

For immediate release

Lebanon: Heed UN Call to Reveal Detainee's Fate

Syrian Opposition Figure "Disappeared "Following Detention by Lebanon's Military Intelligence

(Beirut, November 23, 2009) – Lebanese authorities should investigate the circumstances surrounding the detention and disappearance of Nawar `Abboud, Human Rights Watch and the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH) said today. A UN panel declared on November 10, 2009, that Lebanese authorities had arbitrarily detained him a year ago and then failed to provide convincing answers concerning his disappearance,

`Abboud, a Syrian who lived in Lebanon, is a member of the United National Alliance, a political group affiliated with Refat al-Asad, a Syrian opposition figure and uncle of the Syrian president, Bashar al-Asad. The Lebanese government acknowledges that Lebanese military intelligence detained `Abboud on December 24, 2008, but maintains that they freed him 24 hours later. `Abboud has not been seen since he was taken into custody. His family and lawyer fear that he may have been forcibly transferred to Syria.

“The UN has reminded Lebanon of its obligation to protect individuals detained by its security services,” said Marie Daunay, president of the Lebanese Center for Human Rights. “The only way to do that is to open a real and transparent investigation into the events surrounding `Abboud’s detention.”

On November 10, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), the body mandated to investigate complaints of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, declared `Abboud’s detention by Lebanese military intelligence to have been arbitrary, and thus unlawful. The Working Group said the Lebanese government’s answer to its queries on `Abboud’s whereabouts had been “brief and imprecise” and urged the government to “show with precision the proof that he was liberated.”

On December 24, 2008, plain-clothes members of the Lebanese Military Intelligence came to Abboud’s office in Tripoli and took him, along with two Lebanese employees, to al-Qubbeh military base for interrogation. Lebanese Military Intelligence released the two Lebanese – one on December 24 and the other on December 26. They also said later that they had released Mr. `Abboud at 2:20 p.m. on December 25 and that they returned possessions of his that Military Intelligence had seized, including his two cars.

However, `Abboud’s family and colleagues have not seen him or located his cars despite extensive efforts to find him. According to a letter dated January 14, 2009 from General Security (the security agency responsible for foreigners and border crossings in Lebanon) to the Mount Lebanon public prosecutor’s office, there is no record of `Abboud leaving Lebanon through an official border crossing.

“Lebanon celebrated its independence yesterday, but it hasn’t been able to turn the page on the painful legacy of enforced disappearance,” said Nadim Houry, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch. “If people are going to regain faith that the government will protect them, security services need to operate in a transparent and accountable way.”

On March 5, Human Rights Watch sent a letter to the ministers of defense, interior and justice to request details about `Abboud's whereabouts. No reply has been received.

For more background:

See the joint news release on March 24, 2009 by Human Rights Watch and CLDH calling for a proper investigation: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/03/24/lebanon-investigate-syrian-opposition-figure-s-fate>

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