



**The Commander**

The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

The repercussions continue in the aftermath of the Abu-Ghraib prison and the devious practices that went on there on some Iraqi prisoners at the hands of a few American soldiers running the prison. The world media continue to devote wide coverage of the facts of this issue and its political ramifications. Yet, what the media did not say may be summarized in the following:

One can only admire the position taken by the American president and his aides who successively went on to apologize to the Iraqi people, condemn what happened in the strongest terms, and court-martial those responsible in spite of the harsh war the US soldiers are fighting there and the heavy casualties they are suffering each day. Not to forget either the speed with which the US Congress moved to deal with the matter, especially the awesome sight of the Defense Secretary standing in front of the investigative committee next to the Army Generals being sworn and held accountable like any other citizen. British officials as well took the position of the highest transparency stemming from their deep democratic sense.

We say this because, in this East of ours, we are not used to seeing officials stand under investigation and prosecution in a court of law in spite of all the atrocities and crimes that are committed each and every day all across this gigantic prison stretching from the ocean to the gulf over the entire "Arab Nation". We never hear an official apologize to his people for the savage practices that are deliberately used in the Arab camps and dungeons of torture, where sadistic henchmen find pleasure in tearing the flesh of prisoners who are their own compatriots, or chopping off limbs, or melting people in acid, or burying others in mass graves, without any accounting or supervision. And so we have to laugh when we listen to Arab rulers denounce what happened in Abu-Ghraib, and we like to remind them first that that prison was established under the rule of their colleague in tyranny Saddam Hussein and where thousands of Iraqis disappeared without a single word of denunciation from them. Second, we challenge them to open their own prisons to Western reporters and human rights organizations, even if just for one day. Third, the Abu-Ghraib scandal would not have been exposed without the US press, which means that Western people are more concerned about Arab dignity than the Arabs themselves.

We say this because we have lists of names of hundreds of young Lebanese who were taken to the prisons of Syria decades ago to never return, and no one knows if they will ever return. We say this because we read statements published a few days ago by the Lebanese Organization for Human Rights confirming that Lebanese prisoners are suffering unimaginable atrocities at the hands of fellow Lebanese away from the scrutiny of the press and cameras, and many Lebanese prisons are not even suitable for animals.

We say this in the hope that the US Administration will promptly carry out its reform program entitled "The Greater Middle East" that, perhaps, will spread democracy in these countries, extricate its peoples from their huge prison, and give them back their right to life in freedom and dignity, away from humiliation, indignity, the crushing of the human spirit, and subjection to the rule of regimes.

Finally we blame the press and the media at large, human rights organizations, the Red Cross and others who were so eager to uncover the scandal of Abu-Ghraib, yet can be so callous at ignoring the hidden atrocities that take place in Arab prisons in general, and in the Syrian and the Lebanese prisons in particular.

Indeed, it should be no surprise that the people of Lebanon fell envious of the people of Iraq who found someone to pay attention to them, take their problems and concerns to heart, respect their rights, apologize to them when harm is done to them, and work to establish democracy in their country...Whereas Lebanon has been converted into a huge Abu-Ghraib prison and there is no one to do the accounting or the investigating. Rather, Lebanon continues to be ignored by everyone.

Lebanon, at your service,

Abu Arz,

14 May 2004