

Lebanese father sets himself on fire over unpaid school fees

Author:

Fri, 2019-02-08 22:26

BEIRUT: A Lebanese man set himself on fire in a schoolyard in Bkeftine in northern Lebanon after a dispute over unpaid tuition fees.

George Zureik doused himself in gasoline and set himself alight following a meeting on Thursday with administrators at his daughter's private school. The father of two died before he could be taken to hospital.

Zureik is believed to have asked the school for documents to transfer his daughter to a semi-free public institution, but was refused because of outstanding tuition fees.

He had previously transferred his other daughter from the same school to a public facility.

Zureik's death sparked angry responses on social media with many comments critical of high school fees and Lebanon's worsening economic situation.

MPs from North Lebanon joined the online protests, describing Zureik as "a martyr of taxes and the high cost of living."

MP Sami Gemayel said Zureik was "a martyr to irresponsibility and lack of accountability," while MP Michel Moawad said: "His suicide is an unprecedented Lebanese tragedy that reflects the worsening economic and social conditions in the country."

The school administration denied responsibility for the incident and said in a statement that "due to the deceased father's economic situation, the school had shown sympathy since his two children enrolled in 2014/2015 and exempted him from paying fees except for transportation, stationary and extracurricular activities."

However, Lebanon's Ministry of Education has announced an investigation into the circumstances of the incident.

Education Minister Akram Shahib said that public schools in the country this year have accepted thousands of students who were transferred from private schools because of the tough economic conditions.

The minister said he will ensure Zureik's children continue their education and will provide them with the necessary scholarships.

"I hope that this painful incident will be an incentive for the government to make improving the difficult economic and living conditions a priority," he said.

Economist Louis Hobeika described the incident as “a sad situation.”

“The Ministry of Labor has estimated the unemployment rate in Lebanon at 25 percent – and it might be higher,” he said.

“We have noticed a fall in the number of parents who can pay university tuition fees, prompting students to work at restaurants and other places. But the problem with schools is that parents are the only ones who can pay for their children’s tuition.”



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New Lebanon government calls for ‘painful economic reforms’ Lebanon names 1st female Arab minister in charge of security

[Palestinian chief negotiator Erekat says will not attend Warsaw conference](#)

Fri, 2019-02-08 18:44

WASHINGTON: Palestinian officials will not attend next week’s US conference hosted by Poland, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said on Friday after a US official said they had been invited.

“Regarding statements that we have been invited, we can say that only today there was some contact from the Polish side,” Erekat said on Twitter. “Our position remains clear: We are not going to attend this conference and reiterate that we have not mandated anyone to talk on behalf of Palestine.”

Earlier, a senior US official said that Palestinian officials had been invited to a US conference on the Middle East hosted by Poland next week where White House senior adviser Jared Kushner will discuss plans for peace between the Palestinians and Israelis.

The senior administration official told reporters the event was “not a negotiation but a discussion” on Middle East peace.

“As noted we have asked the Palestinian Authority to send representatives to this event,” the official said.

Kushner, who is US President Donald Trump’s son-in-law, will also take part, the official said, and he “will discuss the administration’s efforts to advance peace between Israel and the Palestinians and also take questions from the audience.”

“We would very much welcome the Palestinian Authority’s perspectives during the discussion, but I do want to emphasize this is not a negotiation but a discussion, and we look forward to fostering a constructive conversation in

Warsaw,” he added.

The State Department has said more than 40 countries will attend the conference in Warsaw from Feb. 12 to 14.

Kushner has been working on a peace plan for more than a year. The Warsaw event will be one of the first occasions where he will discuss the plan publicly, although he is not expected to reveal any details.



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Iran protests to Poland over Iran-focused summitIran's top leader defends Iranian 'Death to America' chants

[Sudan protesters rally against death of teacher in custody](#)

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Fri, 2019-02-08 14:26

KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters rallied after Friday prayers in an eastern town against the death in custody of a teacher arrested in connection with anti-government demonstrations sweeping the country, witnesses said.

An investigator on Thursday confirmed that teacher Ahmed al-Kheir, 36, had died from wounds sustained while in detention after he was arrested last week by security agents in the eastern town of Khashm El-Girba.

Kheir, a member of Sudan's Islamist Popular Congress Party, was detained for allegedly organising anti-government protests, a relative told AFP.

On Friday, crowds of protesters in Khashm El-Girba staged a rally after the weekly Muslim prayers to protest his death.

"We will give our blood to keep you alive," chanted the protesters, who emerged from several mosques after prayers and held a march, a witness told AFP by telephone.

Kheir was arrested by agents of the country's powerful National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), his uncle Ahmed Abdelwahad told AFP as the family took his body from a mortuary.

"We have asked the chief of NISS in Kassala to bring the security agents who interrogated Kheir in Khashm El-Girba," Amer Ibrahim, the head of an investigative committee at the prosecutor's office, told reporters on Thursday, indicating he had died in detention.

"The man had wounds on the back, legs and other parts of his body that led to his death," Ibrahim said.

Deadly protests have rocked Sudan since December 19, with demonstrators holding nationwide rallies calling on President Omar Al-Bashir to resign.

Officials say 30 people have died in the violence, while rights group Human Rights Watch says at least 51 people have been killed.

Demonstrators on Friday also staged rallies in a district of Khartoum and in Omdurman, the twin city of the capital, witnesses said.

Police fired tear gas as protesters rallied chanting "freedom, freedom" outside a mosque in Omdurman run by the main opposition Umma party, witnesses said.

Police dispersed the protesters and some tear gas canisters hit the compound of the mosque, a witness said.

Police and security officials were not immediately available for comment.

Umma's head, former premier Sadiq Al-Mahdi, has thrown his weight behind the protests and called on Bashir to step down.

Bashir, who has refused to resign, swept to power in a 1989 Islamist-backed coup that ousted Mahdi's elected government.

Protests first erupted after a government decision to triple the price of bread but soon escalated into rallies against Bashir's three-decade-old rule.



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Sudan minister appeals to youth as protests continue Sudan protesters chant 'freedom' as police fire tear gas

[UN: Yemen's warring parties reach preliminary pullout deal](#)

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By EDITH M. LEDERER | AP

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Thu, 2019-02-07 19:37

UNITED NATIONS: Yemen's warring parties reached a preliminary compromise on a plan for the redeployment of opposing forces from the key port of Hodeida, the United Nations said Thursday.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the preliminary agreement was reached by representatives of Yemen's government and Houthi rebels meeting on a UN

vessel in Hodeida's inner harbor during UN-mediated talks between Feb. 3-6. He said the head of the UN monitoring mission "tabled a proposal that proved acceptable, in principle ... pending further consultations by the parties with their respective leaders."

Dujarric said he couldn't give details, but he said the UN monitoring team expects to reconvene the warring parties "within the next week, with the aim of finalizing details for redeployments."

Retired Dutch Maj. Gen. Patrick Cammaert, the outgoing head of the UN operation monitoring the cease-fire and redeployment of forces from the Hodeida area that both sides agreed to in Sweden in December, chaired this week's initial meetings, Dujarric said.

His replacement, Danish Lt. Gen. Michael Lollesgaard, attended the meetings and has now taken over.

The agreement in Sweden was seen as a key step in attempts to end the conflict in Yemen, which began with the 2014 takeover of the capital Sanaa by the Iranian-backed Houthis.

The fighting in the Arab world's poorest country has taken a terrible toll on civilians, with thousands killed and a catastrophic humanitarian crisis under way.

UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said in a statement Thursday that the UN and its humanitarian partners are scaling up to reach 12 million people with emergency food, a 50-percent increase over 2018 targets.

He said the Red Sea Mills in a government-controlled area of Hodeidah has enough grain to feed 3.7 million people for a month, but the UN has been unable to gain access since September while the grain possibly spoils in silos.

He deplored that last month two silos were hit by mortar shells and the resulting fire destroyed some grain – "probably enough to feed hundreds of thousands of people for a month."

Lowcock said the Houthis have refused to authorize the United Nations to cross front lines into government-controlled areas to access the Red Sea Mills, citing security concerns.

Discussions are continuing with both sides and Lowcock implored the Houthis and their affiliates "to finalize an agreement and facilitate access to the mills in the coming days."



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Yemen's interior minister calls for national alignment for state restoration
Yemen's Foreign Minister meets with EU officials on political peace process

[UN praises UAE for Arab women peacekeeper training](#)

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Thu, 2019-02-07 22:40

DUBAI: Jean-Pierre Lacroix, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for

Peacekeeping Operations, has praised the launching of a military and peacekeeping program for Arab women in the United Arab Emirates.

Lacroix hailed the program as a step toward achieving “gender parity.”

“More good news concerning our call for more women in @UNPeacekeeping from the United Arab Emirates,” he said on Twitter. “Gender parity is achievable with sustained effort by all partners.”

The military and peacekeeping program for Arab women was launched this week at the Khawla bint Al Azwar Military School in Abu Dhabi.

More good news concerning our call for more women in [@UNPeacekeeping](#) from the United Arab Emirates where a military & peacekeeping programme for Arab women was launched this week. Gender parity is achievable with sustained effort by all partners. [#A4P #WPS https://t.co/7NWhhDuBBz](#)

– Jean-Pierre Lacroix (@Lacroix_UN) [February 7, 2019](#)

The step is aimed at achieving gender balance in the UAE and promotes women’s representation in all work avenues, state news agency WAM reported.

Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, wife of the late UAE’s founder, said the UAE’s collaboration with UN Women to host the Arab women military and peacekeeping capacity-building training program is “a testament to the great confidence in the country’s leadership.”

Sheikha Fatima, who is also the Chairwoman of the General Women’s Union, GWU, highlighted the UAE’s support to women’s participation in maintaining peace and security in the Arab region.

The UAE signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UN Women on 28 Sept. 2018, to develop the capabilities of Arab women in military and peacekeeping operations.



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