

Pressure grows for Hariri's return as Lebanon leader

Thu, 2020-08-20 22:43

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun said on Thursday that he plans to include "competent figures representing the voice of the street" in the new government.

Ten days after Prime Minister Hassan Diab's government resigned in the wake of the Beirut port blast, Aoun is yet to set a date for parliamentary consultations to name a leader for the next government.

In a tweet on Thursday, he added that it is not clear if talks will take place soon.

Diab's government stepped down amid widespread public anger following the port explosion that devastated Beirut, killing 180 people and causing widespread damage.

Opponents of Diab's leadership claim it was a "shadow government" dominated by Hezbollah that failed to carry out reforms demanded by the international community.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri is fighting to restore Saad Hariri as prime minister.

Hariri's government of national unity resigned in October, 2019, after violent protests broke out amid claims of growing government corruption.

Protesters called for a transitional government to implement reforms demanded by the global community to help Lebanon overcome its economic crisis.

Aoun and Berri held a meeting two days ago in which the parliament speaker suggested Hariri return to the leadership.

MPs have reported Berri saying that he considers Hariri "the perfect man for the stage."

Berri also claims that he has Hezbollah's backing for Hariri.

Sources say he is insisting on a political government, not a technocratic one, and wants Hariri to provide it with an acceptable cover in light of the political and economic crises facing Lebanon.

However, the dispute between Hariri and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) worsened during his time as prime minister, bringing an end to the relationship between the two parties.

French President Emmanuel Macron told Lebanese leaders during his visit to Beirut two days after the port explosion that he would return to Lebanon on

Sept. 1 to ensure reforms were being carried out.

He called on officials to “assume their responsibilities during the coming weeks, launch reforms and form a national unity government.”

Future Movement leader Mustafa Alloush told Arab News: “The conditions for Hariri heading any future government have not changed. What is required is an independent government that convinces the international community of the possibility of helping Lebanon and persuades the Lebanese of its ability to rescue (the country).

“The government must enjoy wide and exceptional powers in order to be able to be productive and eliminate the burden of obstruction that parliament poses.”

While Berri and Hariri are expected to continue discussions, Alloush could not predict a date for any meeting.

“There is a positive endeavor that Berri is undertaking and he has presented a government project to Aoun,” Alloush said.

He said that “the political dispute with the FPM continues. What is required is that the FPM – and not Hariri – changes.”



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Saad Hariri rules out returning as Lebanon's PM
Saad Hariri says he holds Hezbollah responsible for father's murder

'Several' Arab states on path to normalizing ties with Israel, says UAE foreign minister

Thu, 2020-08-20 17:27

LONDON: Arab countries were at "different stages" in establishing relations with Israel, UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash said on Thursday.

Speaking during an event hosted by the US Atlantic Council think tank, Gargash said that "several Arab countries" are on the path to normalizing ties with Israel.

"The region does need a strategic breakthrough," he said.

His comments came one week after the UAE and Israel signed a historic agreement to establish full diplomatic relations.

Gargash added that unlike Egypt and Jordan's relations with Israel, the UAE's relationship with Jerusalem in future will be a "warm peace."

"This is going to be a warm peace because, unlike Jordan or Egypt, we have not fought a war with Israel," Gargash said.

Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan in 1994.

The UAE minister said that while Palestinians were ultimately responsible for negotiations regarding their state, the suspension of a proposed annexation of Palestinian lands was one of the key tenets of the agreement for the Emiratis.

"The UAE saw an opportunity because we've always been urged by the Palestinians to help in stopping annexation. By linking (the agreement) to the suspension of annexation, we came out with a good deal.

"We expect our requests regarding the agreement with Israel to be fulfilled," he added.

Gargash said that any potential UAE embassy in Israel "will be in Tel Aviv" – and not in Jerusalem.

US President Donald Trump moved the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in

2018, recognizing the city as Israel's capital.

The Emirati minister said he was "very encouraged" by support for the agreement from both sides of the US political divide, after Trump pushed for the agreement and Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden gave it his backing.

Following the deal, "we expect our strategic relationship with the US will develop much further," Gargash said.

On Tuesday, UAE National Security Adviser Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed Al-Nahyan was visited by Yossi Cohen, head of Israel's foreign intelligence network Mossad.

The two discussed cooperation in several fields, according to Emirates News Agency.



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Israel's Mossad spy chief visits UAE for security talks
Kushner slams Palestinians, critics of UAE-Israel peace deal

Israel bombs Gaza after warning Hamas it risks war

Author:

Thu, 2020-08-20 00:59

JERUSALEM: Israeli warplanes bombed the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip overnight after Palestinians fired a rocket into southern Israel, the army said.

The latest exchange came as Israel warned Hamas it was risking "war" by failing to stop fire balloons being launched across the border.

Egyptian security officials shuttled between the two sides in a bid to end the flare-up, which has seen more than a week of rocket and fire balloon attacks from Gaza and nightly Israeli reprisals.

"Earlier tonight, a rocket was fired and during the day, explosive and arson balloons were launched from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory," said a military statement released shortly before midnight.

In response, "fighter jets and (other) aircraft struck additional Hamas military targets in the Gaza Strip.

"During the strike, a military compound belonging to one of the special arrays of the Hamas terror organization was struck," the English-language statement added. There were no reports from Gaza of casualties.

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin issued a warning to Hamas during a visit Tuesday to firefighters in southern Israel who said they were called out to 40 blazes caused by Gaza arson balloons during the day.

"Terrorism using incendiary kites and balloons is terrorism just like any other," Rivlin told them, according to a statement from his office.

"Hamas should know that this is not a game. The time will come when they have to decide ... If they want war, they will get war," said Rivlin, whose post is largely ceremonial.

Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since 2008.

Despite a truce last year backed by Egypt, the United Nations and Qatar, Hamas and Israel clash sporadically, with Palestinian incendiary balloons or rocket or mortar fire drawing retaliatory Israeli strikes and sanctions against civilians in Gaza.

A Hamas source told AFP the Islamists had held talks with the Egyptian delegation in Gaza on Monday before it left the territory for meetings with the Israelis and the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority.

The Egyptian delegation was expected to return to Gaza after those talks were concluded, the source added.

In response to the persistent balloon launches, Israel has banned fishing off Gaza's coast and closed the Kerem Shalom goods crossing, cutting off deliveries of fuel to the territory's sole power plant.

Power had been in short supply even before the shutdown, with consumers having access to mains electricity for only around eight hours a day. That will now be cut to just four hours a day using power supplied from the Israeli grid.

The plant's spokesman Mohammed Thabet announced its "complete shutdown" on Tuesday after its fuel ran out.

For the rest of the time, those Gazans who can afford it rely on solar panels, or generators, which also need fuel.

Gaza security sources and witnesses said Tuesday's strikes hit Hamas lookout posts at Rafah in the south of the territory and Beit Lahia in the north.

Israeli police said that a balloon came down in the yard of a home in the town of Sderot, which is within walking distance of the Gaza border and a frequent target for attack.

It caused some damage but no casualties, a police statement said.



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Israeli forces shoot, wound deaf Palestinian at checkpoint Israel renews assaults on Gaza, shuts fishing zone

Shattered Lebanon finds little peace in Hariri verdict

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-19 23:55

BEIRUT: Lebanon has been left shocked and disappointed by the UN-backed tribunal's findings on the 2005 assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri.

While supporters of the Future Movement largely accepted the Special Tribunal for Lebanon's verdict, some condemned the acquittal of three Hezbollah members accused of involvement in the Beirut truck bombing that killed 21 people along with the Lebanese leader.

Only one man, Salim Jamil Ayyash, 56, was guilty of involvement in the attack, according to the tribunal's findings handed down in The Hague on Tuesday.

In the wake of the verdict, opponents voiced their dismay on social media, describing the \$1 billion tribunal's declaration that it lacked evidence as a "failure."

Many said the tribunal had left too many questions unanswered, while others suggested its inability to uncover evidence meant the accused were innocent.

A legal source close to the tribunal told Arab News: "The reason for the shock and disappointment is that the Lebanese are used to Latin criminal law, while the tribunal relied on Anglo-Saxon criminal law.

"This means that Anglo-Saxon judiciaries do not rule except when given solid and convincing evidence, while Latin judiciaries rule against the accused if they contributed to the crime. Then they are tried as an accomplice and receive a lighter penalty, while those who planned the crime are immediately indicted."

The tribunal said in its verdict that Ayyash, an accused member of the assassination team, was "the primary person guilty of committing the crime of the assassination of Hariri."

It described Ayyash as "an accomplice in a conspiracy aimed at committing a terrorist act by means of an explosive device and killing 21 other people."

Ayyash “had organizational links to Hezbollah, according to available evidence,” the tribunal said.

In a 2,600-page ruling, the court added that it “suspects Hezbollah and Syria had an interest in the assassination.”

Many have questioned why the tribunal chose to rely on the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition.

“There were too many options available for the STL. It could have relied on more than one type of criminal law, yet it chose to rely on Anglo-Saxon law because all STL judges have expertise in that area,” the source said.

The tribunal acquitted three suspects – Assad Hassan Sabra, 43, Hussein Hassan Oneissi, 46, and Hassan Habib Merhi, 54 – due to lack of evidence.

The source said: “The STL confirmed that there was coordination between the four accused, and that they cooperated regarding a special mission, yet it did not reach a decision that the three already knew their activity would result in the killing of Hariri, which means that the tribunal did not get clear-cut evidence to accuse them.”

The tribunal said “it was hard to prove that Mustafa Badreddine headed the cell in charge of assassinating Hariri,” adding: “He had the intention to commit the acts leading to the assassination. However, the tribunal cannot be convinced that Badreddine was the mastermind behind the crime.”

Rachid Derbas, a former minister and head of the bar association, told Arab News: “The verdict needs to be read carefully since it contains contradictions, and seems like a political sponge that could be used by Hezbollah and Syria, as well as by the prosecution and victims. The verdict is multifaceted.”

He added: “The verdict indicated that a Hezbollah official along with accomplices committed the crime. Now the prosecution should build on the existing work and pursue the case.”

While Hezbollah MPs and leaders refused to comment on the ruling, the group’s supporters expressed joy at the tribunal’s findings on social media, saying they have never acknowledged the UN-backed court.

Former MP Fares Souaid said the verdict revealed the political motives of the crime.

“The opposition’s call for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon at the time was the core of the verdict that was issued,” he said.

“The decision relies on facts and indicts individuals. However, it included a political link which was noted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the US. What is required from the political parties in Lebanon is to recognize this link and answer the following question: Can Hezbollah continue what it is doing?”

“The verdict indicted a terrorist group. Nobody will be convinced that Ayyash could have planned, prepared, financed and carried out the assassination had he not been part of an organization with long history of murder,” Souaid said.



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Hariri verdict builds case for Hezbollah's accountability
Lebanon tribunal convicts Hezbollah member Salim Jamil Ayyash for Hariri assassination

[Wife of jailed Qatari royal speaks on her battle to get justice done](#)

Wed, 2020-08-19 23:37

RIYADH: Sheikh Talal Al-Thani, a senior member of the Qatari royal family, has been imprisoned in violation of his fundamental rights by Qatari authorities since February 2013. During this period, he has been allowed to see his wife Asma Arian and his four children – currently living in exile in Germany – only twice.

Sheikh Talal is the grandson of the late Qatari Emir Sheikh Ahmad bin Ali Al-Thani, whose reign lasted from 1960 to 1972. Sheikh Ahmad was deposed by his cousin Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad, grandfather of Tamim bin Hamad, Qatar's

current emir, and father of former Emir Hamad bin Khalifa.

Tensions between family members escalated following the death of one of Qatar's founders, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Ahmed, after his exile in Saudi Arabia in 2008. Shortly afterwards, Sheikh Talal's assets were frozen and the inheritance he was due to receive after his father's death withheld.

Since his arrest, which happened without a court order, Sheikh Talal has been frequently denied legal representation, family visits and medical care.

In May 2018, Sheikh Talal was sentenced by a Qatari court to more than 22 years. The prison term contradicts Qatar's basic obligation to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Also, in violation of Sheikh Talal's fundamental rights, his case has not been reviewed by an independent court.

Owing to the poor conditions in which he has been kept, Sheikh Talal today suffers from diabetes, loss of teeth, hypertension, pain in the back and joints and limited mobility.

He needs to be moved to hospital but is instead in a prison without access to medical care. The situation is compounded by Qatar's refusal to test prisoners for COVID-19, even though the official claim is that "detainees have free healthcare in prison."

Asma Arian, who married Sheikh Talal in 2007, spoke to Arab News from Germany on her uphill battle to make sure justice is done.

Q: Is it true that your appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Council got accepted?

A: It is true. We have made four appeals so far to the UNHRC. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, they were stalled for a while, so the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) appealed on my behalf to the UNHRC as part of the annual review of Qatar's rights record and its obligations.

Qatar constantly claims that it respects its commitments to human rights. The UN has now endorsed four appeals from me. The first is on behalf of myself and the children at the highest possible level.

The other three appeals were presented to special committees for torture, arbitrary detention of my husband, and corruption of the judiciary.

The UN bodies are due to take a decision and we are in active contact with them. They have assured us that they have accepted the appeal and that, by next September 21, the issues related to this matter will be clarified.



Sheikh Talal has developed poor health and limited mobility due to the poor conditions in which he has been kept. (Supplied)

Q: What are your expectations with regard to handling of the case by the UNHRC?

A: Since the beginning of our correspondence, the UNHRC is convinced that the case as well as the documents provided by me prove Qatar's violation of human rights in various areas. These include violations of the "Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners" charter: torturing Sheikh Talal Al-Thani, preventing him from contacting his lawyer and detaining him without a valid reason, in addition to violating children's rights (by preventing Sheikh Talal's children from getting in contact with their father), and violating women's rights by preventing me from getting in contact with him.

In the beginning, we used kind words in dealing with the Qatari government in asking for the release of Sheikh Talal, given that the documents prove that he had been wronged. We communicated with Qatari prisons to find out the reasons for his detention. However, there was no answer from Qatari authorities.

After pressure mounted on them, Qatari authorities released Sheikh Talal for a week before arresting him again in the expectation of a freeze or waiver of the cases and appeals from me. The brief release was a form of deception on the part of the Qatari authorities.

As to what I expect from the UNHRC, of course they have mechanisms, and we have reached a point where the case has gained importance at the UN level. It is possible to win the case as it is a humanitarian, not political, one, with multiple dimensions – children's rights, women's rights, prisoners' rights and torture in prison – that expose Qatar's flouting of human-rights treaties in general.

As of today, Qatar is violating these treaties. Our children are forbidden from communicating with their father, and I have been forbidden from contacting the lawyer defending him since we launched our appeal to the UN. I have told the UNHRC that as a country that does not respect even its own laws, Qatar cannot be expected to respect international laws.

دولة قطر
وزارة الداخلية
الإدارة العامة للأمن المجتمعي
الإدارة للمؤسسات العقابية والإصلاحية

Ministry of Interior
Public Security General Admin.
Reformatory and Penalty Institutions Dept.

التاريخ: ٢٠١٨/٥/٠٢ م
الموافق: ١٤٣٩/٠٨/١٧ هـ

الرقم: أ م ع / ١ ش / اس / 4575

شهادة لمن يهمه الأمر

تشهد إدارة المؤسسات العقابية والإصلاحية بأن المدعو / طلال عبدالعزيز احمد ال ثاني
الجنسية: قطري (يقضي) لدينا فترة عقوبة مدتها: (٢٢) سنة و(٢) أشهر و(٩) أيام
بدأ حبسه بتاريخ: ٢٠١٣/٠٢/٢١ م وحتى تاريخ: ٢٠٢٥/٠٦/٢٠ م
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Letter from the Qatari Ministry of Interior's Reformatory and Penalty Institutions Department stating that "Qatari Talal bin Abdulaziz Ahmed Al-Thani" had been sentenced for more than 22 years in jail. (Supplied)

Q: Sheikh Talal was released for a short period before being arrested again. Why did this happen?

A: This is how Qatar behaves: it cannot be trusted. We do not know why he was back in prison after he was released, nor where they took him to after blockading the house where he was detained. One can never be safe from this kind of official Qatari behavior.

He was released and put under house arrest, and when they wanted him back in prison, they laid siege to the house for eight hours. They were already monitoring the house, so what was the need for the siege that lasted for so long?

Are the psychological mistreatment and intimidation of Sheikh Talal since his arrest till now not enough? Are they expecting me to give up my husband and my children's rights?

I will not give up, for they have not respected the most basic prisoner's right, which is to allow him to communicate with his lawyer. How can I even agree to talk to them?

Q: Have you been asked by Qatari authorities to give up your campaign and appeals to international organizations?

A: This has been happening through messages sent via Sheikh Talal's family members or directly to me to stop claiming his rights. But what is the use of being silent especially since the matter is limited to not just his condition. There are four children affected by this case and they do not know their father except through pictures.

READ MORE: [Wife of Sheikh Talal Al-Thani accuses Qatar of torturing husband](#)

Q: How many children does Sheikh Talal have?

A: Four children whose names are Alanoud, Aljawharah, Abdullah and Ahmed. The children are suffering owing to their displacement from their country and being away from their father. For example, Ahmed was born while Sheikh Talal was in prison. In addition, his children suffer as they are deprived of both their rights and those of their father.

All this suffering is caused by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the former Emir of Qatar. As long as this person is in Doha, Sheikh Talal is not safe, and this is what I told the UNHRC. It is possible that I will win the case at the UN and Qatar will be indicted. However, as long as Sheikh Hamad is in Qatar, I do not expect that Sheikh Talal will be released.



Sheikh Talal's son Ahmad has developed an allergy due to the lack of air-conditioning in his accommodation. (Supplied)

Q: The case against Sheikh Talal is financial in nature. Is the allegation true? What is the real reason behind his detention?

A: Qatar filed a lawsuit against Sheikh Talal because of debt which resulted from security cheques related to his own companies. The lawsuit included 1,600 documents related to the financial case only.

The UN was wondering why Sheikh Talal would be put in prison over a financial issue, so I told them that he was neither a killer nor a violator, nor did he commit a crime deserving of a life sentence of 22 years. He will die and not get to see his children.

Hence, the case is not financial. Maybe there is a grudge against Sheikh Talal, for prior to his imprisonment he had claimed his rights and his inheritance. Qatari law and the international law do not say that a person under debt should be put in prison for 22 years. Worse, he was imprisoned without having the right to contact a lawyer.

The judge even asked me if I had enough money to pay off the debt, so I presented to him a land ownership deed belonging to Sheikh Talal and said

that the value of this land can pay off the debt and more. Then the judge raised his finger and said: "People on top are the ones to decide whether he will be released or not from prison."

We know that the case is not a financial one to be paid off. However, we reply in accordance with their allegations. Now the state has confiscated the properties of Sheikh Talal, and state enterprises are using them without his permission or authorization.

I have been calling the police to intervene against the state enterprises that are using his properties, for they are holding his properties and depriving his children of financial gain and allowances, in addition to trespassing on his land without permission or paying him in return for benefiting from his properties.

READ MORE: ["The Unforgiven": Qatar's Al-Ghufran tribe fights for justice – and right to citizenship](#)



The Unforgiven

How thousands of members of Qatar's Al-Ghufran tribe are still paying the price for a failed coup in which they played no part.

Enter

Q: Have they tried to settle the financial case with you?

A: Yes, it happened. I filed four cases related to the inheritance of Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Thani, Sheikh Talal's father, who died away from Qatar. These cases prove that Sheikh Abdul Aziz had big inheritance and properties, and that Sheikh Talal's share is substantial.

I told the judge to take all the farms and release Sheikh Talal. I even told them in the last communication: Take everything, and if Sheikh Hamad wants the farms let him take them, and if he wants to take everything, then let him. But to rob him of normal life, and deprive his children and torture them alongside him and displace them, this is not your right.

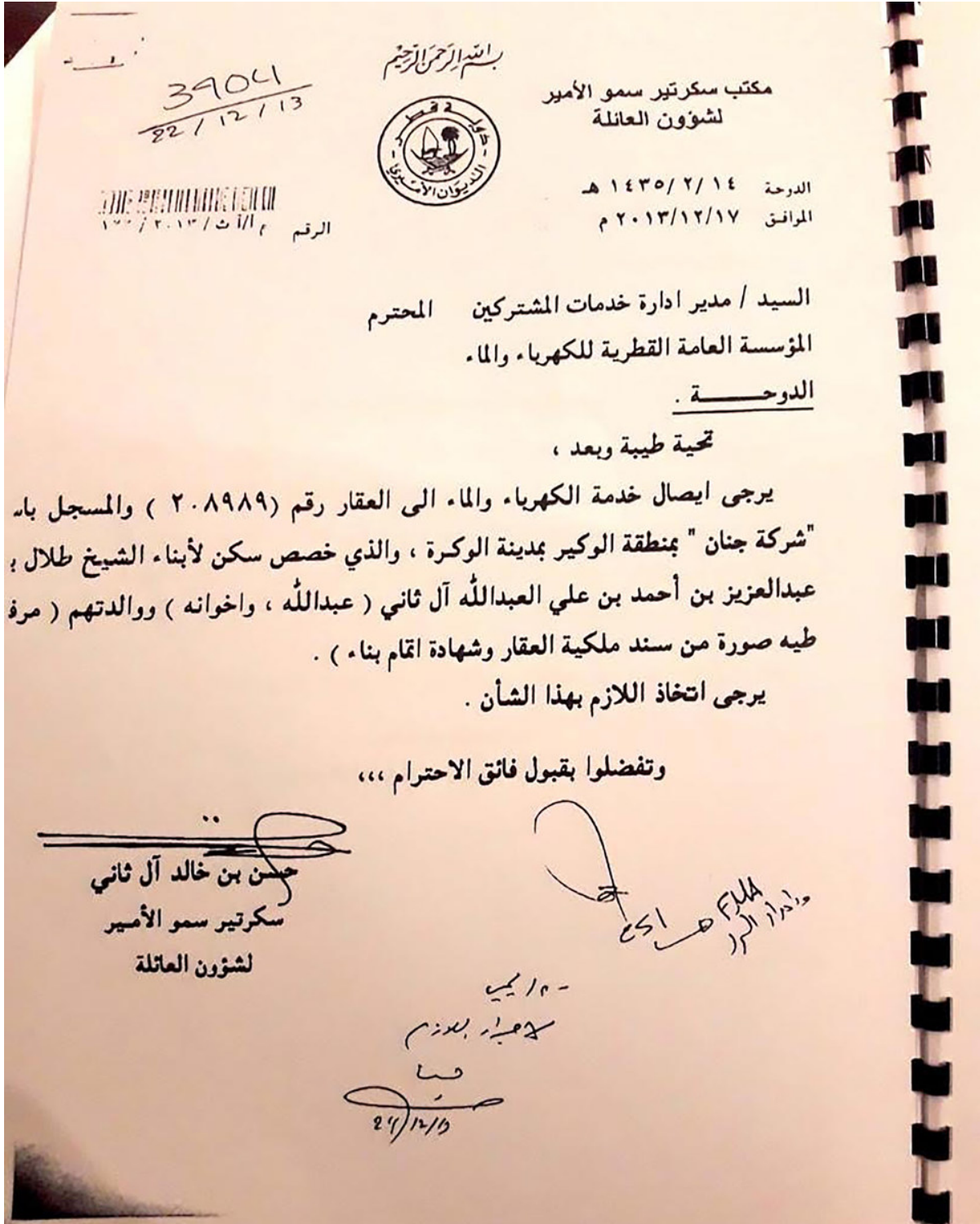
Q: Since when is Sheikh Talal in prison?

A: Since 2013, at the end of Sheikh Hamad's reign, before he abdicated in favor of his son, Sheikh Tamim. In addition, the verdict against Sheikh Talal and his imprisonment was also during the reign of Sheikh Hamad.

He was put in prison because of a cheque. The cheque was not valid. An Egyptian judge, Mohammed El-Minshawi, ordered Sheikh Talal's release but his decision was not implemented. I do not know if this judge is still in Qatar.

Q: How many times have Sheikh Talal's children been able to visit him?

A: His daughter Alanoud was the only one to see her father twice in seven years. As for the other children, they only know their father through pictures.



The request made by Sheikh Hassan bin Khalid Al-Thani for electricity and water connection for a property registered for housing Talal Al-Thani's children and their mother in Al-Wakrah. (Supplied)

Q: How is the health of Sheikh Talal?

A: His psychological and physical state is not fine. I was able to get a picture of him before he was back to prison. He looked very thin and appeared to have lost a lot of weight. I would not have wanted this picture to be published but for his health condition.

He suffers from diabetes at a time Qatar has experienced high numbers of coronavirus cases, especially in prisons. I fear for his life (eyes tearing

up). I asked him: "Are they starving you? He said: "Yes, they are starving me."

I could not imagine this happening in Qatar but after I saw the picture, I believed his words. I wonder how prisoners are fed, especially a prisoner who is suffering from diabetes and has already been operated twice in prison – the first time in his eye, the second time in his leg.

Q: Do you expect Sheikh Talal to be freed if Qatar is indicted for violating human rights in the cases relating to him and his children?

A: I expect an indictment by the UNHRC, but I do not expect Sheikh Talal to be released. However, I am convinced that I can prove to the world the shocking human-rights violations being committed by Qatari authorities. The international pressure they are feeling is a result of these rights violations. For a person of his nature, Sheikh Talal has been wronged in unimaginable ways.

Q: Do you intend to take further steps at the UN and the UNHRC?

A: I will pursue any legal procedure that serves to protect Sheikh Talal and his children from this injustice. Now I intend to file a lawsuit before the German judiciary against Qatar. This is something highly important to me, and I have started to take some steps in this regard. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic I stopped.

Now, as life is back to normal, I will continue the lawsuit especially for I endured damage after they pursued me in Geneva and even crashed into my car. Now I am under the protection of the German police as I have accused Qatar and its media of many violations.

Q: Have you received explicit threats from Qatar?

A: I received threats when I was at Le Club Suisse de la Presse (the Swiss Press Club) in Geneva. They were waiting for me outside and sent people to threaten me and accuse me of spying. The last threat was a week ago when they released Sheikh Talal from prison.

They told me if I do not remain silent, they will put him back in prison, and this is what really happened. I really fear these threats. You cannot imagine what my psychological condition was when I decided to continue defending my husband and children's rights. I feared that my husband would be liquidated and that I would be the cause of it.

Q: What is your message to international human rights organizations via Arab News?

A: I want to ask them to take my case seriously and remember that Qatar is not above the law. Had Qatar been respecting international human rights, it would have respected the charter of prisoners' rights.

If Qatar claims that it respects human rights, then let it respect children's rights and allow Sheikh Talal's children to get in touch with their father at

least via telephone once or twice per week. In addition, I ask the international organizations to intervene and mobilize their mechanisms.

Qatar is not above the law, and this is the right moment for them to mobilize to restore the rights of the prisoner, the child and the woman. I hope that pressure will be brought to bear on Qatar to release Sheikh Talal.

Twitter: [@md_sulami](https://twitter.com/md_sulami)



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Wife of Sheikh Talal Al-Thani accuses Qatar of torturing husband "The Unforgiven": Qatar's Al-Ghufran expulsions termed 'breach of human rights'