



المنظمة الفلسطينية لحقوق الإنسان (حقوق)

Palestinian Human Rights Organization (Rights) - PHRO

Member: Euro – Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)

Member: International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)



Translated Version

Beirut, August 20, 2007

Naher El-Bared Displaced Refugees: Circumstances and Living Conditions

The security conditions prevailing at Naher El-Bared Camp resulting from the conflict going on since 20 May, 2007 between the Lebanese Army and the so called (Fateh El-Islam Group) and its economic, social and health effects caused around 35,000 dwellers (inhabitants) of the camp to abandon their abodes, properties and sources of livelihood to safer areas in the North, Beirut and the South. This has created many problems that have touched on all aspects of their life.

Despite all relief efforts undertaken by a number of official institutions, local and international NGOs to alleviate the needs of the camp refugees who found themselves suddenly without shelter or a source of living, yet the human catastrophe was larger than the relief efforts which were beset by flaws and faults, particularly in the beginning, due to confusion and lack of coordination, neglect and lagging. It is worth mentioning that the Palestinian Human Rights Organization - PHRO spotlighted the causes of these flaws in the successive reports it published which described the situation in Naher El- Bared.

Perhaps the most problematic issue which has been the cause of great suffering for the refugees was finding them shelter. The sudden evacuation of the camp coupled with the lack of material resources caused by the conflict in Naher El-Bared, the general deprivations of refugees from their rights in Lebanon and the policy of discrimination against Palestinians administered by the consecutive Lebanese authorities prompted many of the refugees to take refuge in disused land, shops, industrial workshops, with relatives and acquaintances, particularly at Bedawi Camp - originally very crowded. Also in schools in-general and UNRWA schools in particular where they were distributed in the schools' halls and classrooms which led to more than one family or household from the same family included men, women and children to crowd into the same place without any partitions to separate between these households and afford them any semblance of privacy. Additionally, these families have to share the same washrooms which lacked the simplest facilities for ordinary use. This crowding added to the psychological pressures on the refugees and created all sorts of disputes between the refugees themselves and between them and their surroundings. Add to this the build-up of violence even between members of the same family.

The continuation of fighting for over three months without reaching any decisive result and with the approach of the beginning of the school year and the winter season, the question of finding alternative shelter for families living in these schools, disused land, shops and car repair workshops was becoming most pressing. This calls upon all concerned parties (the Government, the Palestine Liberation Organization and UNRWA) to draw an urgent emergency plan for finding appropriate temporary



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shelters for these families which provide privacy and respects their human dignity until the rebuilding of Naher El-Bared Camp is completed and the refugees return to their homes.

In this framework, and after we began witnessing possible signals in the horizon and signs of changes by UNRWA, represented by expansion of the school buildings, particularly Bier Hasan School and equipping it with fittings and furnishing for unifying the two sections of the school, elementary and middle, running simultaneously as a step towards abolishing the double shift system in the Beirut area, the PHRO has learnt from well-informed sources that UNRWA is planning to postpone the beginning of the scholastic year to, on principle, 1 October 2007, instead of the originally planned date of 15 September 2007. The PHRO has further learnt that UNRWA aims to transfer the displaced Palestinian refugees in the UNRWA school in Mar Elias Camp and giving them shelter at Hemmeh Girls School and Ramallah Boys School in Chatila Camp, closing the doors of these two schools for the scholastic year 2007 - 2008 while transferring all its students - estimated at 1100 students - to Bier Hasan School to be able to absorb more students than its normal capacity which means canceling the plan to eliminate the double shift system and coming face to face with the vested dangers to the safety of the students from having to pass through a street crowded by shops and hawkers, knowing that some lawless individuals loiter in this street, among them a number of gamblers and sellers of licentious films and compact discs. The students will also have to cross the main fast road in the two directions due to the absence of pedestrian bridges. Here we have to pause the question: is the alternative proposed by UNRWA worth exposing the life of students to these risks? And are the costs of repairing damages to furnishings and equipments cheaper than the rental of shelters for the refugee families? These questions are directed to the competent UNRWA authorities which seem to have lost their sense of clarity of vision regarding the future of education in the Northern Region and have fallen prey to confusion. All this raises serious fears on the future of the scholastic year of refugee students.

From another angle, the negligence of the responsible authorities (whether on the level of the Lebanese Government, the Palestine Liberation Organization, UNRWA and even donors) for providing appropriate shelter to the refugee families has caused a great deal of indignation in their ranks and motivated some with certain political backgrounds to exploit the situation through programmed instigation in the service of aims and targets unrelated to the interests of refugees though they might appear to be related. We end with the question: would it not have been better to have accelerated finding such temporary shelters for avoiding this instigation instead of leaving things to cause all this indignation? Here again the PHRO reiterate its demands for the necessity of serious and urgent efforts for finding alternative temporary and suitable shelters that guarantee their rights of enjoying an adequate standard of living sufficient for protecting their health and comfort - though at a minimum standard - in accordance of international covenant and conventions that guarantee human rights without any distinction built on race, color, national or social origin or any other distinction.



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