

Public Statement

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Lebanon: Killing of asylum-seeker should be thoroughly investigated

Amnesty International today expressed its concern at the killing of Ibrahim al-Taj Hussain Zaydan, a Sudanese asylum-seeker, by the Lebanese General Security and called on the Lebanese Government to ensure that investigations into this killing are thorough, impartial and public.

On 22 March 2001, Ibrahim al-Taj Hussain Zaydan, a Sudanese national in his early twenties and an asylum-seeker who had been registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Beirut since 1999, was shot at by a General Security force officer who was attempting to arrest him and others in al-Awza'i area of Beirut on grounds of illegal entry and residence in Lebanon. According to information received by Amnesty International, Mr Zaydan was shot while attempting to escape arrest by climbing a nearby wall. The incident took place when plainclothes members of the General Security were apparently carrying out a raid on suspected illegal immigrants.

On 23 March, Amnesty International wrote to the Lebanese authorities urging them to clarify the circumstances of the killing of Mr. Zaydan through an independent and impartial investigation, as well as the nature of the instructions given to law enforcement officials in the use of firearms.

On 27 March, the Lebanese authorities responded to Amnesty International's enquiry by stating that "climbing a wall, Zaydan hit hard the inspector's hand holding the gun while trying to arrest him, causing a forced fatal shot from his gun". The response also said that the Military Prosecutor had ordered the arrest of the inspector in question for investigation.

Amnesty International welcomes the response and the fact that the person responsible for the killing is currently under investigation. However, the organization regrets that the authorities' response does not give an adequate explanation of the incident and that requests for an autopsy report have been ignored. Independent sources have confirmed that Ibrahim Zaydan was shot in the back from a distance of over 50 centimetres.

Now, as on previous occasions, no autopsy reports have been made available to the organization or the next of kin.

Amnesty International remains deeply concerned about this grave incident and reiterates its call to the Lebanese authorities to ensure that an independent and impartial investigation is carried out, the perpetrator in question is brought to justice, and the family of the victim is adequately compensated. The use of firearms by members of the General Security should also be urgently reviewed in light of international standards.

Background

On 26 February 2001 Amnesty International issued a public statement expressing concern that hundreds of refugees and asylum-seekers in Lebanon -- mostly from countries suffering from war or systematic human rights violations such as Iraq, Sudan, and Somalia -- are at risk of arrest, torture during detention and forcible return. Since September 2000 more than 300 asylum-seekers were reportedly forcibly returned to their country of origin. Almost all had been arrested and detained on charges of illegal entry and residence in Lebanon.

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