

Lebanon president calls on protesters to go home

Tue, 2019-11-12 22:21

Lebanese President Michel Aoun called on protesters to go home, saying their demands had been heard, and warned of a "catastrophe" if they stay in the streets.

In a televised interview, Aoun also urged the Lebanese not to rush to the banks to withdraw their money, which he said was safe.

Aoun also said he supports the formation of a government made up from both politicians and technocrat.

The interview was the latest attempt by the president to address the protesters who took to the streets last month. The demonstrations were initially against tax increases but soon turned on the country's leaders, whom they accuse of corruption, and the sectarian political system.

They forced the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri and have led the country into its worst economic crisis since the civil war.

"If you continue in this way, you will strike Lebanon and your interests ... I am placing you in front of this choice," Aoun said. "We are working day and night to get the situation in order. If they keep going, there is a catastrophe. If they stop, there is still room for (us) to fix things."

The UN has urged Lebanon to form a competent new government better able to seek international aid.

Indicating no breakthrough in talks over the next government, Aoun said he was still waiting for answers before calling formal consultations with MPs to designate the next prime minister.

"A technocrat government cannot define the policy of the country...and I back forming a government that is half political and half technocrat," Aoun said. "I met Hariri and I found him hesitant between yes and no."

With Reuters



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Aoun tells thousands of supporters Lebanon must unite behind reforms
President Aoun calls for merit-based Lebanese government and shift away from sectarian system

[In their mother's country, Lebanon protesters clamour for citizenship](#)

Tue, 2019-11-12 22:10

BEIRUT: Draped in the Lebanese flag, 22-year-old Dana is bursting with pride at taking part in Lebanon's "revolution" – even if her home country refuses to give her nationality.

Standing among other demonstrators in the capital, she explains she was born in Beirut to a Lebanese mother and has spent all her life in the country.

But like thousands of others in Lebanon, her father is a foreigner and, with Lebanese women unable to pass down their nationality, she has been deprived of citizenship.

"My parents divorced before I was even born. I grew up with my mother," Dana told AFP.

"I see myself as Lebanese, but they don't want to recognize my identity," she added.

The politicians who do not want to change the century-old law, she says, are "patriarchal" and "racist."

The right to citizenship is one of many long-standing demands to have found new life in the mass protests sweeping Lebanon since October 17.

The unprecedented show of cross-sectarian anger in the street brought down the government last month – but many other of the demonstrators' demands remain unmet.

Outside the seat of government, 17-year-old Omar said he'd only ever been to Syria once, but was consistently suffering the consequences of his father's nationality.

Each year, he has to make his way to General Security headquarters to renew his residency permit – like all other non-Lebanese.

"They treat us like foreigners. It's humiliating," he said, holding the Lebanese red-green-and-white flag.

Last year, Human Rights Watch (HRW) strongly denounced the law, noting that Lebanon lags far behind some other countries in the region on the issue.

Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen all provide equal citizenship rights to the children of both women and men, while Iraq and Mauritania confer nationality to those born in the country, according to HRW.

At a Beirut protest, Samer stood in a small crowd, raising his fist and chanting against political leaders he sees as inept and corrupt, the majority of whom have been in power since the end of the country's 15-year civil war in 1990.

"But we need it (citizenship) to work, to sign up our children at school and receive social security," said the 33-year-old, whose father is Palestinian and who is himself the father of three.

Despite activists campaigning to amend the 1925 nationality law, Lebanese authorities have been reluctant to do so.

In this small multiconfessional country of around 4.5 million, the political system relies on a fragile balance of power between communities.

Authorities fear that changing the law would open the door – especially through marriages of convenience – to the naturalization of some of the majority-Sunni 1.5 million Syrians and around 174,000 Palestinians living in the country, according to official estimates.

Last year, then foreign minister Gibran Bassil suggested amending the law to allow for Lebanese mothers to pass on their nationality – but only if the father was neither Palestinian nor Syrian.

"It's racism," said Randa Kabbani, coordinator of the "My Nationality, My Dignity" campaign demanding citizenship for children of Lebanese women.

Of the 10,000 impacted households identified by the campaign, some 60 percent are Syrian, 10 percent Egyptian, and just seven percent Palestinian, Kabbani said.

Others are Jordanian, Iraqi, American or hold European nationalities, she added.

Around 80 percent are Muslim and 20 percent Christian.

Samer said those pushing for reform are not demanding the naturalization of all Palestinians living in Lebanon, "but only those born to a Lebanese

mother. It's a natural right."

Kabbani said she was delighted the issue had gained new momentum in the ongoing protests.

"Before the movement, women were almost ashamed to speak up about it. But today they're clamouring loud and clear," she said.

On Sunday, hundreds of protesters took part in a march organized by "My Nationality, My Dignity" in the capital.

Volunteers with the campaign have erected a tent in the square by the office of the now deposed cabinet to discuss the issue.

When she is not protesting, Dana – the university student – helps spread the word among other protesters so they too can join in her fight.

But the young student says she is under no illusions.

Whether or not a new cabinet includes independent experts as demanded, the key to her finally obtaining her Lebanese citizenship will boil down to political will.

"The day decent leaders take power, the legal amendment will fly through," she said.



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Wikipedia the latest battleground in Lebanon's protests'Sister protests': Lebanon, Iraq look to each other

Palestinian shot in back says Israelis abused him for hours

Author:

Tue, 2019-11-12 01:07

HEBRON, West Bank: A young Palestinian man who was shot in the back by Israeli forces in an incident caught on video last year says the footage shows just a small part of what was a horrifying day for him. Speaking to The Associated Press after the video emerged last week, Karam Qawasmi said he was run over by a military jeep, then beaten for several hours before troops released him, only to shoot him in the back with a painful sponge-tipped bullet as he walked away. He said Israeli investigators have never contacted him.

"I died several times that day," he said in an interview at his home in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. "They tortured me in a way that I felt they are killing me. And when they shot me, I felt it's my end. I closed my eyes and prayed."

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast War and has kept it under military occupation for over 50 years. While the Palestinian Authority has limited autonomy in parts of the territory, Israel wields overall security control.

The incident occurred a year and a half ago, but only came to public attention last week, when Israel's Channel 13 TV broadcast a leaked video of the shooting, allegedly carried out by a member of the Israeli paramilitary border police unit.

In the video, a woman is heard screaming at a young Palestinian man to "get out of here" as he slowly walks away with his hands in the air. A male voice tells him to lower his hands as the woman again shouts at him. Some 20 seconds later, a shot is heard as the man crumples to the ground, screaming in pain.

The shooter is not seen in the video, which appears to have been taken by a member of the security force.

Qawasmi, 22, said that he was the man in the video, saying his troubles began early on the morning of May 25, 2018.



Palestinian Karam Qawasmi looks at a video, which appears to have been taken by a member of the security forces, showing when he was shot in the back by Israeli forces in an incident last year. (AP)

He said he had recently completed his accounting studies at a technical college. With few jobs available in the West Bank, he set out from his home in Hebron to the West Bank town of Azayim, outside of Jerusalem, in hopes of finding work at a gas station.

After a meeting at the station, he was walking back toward a checkpoint when he says a military jeep pulled up and struck him, tossing him several meters. Border police officers jumped out of the vehicle and grabbed him, he said. "They took me into the jeep. They handcuffed me and drove me to a nearby tunnel and started beating me up," he said. "They twisted my arms, hit me

with their hands, boots, and guns all over my body.”

He said he was carrying a small bag with work clothes, but Qawasmi, who does not speak much Hebrew, says he thinks the forces suspected he was armed with a knife.

“I recognized some words, like ‘knife,’” he said. “I thought they are going to kill me and leave a knife next to my body.” He said a crowd of policemen beat him up, as one officer recorded it on a mobile phone.

One female officer was especially aggressive. “She twisted my arms to my back and made me kneel in a very painful way,” he said. Another female officer stood and watched, he said.

After more than three hours, Karam said the forces gave him his ID card and ordered him to leave.

“I walked, and when I looked back I saw three soldiers pointing their guns at me,” he said. “I was terrified. I walked slowly, and my heart was beating quickly. One shot me, I was hit in the back. I fell down and thought I’m dying. I stared praying and closed my eyes.”

A soldier rushed to him and told him to leave. “I stood up terrified and walked. I kept walking for more than an hour,” he said.

Israeli forces often use sponge-tipped bullets to disperse crowds. The bullets are meant to not be lethal, though they are fired at high velocity and can be extremely painful.

Qawasmi said he eventually made it to a nearby Palestinian village where he changed his clothes and continued back to Hebron. “I went to the hospital for a checkup. There were bruises everywhere. The rubber bullet hit the end of the spine,” he said.

He said he recovered at home for a month and suffered nightmares and physical pain for many months afterward. He showed off what he said was the white Adidas T-shirt he wore that day, with a hole in the back where the bullet hit him.



Palestinian Karam Qawasmi holds up the shirt he was wearing when he was shot, in the garden of his house, in the West Bank city of Hebron. (AP)

Since the video was broadcast, Qawasmi has become a bit of a local celebrity. During the interview, he took a call from an Israeli lawyer offering to represent him. Several people approached him at a restaurant, some jokingly asking how much money he now expects from a legal settlement.

Israel’s Justice Ministry said last week that it has completed an investigation into the case and will soon announce a final decision on whether to indict officers who were at the scene, including a woman who is believed to have fired the bullet.

Israeli police said the woman was immediately removed from duty after the force became aware of the incident. They said other officers who were at the scene were reassigned.

“This is a case that does not characterize in any way whatsoever the behavior or operations of the Border Police,” a statement said.

Qawasmi said he did not file a complaint against the security forces, believing it would make no difference.

Palestinians and Israeli human rights groups accuse Israeli security forces of routinely covering up abuses and carrying out half-hearted investigations.

Qawasmi, for instance, said Israeli investigators have never asked to question him. Justice officials did not respond to a query as to why Qawasmi has not been interviewed.

In 2016, the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem stopped working with the Israeli military on such investigations, accusing it of whitewashing the cases.

Amit Gilutz, spokesman for the group, said it is common for alleged victims not be interviewed, and rarely are forces seriously punished.

"The only exceptional aspect of this incident is that it was filmed and published," he said.



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[How Jordan reclaimed two fertile](#)

enclaves from Israel

Tue, 2019-11-12 00:53

AMMAN: Few Jordanians had expected it to happen, so when the Royal Jordanian Army raised the national flag over the twin enclaves of Al-Baqoura and Al-Ghamr on Sunday, the mood across the country was a mix of delight and satisfaction.

On Monday, Jordanian TV showed King Abdullah II, in military uniform, touring Al-Baqoura, accompanied by Crown Prince Hussein and the army's chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Yousef Huneiti.

The events this week mark the end of a controversial 25-year-old lease agreement that came as a part of the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty.

In 1950, Israel took the 6,000 dunams (1,482.63 acres) that make up Al-Baqoura, including an 820 dunam plot that the British Mandate government had given to Pinhas Rottenberg, a Zionist leader, in 1926 to build an electricity-generating company using the waters of the Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers.

During the 1967 war, Israel captured a further 4,000 dunams of land in Al-Ghamr, south of the Dead Sea. The plots in both Al-Baqoura and Al-Ghamr are rich in water supplies from natural aquifers located in Jordanian territory. Jamal Jeet, an attorney and spokesman for the unified Jordanian Hirak (movement), knew more than a year ago that strong public support was needed if Amman intended to refuse to renew the lease agreement.

Annex 1b and 1c of the Jordan-Israel peace treaty allowed Israeli farmers to continue farming those tracts without paying any fees or taxes to Jordan. But Jeet was aware that the same section permitted the abrogation of the lease agreement, provided one side gave the other a year's notice.

"I knew that the land was Jordanian and that we needed to cancel the 25-year-old lease," Jeet said. As he told members of the Jordanian Bar Association: "We need(ed) to do something unorthodox."

"I wanted advice from the association's head, Mazen Rosheidat, about an idea I had," he told Arab News.

"We didn't want to issue a statement and make a symbolic act of protest. I wanted a legal notice to be issued and delivered at every courthouse in Jordan."

Rosheidat not only welcomed the idea but suggested that it be brought under the auspices of the bar association. Two committees were formed – one to draft the text of the legal petition, and the other to help distribute it.

"Once the legal documents were ready, we made sure that a lawyer would take the lawsuit to the local courthouse and deposit it with the court clerk," he said.

The document called on the government to issue a one-year notice – before November 2018 – for a formal end to the lease arrangement.

Jeet also made sure that activists throughout Jordan took part in a campaign in tandem with the legal process.

A mural was placed at the Jordanian Professional Association's headquarters in Amman and hundreds of lawyers, doctors and engineers signed the document calling on the government of Omar Razzaz to issue the warning.

The campaign could not have occurred at more politically opportune moment.

Ties between Jordan and Israel had cooled due to a number of decisions by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, including the withdrawal of support for a two-state solution, a refusal to stop Jewish hardliners from praying at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and the sidelining of Jordan as the administration of US President Donald Trump worked on a new Middle East peace plan.

FASTFACTS

- Al-Baqoura is 6,000 dunams of fertile, aquifer-rich land east of Jordan River.
- Al-Ghamr is a 4 kilometer-wide, aquifer-rich area of land along Jordanian border, within Aqaba governorate.
- Israel occupied Al-Baqoura in 1950 and 4,000 additional dunams of land in Al-Ghamr, south of the Dead Sea, in 1967.
- Jordan and Israel signed Wadi Araba Peace Treaty in 1994.
- Jordan announced in October 2018 it would not renew the 25-year lease.
- The lease officially expired on Nov. 10, 2019.

The relationship had deteriorated so much that Abdullah had stopped taking phone calls from Netanyahu, after the Israeli leader was seen greeting an Israeli security guard who had shot two Jordanians and returned home after Amman, respecting his diplomatic immunity, handed him over. The guard did not face any legal action upon his return.

For Jeet, the very first sign that the association's campaign had been successful came when the king issued a short tweet on the issue on October 18 last year. "Al-Baqoura and Al-Ghamr have been on the top of our priorities and our decision is to end the annexes in the peace treaty in light of what is good for Jordan and Jordanians," it said.

That post kicked off a series of legal steps, culminating in the official decision to allow the Al-Baqoura and Al-Ghamr lease agreements to expire. The Jordanian government's decision was not strongly contested by Israel, which had been preoccupied with two election campaigns and a corruption scandal embroiling Netanyahu.

For Kamel Abu Jaber, a former Jordanian foreign minister, the significance of the return of Al-Baqoura and Al-Ghamr cannot be overstated.

"This is very important not only to Jordan but to the Arab and Islamic worlds," he told Arab News. "It shows that the peace treaty, with all its problems, produced the return of the land.

"Jordan is able to put pressure on Israel as a result of Article 9 of the treaty with Israel."

For his part, Adnan Abu Odeh, who served as an advisor to both Abdullah and the late King Hussein, and as Jordan's permanent representative at the UN until 1992, says the return of two enclaves will encourage Jordanians.

"It is important because it encourages Jordanians to keep pushing for their

rights and their interests, and (because) the government responded positively to public demands," he told Arab News.

Abu Odeh pointed out that in recent months Jordan had confronted Israel using legal means, such as its move to recall its ambassador, an action that prompted Israel to release two Jordanians.

"I hope that this will bring about further change in Israel's (behavior) in terms of what is happening in Jerusalem," Abu Odeh said.

Jordanians who had gathered near Al-Ghamr on Monday were permitted by the Jordanian army to visit the reclaimed tracts of agricultural land. Al-Baqoura remains a closed military area.

Jeet told Arab News he was cautiously optimistic but keeping his emotions in check. "We plan to hold a major rally to celebrate the return of Jordanian land," he said, adding that he was disappointed a planned press conference by the foreign ministry at the Al-Ghamr site was moved to Amman.

He said what also worried him was a statement by a ministry source that Amman had assented to a one-time visit by Israeli farmers to harvest what was planted before the end of the lease.

Ayman Safadi, Jordan's foreign minister, said on Monday that Israel had given the names of four non-Israelis who would be harvesting the land.

He said the press conference was moved to Amman because the original site in Al-Ghamr lacked the requisite technical facilities.

Ofer Zalzburg, a senior analyst for the International Crisis Group, told Arab News that Jordan has come out a winner in the latest negotiations.

"Amman's decision to terminate the state-to-state arrangement and allow only a one-time, six-month extension should come as no surprise," he told Arab News.

"Time will tell whether Israeli farmers who own land inside Jordan would be able to arrive at a new technical access arrangement to continue farming their lands while residing in Israel.

"Such a private arrangement may be possible only if it excludes the Israeli government and is devised exclusively within the bounds of Jordanian law."





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How Jordan reclaimed two fertile enclaves from IsraelJordan's king visits border area after end of lease deal with Israel

Bombings kill 6 civilians in main Kurdish city in Syria

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Mon, 2019-11-11 15:16

QAMISHLI, Syria: Three simultaneous bombings killed at least six civilians in the Kurdish-majority city of Qamishli in northeastern Syria on Monday, a Kurdish security source and a Britain-based monitor said.

There was no immediate claim for the bombings, but they occurred shortly after the Daesh group said it was responsible for the killing the same day of a priest from the same city.

In Qamishli, an AFP correspondent saw charred cars and smoke rise from the site of the blasts.

Firefighters tried to put out the flames caused by the explosions, as rescue workers carried away the victims.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor, which relies on sources inside Syria, said two car bombs and an explosives-rigged motorcycle blew up in a market and near a school in the city.

More than 20 people were wounded in the simultaneous attacks, said the Britain-based monitor said.

The blasts come after Daesh claimed to have killed an Armenian Catholic priest from Qamishli.

The Observatory said the priest and his father were killed by gunfire as they made their way to the eastern province of Deir Ezzor to inspect the restoration of a church there.

Kurdish fighters have led the US-backed battle against Daesh in Syria, expelling the extremists from the last scrap of their proto-state in March. But the jihadists have continued to claim deadly attacks in northeastern and eastern Syria ever since.

In July, IS said it was responsible for a massive truck bomb that killed at least 44 people in Qamishli.

A Turkish cross-border attack against Kurdish fighters on Oct. 9 heightened fears that Daesh fighters could break out in mass from Kurdish jails.

But a fragile Turkish-Russian cease-fire deal has more or less halted that offensive, and seen Kurdish forces withdraw from areas along the Turkish border, except Qamishli.



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Daesh claims responsibility for deadly car bomb in Syrian Kurdish town
Qamishli
British backer of Syrian White Helmets found dead in Turkey