
- Prohibiting Palestinian Refugees from working leads to these refugees feeling hopeless and powerless; with the few options left to them the one they perceive as the best opportunity is still worst. As a result of their vulnerability, they often fall prey to human traffickers and smugglers, which lead them on a ‘Death March’ (desperate and dangerous journey)³ across the Mediterranean Sea. This situation is not only a shame, but can be considered a crime against humanity. Through making the living conditions difficult for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and by making it easier for Palestinian Refugees to be exploited through trafficking, the Lebanese Government can be held as accomplice for the occurrence of this illegal migration and the resulted death in particular in the Mediterranean Sea.
- A number of Palestinian Refugees who refuse the suicidal option of participating in death march. They ended, in their desperation, victims to terrorist and extremist groups who have a lot of money to entice these indigent and unemployed refugees. The Palestinian Refugees who join these groups are led down a dangerous path which jeopardizes their lives, communities and host countries. Those who pushed them to such choices are partners in responsibility.
- The discriminatory pattern of depriving Palestinian Refugees of work permits or failing to renew permits, which were previously issued to them, can be considered a violation of the rights of Palestinian Refugees according to the International Human Rights Bill and the international and regional treaties which Lebanon has ratified. These instruments

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³ Death march parag.16.5 page 15- Coalition Submission for UPR

<http://palhumanrights.org/rep/ENG/UPR%20Report%20for%20Lebanon%20-%202015%20-%20Palestinian%20Coalition%20in%20Lebanon.pdf>

obligate Lebanon to respect the human rights of Palestinian Refugees. The Lebanese Government will be embarrassed after questioning these actions, during its human rights review which will occur in front of the Arab Commission for Human Rights, at the end of this month at the headquarters of the Arab League, in Cairo. Furthermore, they can be held accountable for these actions before the United Nations Human Rights Council, during the Universal Periodic Review of Lebanon which will take place in Geneva, in November 2015. It should be noted that during its previous UPR session in 2010, Lebanon stated that it had already ensured the right to work for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, and committed to improving the work and economic situation of Palestinian Refugees.

- The organizations which have signed this letter have approached your Excellency with the wish that you would address this injustice and discrimination faced by the people whose work permits have not been renewed, through reconsidering the refusal of working permits and establishing mechanisms which ensure the elimination of restrictions against Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon who are seeking work permits.

We hope that your Excellency will respond to our grievances.

With all respect,

Below can be found the list of the names of organizations which have signed this letter:

- Palestinian Human Rights Organization (PHRO)
- Human Development Center
- Palestinian Association For Human Rights (Witness)
- Developmental Action Without Borders (NABAA)
- Center for Refugee Rights /Aidoun (CRR)
- Women's Humanitarian Organization (PWHO)
- Women's Program Association (WPA)
- Mousawat Association
- Coalition of the Right to Work Campaign