

Joint Media Release with Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs – MH17 Fifth Anniversary

Today marks the fifth anniversary of the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, resulting in the tragic deaths of 298 passengers and crew, including 38 Australians.

Commissioner Andrew Colvin APM OAM

Commissioner Colvin advised me shortly after the election that he would not seek an extension of his contract.

UK to send third warship HMS Duncan to Gulf

Author:

AFP

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Tue, 2019-07-16 17:55

LONDON: Britain will send a third Royal Navy warship to the Gulf, the defense ministry announced Tuesday, while insisting that it did not “reflect an escalation” of tensions with Iran in the region.

Britain has already sent the HMS Duncan, an air defense destroyer, to cover for frigate HMS Montrose while it undergoes maintenance in nearby Bahrain, and will also send frigate HMS Kent “later this year.”

Reports said it would head to the Gulf in mid-September.

HMS Montrose last week warned off three Iranian gunboats that UK officials said were trying to “impede” the progress of a British supertanker through the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf.

The defense ministry said the HMS Kent would be “taking over” from HMS Duncan, but added that an “occasional overlap of ships when one deployment begins and another ends... is not uncommon,” suggesting that all three could be in the region at some point.

The ministry said the deployments were “long-planned” to ensure “an unbroken presence” in the crucial waterway and “do not reflect an escalation in the UK posture in the region.”

Iranian officials have denied last Wednesday’s incident in the Strait of

Hormuz ever happened.

The British government has in any case raised the alert level for ships traveling through Iranian waters to three on a three-point scale, indicating a “critical” threat.

HMS Duncan is an air defense destroyer that carries a set of heavy Harpoon anti-ship missiles and has a company and crew in excess of 280.

Tensions have been escalating in the region for weeks, with US President Donald Trump last month calling off at the last minute an air strike on Iran over its downing of a US spy drone.

The Strait of Hormuz episode occurred a week after UK Royal Marines helped the Gibraltar authorities detain an Iranian tanker that US officials believe was trying to deliver oil to Syria in violation of separate sets of EU and US sanctions.

Iran has bristled at the arrest and issued a series of increasingly ominous warnings to both the United States and Britain about its right to take unspecified actions in reprisal.

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt sought to ease tensions on Monday by saying the tanker would be released if Tehran guaranteed it was not heading to Syria.



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Could foreign Daesh suspects be tried in northeast Syria?

Author:

Tue, 2019-07-16 22:25

QAMISHLI: Months after the territorial defeat of Daesh, Syria's Kurds are pushing for an international tribunal to try alleged militants detained in their region.

The Kurds run an autonomous administration in the northeast of Syria, but it is not recognized by Damascus or the international community.

This brings complications for the legal footing of any justice mechanism on the Kurds' territory, and the international cooperation required to establish one.

With Western nations largely reluctant to repatriate their nationals or judge them at home, could foreign Daesh suspects be put on trial in northeast Syria?

After years of fighting Daesh, Syria's Kurds hold around 1,000 foreign men in jail, as well as some 12,000 non-Syrian women and children in overcrowded camps.

Almost four months after Kurdish-led forces backed by the US-led coalition seized Daesh's last scrap of land in eastern Syria, few have been repatriated.

The Kurdish authorities say they are seriously exploring how to set up an international tribunal, and invited foreign experts to discuss the idea at a conference it hosted early this month.

"We will work to set up this tribunal here," the region's top foreign affairs official Abdelkarim Omar told AFP afterwards.

"The topic of discussion now is how we will set up this tribunal and what form it will take," he said.

Daesh in 2014 declared a "caliphate" in large parts of Syria and neighboring Iraq, implementing its brutal rule on millions in an area the size of the UK.

The militants stand accused of a string of crimes including mass killings and rape, and a UN probe is investigating alleged war crimes.

Mahmoud Patel, a South African international law expert invited to the July conference, said any court should include input from victims and survivors.

It should be "established in the region where the offenses happened so that the people themselves can be part of that process," he said, preferably in northeast Syria because the Kurds do not have the death penalty.

In Iraq, hundreds of people including foreigners have been condemned to death or life in prison.

In recent months, a Baghdad court has handed death sentences to 11 Frenchmen transferred from Syria to Iraq in speedy trials denounced by human rights groups.

Omar, the foreign affairs official, said he hoped for an international tribunal to try suspects "according to local laws after developing them to agree with international law."

The Kurdish region has judges and courts, including one already trying Syrian Daesh suspects, but needs logistical and legal assistance, he said.

A tribunal would have "local judges and foreign judges, as well as international lawyers" to defend the accused, he said.

Nabil Boudi, a French lawyer representing four Frenchmen and several families held in Syria, said the Kurdish authorities seemed determined.

"They're already starting to collect evidence," he said after attending the conference.

"All the people who were detained and jailed had their own phone" and data can be retrieved from them, said the lawyer, who was however unable to see those he represents.

Boudi called for "a serious investigation by an independent examining magistrate ... that should take time and be far less expeditious than in Baghdad."

Stephen Rapp, prosecutor in the trial of Liberian ex-president Charles Taylor, said the most realistic option to try foreigners in northeast Syria would be a Kurdish court.

It could have "international assistance conditioned on compliance with international law," he said, including advice from a non-governmental organization specialized in working with non-state actors.



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Syrian Kurds hand over 12 French orphans from Daesh families
Syria Kurds host conference on Daesh detainees

[Palestinian refugees protest Lebanese Labor Ministry restrictions](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-07-16 21:35

BEIRUT: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon expressed their anger on Tuesday at the decision of the Lebanese Ministry of Labor to classify Palestinian labor similarly to illegal Syrian labor.

The refugees carried out a general strike and protests across 12 camps.

The protests, under the slogan "Day of Anger," paralyzed movement in the camps. Protesters closed the entrances with burning tyres. All Palestinian political forces and popular committees took part in the protests.

The speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri, received a letter from the head of the Palestinian National Council, Salim Zanon, calling on him to "address the negative effects of the decision of the Lebanese Ministry of Labor."

Zanon said that Palestinians would support "Lebanon and its stability, as well as our determination to struggle together for the return of the Palestinian refugees, who have been graciously hosted by Lebanon for 71 years, and all refugees to their land and homes from which they were displaced by terrorism and the Israeli killing machine."

Zanon added that the decision of the Ministry of Labor has "caused great damage to human and civil rights and closed the doors of life for the Palestinian refugees."

A source in the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) said: "The protests are an expression of the deteriorating social and living conditions experienced by Palestinians in Lebanon. The decision of the Ministry of Labor inspired these protests."

The source added: "The census conducted by the Lebanese state in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority in 2017 showed that the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has reached 174,000 and the Palestinian labor force doesn't exceed 40,000 workers. But if we repeat the census this year, we'll find that there's a decline in the labor force because of the quest to migrate, even if illegally, and to move to a third country in search of a better life."

The Lebanese Parliament introduced amendments to laws 128 and 129 on labor and social security in 2010, which excludes "exclusively Palestinian refugee workers, who are duly registered in the records of the Ministry of the Interior, from the terms of reciprocity and work permit issued by the Ministry of Labor."

The LPDC source said: "The amendment needed implementation decrees from the Council of Ministers, signed by the president, the prime minister and the minister of labor, but they've not been issued for nine years."

The Palestinian labor force is present in fragile sectors such as construction and small crafts, but more problems arise among Palestinians who graduate from Lebanese universities and cannot work in their specialties because of trade union limitations. The source said that the Order of Nurses in Lebanon is the only union that allows Palestinians to work in their sector.

Alongside the protests, a meeting was held between various Palestinian factions at the headquarters of the LPDC with representatives of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers. The Palestinian side called for "ending the measures of the Ministry of Labor regarding Palestinian refugees and not linking Palestinian labor in Lebanon with foreign labor."

Ghassan Ayoub, a Palestinian member of the LPDC, said that the ministry's

actions “have a political impact. The Palestinian refugee isn’t a guest who has remained in Lebanon because he liked the hospitality. He’s a forced refugee who was born in Lebanon and lives on his territory. He isn’t a foreign expatriate who came to work in Lebanon. This must be taken into account in the enforcement of the Ministry of Labor’s procedures.”

Ayoub said the situation demanded “the application of the spirit of the law and not the text of the law. There are many complications in the law in terms of obtaining a work permit and conditions for establishing a business. They’re impossible conditions for the Palestinians.”

As for the implications of applying the ministry’s procedures to the refugees in Lebanon, Ayoub said: “Ninety percent of professions are forbidden to Palestinians, which means that they’re entitled to work in only a few sectors, namely portering and digging, which are arduous. That means you’re telling the Palestinians ‘you have 10 percent of the air to breathe.’ What do you want from the Palestinians? Where should they go? What are the alternatives?”

Palestinian refugees are not entitled to work in 72 professions in Lebanon, and are not permitted access to social security. One of the contradictions of the law is that Palestinians have the right to purchase a taxi but are forbidden to work in it. Moreover, Palestinians are only allowed to fish after obtaining a special permit.

“The plan of the ministry to combat illegal foreign labor force isn’t aimed at the Palestinians and has nothing to do with conspiracy theories,” Lebanese Labor Minister Kamil Abu Sulaiman said.

“There’s a labor law in Lebanon. We approved a plan a month and a half ago to implement the law and gave a grace period of one month before we began inspections. The law applies to everyone and law enforcement can’t be fragmented.”

Abu Sulaiman added: “The Palestinian reaction is incomprehensible and meaningless.”

He received a call from Ashraf Dabbour, the Palestinian ambassador to Lebanon, and said he informed the diplomat of the ministry’s readiness to facilitate the affairs of the Palestinians.

In an open letter, Dabbour called on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to avoid being “dragged into what does not serve our just cause. Our goal in the stage of our forced presence in Lebanon is to have a decent life until our return to our homeland, supported by our Lebanese brothers.”

The LPDC said that the Ministry of Labor “ignores the special case of the Palestinian refugees under the amendment of laws 128 and 129 and treats them as foreign workers.”

The LPDC added: “The Palestinian refugees can’t return to their country, and everything that they produce inside Lebanon remains in it, which strengthens the economic cycle of the country, whether it comes from small entrepreneurs

or the hard work of laborers and craftsmen.

“Lebanon also benefits from the funds flowing through the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East’s \$80 million budget. They also gain from the efforts of international organizations in Palestinian camps, as well as what Palestinian refugees send to their refugee families in Lebanon, which is estimated at several hundred million dollars.”

Fathi Abu Al-Ardat, secretary in Lebanon of Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization, said: “The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are guests in this country and we respect its sovereignty, but we also respect the decent living of Palestinians in the camps.”





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Palestinian refugees reject US Mideast policy as Beirut skips meeting
Donors pledge over \$110 million to help Palestinian refugees