

JANUARY 2016

# **SYRIA: VOICES IN CRISIS**

A MONTHLY INSIGHT INTO THE HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN SYRIA.



Beqaa Valley – Syrian Refugee camp - © Giles Clarke/Getty Images Reportage

## **“YOU’RE NOT ELIGIBLE TO MAKE A COMPLAINT”**

### **VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION OF REFUGEE WOMEN FROM SYRIA IN LEBANON**

Refugee women in Lebanon are at risk of violence, harassment and exploitation. They have little or no protection or access to justice. Their situation is made worse because the international community is failing to provide adequate funding for refugees from Syria and the Lebanese government continues to make it extremely difficult for refugees to obtain or renew residency permits.

Refugee women from Syria face gender-based violence and exploitation in almost all aspects of their

daily lives. They struggle to meet the high cost of living in Lebanon. Finding enough money to pay rent is a particular concern. These women worry constantly that they won’t be able to pay the rent on time and that landlords may evict them. Some refugee women who work or who have tried to find a job are underpaid and sometimes don’t get paid at all. Some employers deliberately pay them very low wages because they know the women are desperate.

Some women refugees experience sexual harassment or risk being harassed at work. Many experience sexual harassment in public spaces and women who are heads of households are more likely to be targeted for harassment by men who know they are alone in Lebanon. Refugee women from Syria told Amnesty International about sexual harassment by police officers, government employees in charge of renewing residence permits, employers, bus and taxi drivers, and strangers on the street. The lack of valid residency permits is a key reason why women refugees from Syria are unable or unwilling to report this violence, harassment and threats to the Lebanese authorities.

Hanan (not her real name) came to Lebanon in early 2013 and lives with her three daughters in Beirut. She is a Palestinian refugee from Syria's Yarmouk Camp in Damascus. The government of Lebanon has introduced increasingly tight restrictions, especially on Palestinian refugees from Syria. Hanan told Amnesty International:

"My husband is in Europe. Since he left, people look at me weirdly, including the people who distribute aid. They put conditions on the aid, and say they will only give me the aid if I will see them later on. The taxi drivers also harass me and tell me that they will take me to places that are not where I asked to go.

"I had an incident once with a bus driver when I was with my daughters coming back from Bekaa to Beirut. There was only one other man apart from the driver on the bus and I was alone with my daughters. The bus driver started trying to harass me. The first thing he did was take his gun and place it next to him so I would know that he had a weapon with him. My eldest daughter who is 16 was really terrified. But I had to tell her not to be scared and promised her that I would manage the situation.

"How do you think I was able to get off the bus? I had to promise to come back to him and told him, 'As you like, I will first just take my daughters home.' I took his phone number and his name because this was the only chance for us to get out. I gave him my phone number and smiled a lot so he would believe my lie and told him I would call him back. He said he'd call me Princess and I said, 'OK, you can call me whatever you like.' I even thought to myself that, if things went to the extreme and I wasn't able to get away, I would just give him whatever he wanted as long as he didn't hurt my daughters.

"I complained at Shatila police station in Beirut. I was really angry but they told me, 'Do you know that you're

not eligible to make a complaint? You don't have legal status.' And then they said in a sarcastic way, 'Why did he come up to you and harass you in the first place?'

"My 16-year-old daughter is very tall and looks older. Men come to me and propose to marry my daughter. Neighbours and people in the community suggest to me that I should get her married but I don't want that. I want her to finish her education, even though she hasn't had the chance [to go to school] here.

"My husband is sick and needs an operation. I want to travel to Europe to be with him. I feel stressed because he is sick and I can't be with him. If we were in Europe, I could work and my daughters would be getting an education."



# CASE FOCUS: YUSEF EIDO

## HUMANITARIAN VOLUNTEER “DISAPPEARED”



The father of Yusef Eido holding a picture of his son ©Amnesty International

Yusef Eido is a 25-year-old humanitarian volunteer. He has been missing since 26 December 2012. Prior to his enforced disappearance, he lived with his family in the al-Khalidiya neighbourhood of Aleppo. Here, he helped families sheltering in local schools after being displaced by the fighting, organizing food, blankets and clothes to be provided for them.

One month before he went missing, he was hit in the eye by what seemed to be a stray sniper bullet while at his local market. His brother, Saeed Eido, said: “He was eating a sandwich and a bullet hit him in the eye. It was random bullet, and we have no idea where it came from.” Yusef Eido was able to take a taxi to a local hospital where he was taken into surgery. Doctors told his family that the procedure of removing the bullet was too complicated to be carried out there, and he would need to travel to Germany.

Yusef Eido then proceeded to organize his paperwork to obtain a visa for Germany in order to have surgery. On the day that he disappeared, he called his family from within an area of Aleppo

controlled by the Syrian government, very close to the local government office where he was supposed to pick up the visa. He never returned home. His family believes he was arrested, but the reasons for his arrest are unknown.

His father Ahmed Eido told Amnesty International:

“When he didn’t come home soon after his call, we knew something was wrong immediately. We went to all the prison branches, the police offices, the checkpoints, and we asked them one by one. They each said the same thing: ‘He’s not with us’. We later heard from a released detainee that Yusef was in a branch of Political Security in Damascus, so we went to the judge to submit the documents about his case. When we got to the reception desk, the receptionist just threw the papers back in our faces.”

At the end of 2014, Yusef Eido’s mother went to Damascus to look for her son. She was told by an official there that he was being held in Military Intelligence Branch 215 and would soon be transferred to ‘Adra prison. When she returned several days later, she discovered that the official with whom she had spoken was no longer employed. His replacement denied that Yusef Eido was in custody. Since then, the family has heard from a released detainee that Yusef Eido was still in Branch 215 and had been tortured. They are, however, unsure whether this news is reliable.

Saeed Eido explained how the family has been affected by Yusef’s disappearance: “My father wanted to go with my brother to pick up the visa, but my brother insisted that he should travel alone. My father feels responsible now. He has aged 20 years since my brother was taken.” Ahmed Eido added: “It seems my wife never stops crying now. Sometimes in the night I wake up and she is awake, looking at his picture and crying.”

Amnesty International calls on the Syrian authorities to immediately disclose to his family for Yusef Eido’s whereabouts and legal status. He should be released unless he is charged with an internationally recognizable criminal offence and tried in accordance to fair trial standards without further delay. He must be given immediate access to his family and a lawyer and must be given any medical attention he may require. He must be protected from torture and other ill-treatment while he remains in detention.