

Republic of Lebanon
Ministry of Social Affairs
The Minister

To Human Rights Watch
Beirut Office

Subject: Eviction and Expulsion of Displaced Syrians in Lebanon
Re: Letter from Human Rights Watch dated February 21, 2018

In reference to the aforementioned, and to the inquiries in your letter about the eviction of displaced Syrians from some Lebanese villages and the assistance being offered to them, we hope you will look into the attached report that answers your questions.

Beirut: March 23, 2018

Minister of Social Affairs
Pierre Bou Assi

1. Has the Ministry provided cash or other assistance to Syrians who have been evicted, expelled, or otherwise compelled to leave their shelters in one locality within Lebanon?

The evictions that took place in the Bekaa region can be divided into two categories:

1. Evictions by municipalities
2. Evictions undertaken out of necessity and security considerations

In all these cases, the situations were studied one by one and cash assistance was approved in certain cases after coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs, keeping in mind that the Ministry had already taken the decision not to allocate any cash assistance after it became clear that some associations were providing cash assistance to people who hadn't in fact been evicted and without coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The Ministry of Social Affairs is the body authorized to manage cases of eviction. Also, it does not provide cash assistance; its role is to secure approval for alternative spaces and to secure plots of land on which to set up alternative camps, in coordination with the relevant ministries, municipalities, and associations. Recently, a camp was established in the town of Bar Elias after it was approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs, and 74 families were relocated from the surroundings of Rayak.

2. Has the Ministry or the Governor of Bekaa barred UNHCR or its implementing NGO partners from providing cash assistance to Syrians who are evicted or expelled?

The UNHCR is an essential partner of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Previously, a response plan was put in place to deal with potential cases of eviction with clear

working mechanisms through which roles and responsibilities are allocated under the management and direct supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the plan was updated in partnership with international associations and the UNHCR.

As mentioned previously, cash assistance is not well-regarded, but has been approved in certain cases after coordination with the Ministry's action team, within the parameters of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan and after detailed explanation of the adopted mechanisms for the distribution of cash assistance.

In the case of emergencies (fires, floods), the distribution of cash assistance is prohibited, as a result of negative past experiences wherein the ministry and the agreed-upon working mechanisms were bypassed, especially that the Ministry of Social Affairs is tasked with the coordination of all assistance and with putting emergency response plans in place. The indiscriminate distribution of cash assistance, outside the parameters of the response plan put in place by the Ministry and its relevant partners, constitutes a grave danger that threatens the safety of the displaced as well as the surrounding areas, with certain people committing arson in neighboring camps to extort financial benefit from the families residing there and from the restoration of their camps (as in the case of the fire that took place in Al-Marj in 2014). This has led to more than one fire and is a consequence of the distribution of money without coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The Governor of Bekaa has been extremely cooperative, especially through granting approval for alternative plots of land, while the logistical aspect appertains solely to the Ministry of Social Affairs.

3. Please provide statistics on the number of Syrians who have been compelled to leave the Rayak Air Base, and surrounding areas, and, if available, demographic information on those evicted, including their current location.

- The number of evictions that have taken place since 2016-2017 is 22,650. About 12,665 of these are estimated to have received warnings from Army Intelligence, and 7,524 are estimated to have left the vicinity of Rayak Air Base. There are 15,126 remaining who are susceptible to eviction at any moment.
- The municipalities in the vicinity of Rayak Air Base susceptible to receiving eviction warnings are: Al-Nabi Ayla, Timnin al-Tahta, Terbol, and Al-Dalhamia.
- The municipalities that received the displaced persons who were evicted from the vicinity of Rayak Air Base are: Bar Elias, Hosh Al-Rafiqa and certain areas of Terbol, Al-Dalhamia, Al-Nabi Ayla, and Timnin.

4. Please provide statistics by municipality on the number of Syrians who have been evicted/expelled from municipalities in 2016, 2017, and, so far, in 2018, and, if available, demographic information on those evicted, including their current locations.

The municipalities are not involved in compiling statistics on the evictions, but they register data about some of the new arrivals. Then the Ministry, along with the municipality, records these in order to know the numbers of new arrivals. The

numbers are confidential and cannot be shared due to security considerations related to protecting the families who are being evicted for various reasons.

Please Note: There is a plan that has been drawn up to respond to evictions and has been approved in partnership with the UNHCR and UN [agencies], and it is put into effect when information is received about evictions taking place in a certain area. The plan covers:

1. Determining the area where the evictions are taking place (the municipal zone concerned)
2. The reason for the evictions (municipality - security services - land owner). Each situation is dealt with depending on the reason for the eviction. If it is for security reasons, the Ministry of Social Affairs cannot interfere on the ground, and its role is thus confined to coordinating with the security services to effectuate a plan to relocate the displaced people. In case of other reasons for the eviction, they are dealt with differently as there is a decision on behalf of both the Ministry and His Excellency the Governor of Bekaa not to move any tent or establish any new refugee camp.
3. Finding alternative plots of land on the part of the Ministry with technical help from the UNHCR team and securing all the necessary approvals to establish a new refugee camp: from the Governor, the Ministry of Interior, the concerned municipality, and security services.
4. Preparing and equipping the refugee camp on the part of the Ministry and relocating the families.
5. Preparing two backup plots of land, whereby the available land must have an area of 40,000 square meters in the case of the eviction of large numbers of people.
6. Studying the social stability of the municipality that has expressed a willingness to receive the displaced people.

It is important to note that some of the displaced people have dealt with the situation on their own, and that some others have established tents without securing approval from the relevant bodies, in which case they were stopped from doing so by security services. After the Ministry of Social Affairs was informed about the situation, they were given approval to use the land.