

PRESS RELEASE

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FEAR THAT POTENTIAL ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE APPREHEDED CROSSING ILLEGALLY THE BORDERS: LEBANON LACKS FRAMEWORK FOR THE RIGHT TO SEEK ASYLUM

Frontiers Ruwad is worried by the recent media news of the arrest in the Bekaa of more than 20 Sudanese nationals shortly after entering the country illegally. The arrest was coupled with beatings and ill-treatment of the arrestees. While this incident is not unique, Frontiers is concerned that such arrests may include asylum seekers who were not given the opportunity to declare themselves, particularly if they are from Darfur, where the security and human rights situation is leading thousands to flee the area and to seek asylum in various countries.

The state has a legitimate right to control its borders and arrest persons crossing it illegally. Equally, the state has the responsibility to provide an adequate legal framework that permits the reception of asylum seekers who flee their countries from fear of persecution. International refugee law does not penalize the act of illegal entry. Unfortunately, Lebanon lacks any legal framework for refugee protection and treats asylum seekers as illegal migrants and put them at risk of being refouled at the border or later.

The right to seek asylum is enshrined in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has constitutional value in Lebanon. However, this right has not been translated into any legal and operational mechanism that would allow asylum seekers to seek international protection.

UNHCR, today the sole responsible Agency in Lebanon for receiving and considering applications for asylum is not present at the borders, nor is automatically informed of the arrests at the border to be able to identify who is an asylum-seeker amongst the arrestees. In addition, Lebanon receives technical and financial assistance from major Western countries to improve its border control. However human rights and refugee rights do not seem to be part of the assistance and training.

Frontiers calls on the Lebanese authorities to immediately provide the arrestees legal counseling and contact UNHCR in order for the UN Agency to determine if they have refugee claim, and in the long term to establish, at a minimum, an operational refugee protection framework that would allow asylum seekers to declare him/herself upon arrival at the border and not to detain them solely for having entered the country illegally.