

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Lebanon: Stop attacks on Syrian workers and bring perpetrators to justice**

Amnesty International is very concerned at reports that tens of Syrian workers have been killed and scores of others beaten, shot, threatened or robbed in Lebanon since the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri on 14 February 2005. Amnesty International calls for an immediate end to this wave of xenophobic attacks, and calls upon the Lebanese authorities to fully investigate the attacks, to bring alleged perpetrators to justice in proceedings that meet international standards for fair trial, and take measures to protect Syrian workers.

On 8 March Syrian Department of Immigration sources were reported to state that more than 20 bodies of killed Syrian workers had passed through the Lebanese-Syrian border post of Jdeide Yabous since 14 February. Thousands of Syrians have apparently left the country as a result of the violence and threats, many of whom were reportedly owed or denied back-pay from their employers.

It is believed that many of the killings occurred in cases when assailants set fire to tents or other temporary housing of the workers, or after workers were taken to secluded areas in anticipation of work. In addition, Amnesty International was informed that in late February in 'Aramoun, to the south of Beirut, two Syrians were killed when they were taken up to a four-storey building and thrown off the roof. On 19 March in Beirut's southern suburb of Ghobeiri two Syrian men were reportedly stabbed to death by a mob of assailants who then fled the scene. Two other killings of Syrians occurred on 9 and 12 March in Tyre and Tariq Jdeide in Beirut respectively, although the motives remain unclear.

On 13 April Amnesty International received a response from Lebanese General Security regarding its request for information related to attacks, including killings, on Syrians since 14 February, as well as about whether any of the alleged perpetrators are being brought to justice. Details received of officially recorded attacks include: 31 separate incidents of Syrian workers' temporary housing being burnt between 27 February and 23 March; 43 separate physical attacks on Syrian workers – including with stones, sticks, guns and grenades and at times with associated robbery - between 1 March and 6 April; two Syrian men abducted and one Syrian woman raped; a number of Syrian workers' vehicles being burnt or attacked; and 17 cases of threats against individuals to force them to leave the country.

However, the response does not include any information on killings, including those in 'Aramoun, Beirut and Tyre, nor on attacks outside of those dates, nor on any arrests. Amnesty International is concerned that the lack of clarity over the killings and the lack of information on steps being taken to bring alleged perpetrators to justice suggests that the attacks are not being fully investigated nor Syrian workers being adequately protected.

Exact numbers do not exist, but it is estimated that between four hundred thousand and six hundred thousand Syrians work in Lebanon, mostly in agriculture, construction, petty retail and services. At least 20 people were killed in the explosion that killed Rafiq al-Hariri, including at least two Syrians working nearby, and former minister Bassel Fleihan who died of his injuries on 18 April.