



**The Commander**

The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

The issue of the missing Lebanese in Syrian prisons is a real tragedy and a collective crime to add to the Syrian regime's record which is full of all the major crimes it committed against Lebanon and its people from 1975 to the present. Research and investigations conducted by inquiry committees affiliated with human rights organization, led by SOLIDE in particular, have revealed the presence of thousands of Lebanese nationals in the prisons of Syria for decades, and no one knows anything about their whereabouts or their fate!!

Thanks to political and media campaigns, as well as active contacts, by these organizations in tandem with the families of the missing, the Syria authorities released 54 detainees from its prisons in December 2000.

On June 26, 2001 the Syrian president Bashar Assad declared from Paris that Syria no longer holds any Lebanese detainees. In response, SOLIDE published a list of names of 263 missing individuals, among whom were 172 names associated with complete files containing all the evidence and testimonials certifying their presence in the Syrian concentration camps. Copies of the files were sent to the Vatican, the European Union Parliament, and the World Organization of Human Rights, Amnesty International, and the United Nations Human Rights Commission, but to no avail.

A Syrian human rights activist who was just released from the Syrian prison of Mazze made a statement to the Western media that there were approximately 1,500 Lebanese detainees who are still alive in the prisons of Syria. Several hundreds had died and were buried in mass graves in the vicinity of the Mazze prison near Damascus.

On June 25 of this year the Syrian authorities delivered the remains of a Lebanese detainee, Joseph Houeyss, to his family in Zahle after his death in prison after 11 years in detention. The family was forced to bury him in secret and under cover of night...And so it was!! But the remains of prisoners Joseph Zghayb, Adel Ajjour, and Radwan Ibrahim have never been returned.

A few days ago, we were treated to the following statement by the Syrian Interior Minister: "We no longer hold Lebanese prisoners because of their political or ideological affiliations, or for their opposition to the Syrian presence in Lebanon...", in effect admitting that the Syrian regime had in fact carried out politically-motivated abductions and detentions of Lebanese opponents of the Syrian occupation. This, after having denied that same fact for the past quarter of a century. Even more glaring was his statement that "We (Syria) are not a militia to commit acts of abduction and disappearances. We are a state that respects human rights..." without explaining how did the thousands of Lebanese end up in Syria's detention camps and how did most of them disappear if his country did not have a hand in these acts? What does he think of the mass graves that his honorable state dug around Mazze and Tadmor-Palmyra to hide the evidence of the crime, and which we hope one day soon will be uncovered as happened recently in Iraq?

The ultimate sad joke in the Minister's statement is his reference to Human Rights, since he ignored what people have been saying about his "civilized" jails: "He who enters them is missing, and he who exits them is reborn". Does he think the memory of the world has forgotten the massacre of Hama in which his regime leveled the city on its inhabitants killing in the process thirty thousand and more of its people? And the massacres committed by the Syrian regime in Lebanon in which tens of thousands of innocent people perished under the shelling, the bombardment, and the organized destruction caused by its army's hateful rockets and canon shells? Not to mention the assassinations, the liquidations, the car bombs, and other such fine specimens of Syrian culture!!

We wish to draw the attention of the Minister, if he does not know, that the torture chambers in the basements of Syria's jails have a worldwide reputation given the "refined" and highly developed torture methods that are practiced there on the prisoners. From whipping, to placing the prisoner inside of a rubber tire tube then beating him until exhaustion, to hanging him upside down from the ceiling and beating him repeatedly with electric wires, or forcing him to sit on a pointed wooden piece or a bottle, or extinguishing cigarette butts on sensitive parts of his body, or pulling his nails or chopping off his fingers or genitals, and other methods that are too gruesome to describe and which were developed by the Germans during the Nazi holocaust. And finally if the prisoner just dies from all this torture, to tie up his body to the rear of a car and drag it to one of their mass graves!!

Worse yet, the Minister's words "The attempt by some to tarnish the image of Syria..." as if an ugly face needed any tarnishing.

On behalf of our missing fellow Lebanese, those alive and those who passed away, on behalf of their families and their mothers in particular, and on behalf of all honorable Lebanese, we accuse the Western countries or the so-called Free World not only of neglect for not bringing this painful tragedy to an end, but for their complicity with the Syrian regime. We accuse them of being partners in crime with that regime, because to be silent in this case is to be a guilty mute.

We assure everyone that we will not rest and that we will doggedly pursue this matter to its end, according to the principle that no right will perish as long as someone is claiming it. The curse of Lebanon will haunt those who attacked it, and the tragedy of the missing will remain a Mark of Cain on the forehead of humanity.

Lebanon, at your service,

Abu Arz,  
July 11, 2003