

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

**Research Response Number:** LBN31266  
**Country:** Lebanon  
**Date:** 24 January 2007

Keywords: Lebanon – Lebanese Forces – Amnesty law

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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**Questions**

- 1. Is there any information which would indicate that Lebanese Forces members or former members might be arrested if that person was returned to Lebanon? Has the Amnesty Law been broken in any way?**
- 2. Is there any information which would indicate that Lebanese Forces supporters, and high profile members in particular, are being targeted by rival organisations?**

**RESPONSE**

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No information was found confirming that arrests of Lebanese Forces (LF) members or former members had occurred since the Amnesty Law was passed in July 2005. Excepting a change in government, the possibility of such an arrest is unlikely given that in the parliamentary elections held in May – June 2005, the Lebanese Forces party won 6 seats and are currently allied with the ruling anti-Syrian “March 14 Coalition” government (UK Home Office 2006, *Country of Origin Information Report – The Lebanon*, July, Section 4.09 – Attachment 1; Blanford, N. 2006, ‘In Lebanon, a crisis for Christians’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 November <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1128/p06s01-wome.html> – Accessed 23 January 2007 – Attachment 2).

Two current pro-Syrian political rivals to the Lebanese Forces party led by Samir Geagea are the Christian Free Patriotic Movement led by Michael Aoun and Hizbullah. Both these organisations alleged the Lebanese Forces of rearming itself following reports of the arrest of 9 men in the town of Shahtoul in the province of Kesrouan (or Kesrwan) on 28 November 2006. Both the Free Patriotic Movement and Hizbullah alleged that the men were Lebanese Forces members, a charge denied by their leader Samir Geagea. The 9 men arrested appear to have been bodyguards of Pierre Daher, chair of a television station affiliated with the

Lebanese Forces ('The Lebanese Forces says they are security personnel for LBC: the arrest of armed men training in Kesrwan', 2006, Free Patriotic Movement website, 28 November [http://www.tayyar.org/tayyar/articles.php?article\\_id=21421&type=press\\_news](http://www.tayyar.org/tayyar/articles.php?article_id=21421&type=press_news) – Accessed 23 January 2007 – Attachment 3; 'LBC's Daher Bodyguards Arrested on Shooting Exercise', 2006, Lebanon-Today.com website, 28 November <http://www.lebanon-today.com/content/view/1318/2/> – Accessed 23 January 2007 – Attachment 4).

No references to the breaking of the Amnesty Law were located but two reports commenting on the operation of the Amnesty Law since its introduction were found. A human rights lawyer and activist, Nizar Saghieh, reportedly stated during a symposium held in Lebanon in 2005 that:

Lebanon's amnesty law was a political document ...not a legal one...Then there are Geagea's colleagues, those no longer in the country, that were included in the amnesty law. At least one of them, Ghassan Tuma, is well known to have been a vicious criminal. The amnesty law pardons them of all crimes committed before 1994. That's four years after the Civil War ended. There is no legal justification for this...The subordination of legal to political, he says, is endemic in the Lebanese political system (Quilty, J. 2005, 'At last someone criticizes the infamous amnesty law', *The Beirut Post* blogspot website, 7 October <http://beirutpost.blogspot.com/> – Accessed 23 January 2007 – Attachment 5).

A second report indicated that the "General Amnesty Follow-Up Committee" resumed activities in April 2006 following an 8 month suspension, with the aim of visiting "spiritual leaders to brief them about their new agenda and to request help to endorse a general amnesty law" ('Amnesty committee plans pardon for Bekaa detainees' 2006, Lebanese Canadian Coordinating Council website, 22 April <http://www.10452lccc.com/daily%20news%20bulletin/april.english22.06.htm> Accessed 23 January 2007 – Attachment 6).

## **2. Is there any information which would indicate that Lebanese Forces supporters, and high profile members in particular, are being targeted by rival organisations?**

Tension between Lebanese Forces supporters and the rival Christian political organisation led by Michael Anoun have escalated since the assassination of government minister Pierre Gemayel on 21 November 2006. Gemayel was the sixth anti-Syrian figure killed in 2 years and a member of a well known political family affiliated with the Lebanese Forces. His death further destabilised the ruling government and meant that a further "two more departures [from the government] would force a government collapse" if they were to occur (Biedermann, F. 2006, 'Gemayel funeral sees show of defiance against Damascus', *Financial Times*, 24 November – Attachment 7; Blanford, N. 2006, 'In Lebanon, a crisis for Christians', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 November <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1128/p06s01-wome.html> – Accessed 23 January 2007 – Attachment 2).

Several days after the funeral of Gemayel, on 28 November 2006, several thousand rival supporters of General Anoun and the Lebanese Forces of Samir Geagea and Gemayel family's Ketaeb party were involved in fistfights, stone and bottle throwing (Biedermann, F. 2006, 'Lebanon Christians see to end tensions', *Financial Times*, 29 November – Attachment 8; 'Scuffles break out between Lebanese Christian factions' 2006, Arab Media Watch website, 28 November

<http://www.arabmediawatch.com/amw/Articles/News/tabid/76/newsid393/3454/News-on-the-Arab-world-from-28-November-2006/Default.aspx>

– Accessed 24 January 2007 – Attachment 9).

The current situation in Lebanon is extremely unstable with tensions between the Lebanese Forces group and its rival Christian organisation escalating to violence in the last 24 to 48 hours. The occasion for this violence was the general strike called for Tuesday 23 January 2007 by the Hezbollah led opposition following months of protests which began on 1 December 2006 ('Strike plunges Lebanon into Chaos' 2007, *BBC News*, 23 January, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6288503.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6288503.stm) – Accessed 24 January 2007 – Attachment 10; 'Three dead in Lebanon clashes' 2007, Aljazeera.net, 23 January <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C25E17A2-478A-40EB-851C-85C393F86FD4.htm> – Accessed 24 January 2007 – Attachment 11).

One member of the Lebanese Forces party was reported shot dead in the town of Batroun in north Beirut on 23 January 2007 ('Three dead in Lebanon clashes', 2007, Aljazeera.net, 23 January <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C25E17A2-478A-40EB-851C-85C393F86FD4.htm> – Accessed 24 January 2007 – Attachment 11). Scuffles between Lebanese Forces and Anoun supporters were reported in several Christian parts of Beirut, including Chekka "leaving many wounded" according Lebanon's *The Daily Star* newspaper (Abi-HAbib, M. 2007, 'Security Forces struggle to hold the line between rival mobs across the country', *The Daily Star*, 24 January, [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=1&categ\\_id=2&article\\_id=78887](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=78887) – Accessed 24 January 2007 – Attachment 12). The Geagea-Anoun rivalry is now being reported variously as a "war of elimination" and as a "show-down" to assert leadership of the Christian street (Perry, T. 2007, 'Old Christian rivalry moves into Lebanon streets', *Reuters News*, 24 January – Attachment 13).

In its most recent article on events in Lebanon, *The Daily Star* refers to unverified reports of seven people having been killed and that, while the strike was lifted late on Tuesday 23 January 2007, the country may be approaching another civil war with clashes between rival Christian groups "recalling" those which occurred during the 1975-1990 civil war:

The Hizbullah-led opposition's general strike against the government on Tuesday led to a nationwide protest that paralyzed the country and left its capital engulfed in barricades of blazing tires and bloodied by clashes that left at least three dead and over 130 wounded.

Late Tuesday, the opposition announced that it would lift its strike. Prior to the announcement, however, the man whom the crippling protest was aimed at unseating – Prime Minister Fouad Siniora – issued a brief, firm address to the nation in which he stood his ground and announced he would remain in office, even as the country appeared to be drawing to the verge of another civil war.

"We are at a dangerous crossroads: Either we are heading to a civil war, or heading to dialogue," Siniora said in a televised address from inside the Grand Serail, where he has been residing since the beginning on December 1 of a sit-in in the heart of the capital aimed at deposing his government.

The peaceful anti-government campaign had been escalating slowly over the past two months, until on Tuesday it suddenly surged and turned violent.

As *The Daily Star* went to press, unverified reports had emerged that at least seven had perished in street clashes.

... In its announcement that the strike would end, the opposition said that the day's chaos had been a "warning."

"This was a warning to the government," said Hizbullah MP Amin Cherri, reading a joint opposition statement.

"The government has to respond to our demands, and if doesn't, then it should expect even greater escalation, far worse than today's," Cherri told *The Daily Star*.

**... Violent clashes erupted across the country, with two areas witnessing the return of old "fault lines" from the 1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War.**

The Shiite supporters of Hizbullah and Amal clashed with the Future Movement's Sunni supporters in the predominantly Sunni area of Corniche al-Mazraa. Stone-throwing and fistfights injured dozens of people and wreaked damage on cars and private property.

**At the same time, supporters of Christian opposition leader Michel Aoun clashed with followers of Lebanese Forces chief Samir Geagea in several predominantly Christian areas, in fights recalling the leaders' bitter rivalry in the late 1980s.**

**Lebanese officials were quoted as warning that the Aoun-Geagea struggle may turn into "a war of elimination."**

..."What is happening is a revolution and a coup d'etat," Geagea told local media.

"This is direct terrorism to paralyze the country," he said, going on to criticize the national security apparatus for failing to "guarantee safe and open passage for the Lebanese."

..."Our campaign will escalate day by day," former Minister Suleiman Franjeh, an opposition leader, told Al-Manar television earlier on Tuesday. "As long as they won't listen to us, we will not let them rest."

**Some residents caught in the middle of the clashes between the two opposed Christian parties called on their religious leader, Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Butros Sfeir, for help and for an end to clashes before the situation deteriorated into a violent intra-Christian war** (Ghazal, R. 2007, 'One day was more than enough', *The Daily Star*, 24 January, [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=1&categ\\_id=2&article\\_id=78890](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=78890) – Accessed 24 January 2007 – Attachment 14).

## List of Sources Consulted

### Internet Sources:

#### **International News & Politics**

*The Christian Science Monitor* <http://www.csmonitor.com/>

*The Beirut Post* website <http://beirutpost.blogspot.com/>

Arab Media Watch website <http://www.arabmediawatch.com/>

*BBC News*, 23 January, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

Aljazeera.net <http://english.aljazeera.net/>

*The Daily Star* <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/>

#### **Topic Specific Links**

Free Patriotic Movement website <http://www.tayyar.org>

Lebanon-Today.com website <http://www.lebanon-today.com/>

Lebanese Canadian Coordinating Council website <http://www.10452lccc.com/>

#### **Search Engines**

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

### Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

## List of Attachments

1. UK Home Office 2006, *Country of Origin Information Report – The Lebanon*, July.
2. Blanford, N. 2006, 'In Lebanon, a crisis for Christians', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 November <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1128/p06s01-wome.html> – Accessed 23 January 2007.
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5. Quilty, J. 2005, 'At last someone criticizes the infamous amnesty law', *The Beirut Post* blogspot website, 7 October <http://beirutpost.blogspot.com/> – Accessed 23 January 2007
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7. Biedermann, F. 2006, 'Gemayel funeral sees show of defiance against Damascus', *Financial Times*, 24 November. (FACTIVA)
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<http://www.arabmediawatch.com/amw/Articles/News/tabid/76/newsid393/3454/News-on-the-Arab-world-from-28-November-2006/Default.aspx> – Accessed 24 January 2007.
10. 'Strike plunges Lebanon into Chaos' 2007, *BBC News*, 23 January,  
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12. Abi-HAbib, M. 2007, 'Security Forces struggle to hold the line between rival mobs across the country', *The Daily Star*, 24 January,  
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– Accessed 24 January 2007.
13. Perry, T. 2007, 'Old Christian rivalry moves into Lebanon streets', *Reuters News*, 24 January. (FACTIVA)
14. Ghazal, R. 2007, 'One day was more than enough', *The Daily Star*, 24 January,  
[http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=1&categ\\_id=2&article\\_id=78890](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=78890)  
– Accessed 24 January 2007.