

***LERC part of the working group on “Rights of Non –Palestinian Refugees” at the Lebanese Parliament***

Thursday 25th November 2010, Beirut

Reported by Michele Fenianos, LERC Research Assistant

In the context of the discussions towards finalizing the draft zero of the National Action Plan on Human Rights, the Lebanese Human Rights Parliamentary Committee, in partnership with the United Nations Development Program and the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in the Middle East, held on Thursday, November 25, 2010 a meeting with the specific working group on the rights of Non-Palestinian refugees to review the study titled “Rights, needs and responsibility: Challenges to Rights-Based Advocacy for Non-Palestinian Refugees’ Health and Education in Lebanon”.

The meeting was chaired by MP Ghassan Moukhaiber, Rapporteur of the committee, and attended by various stakeholders, including MPs Atef Majdalani and Serge Torsarkissian, Messrs. Cavalieri and Tohme from UNHCR, expert Ms. Samira Trad, the spokesperson of the president of the North Lebanon Bar Association, and representatives of the public sector and civil society, mainly LERC, Frontiers Ruwad and CLDH.

The meeting, which had a consultative character, discussed essentially the following:

- The weaknesses of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2003 by the UNHCR and the Government of Lebanon stating that refugees and asylum-seekers will be tolerated, but only for a limited period (12 months), pending resettlement or voluntary repatriation.
- "Refugee status determination" to be done by UNHCR and not by the Lebanese Government.
- The fact that the status has no legal effect on the Lebanese territories. Consequently, refugees lack juridical personality and their stay remains illegal until they settle their status as foreigners and not as refugees.
- The question of the Lebanese international commitments and the effect of Lebanon’s absence from The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Protocol adopted in 1967.
- The “non-refoulement” principle that “no refugee should be returned in any manner whatsoever to any country where he or she would be at risk of persecution.”
- The Principle of Protection of refugees from arbitrary Detention or Imprisonment
- Employment, Health and Education Rights.
- The Action plan proposed and its short-, mid- and long-term objectives.