Lebanon's instability leads to human rights abuses

The Daily Star

January 29, 2015

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jan-29/285710-lebanons-instability-leads-to-human-rights-abuses.ashx

The precarious security situation in Lebanon has led to widespread human rights abuses, with broad restrictions imposed on Syrian refugees and violations committed by security forces during operations, Human Rights Watch said Thursday.

“The deteriorating security situation is having a negative effect on human rights protections in Lebanon,” HRW said, also using its World Report 2015 to warn about several cases where freedom of expression was abused.

In the 25th edition of its world report HRW alleged various human rights violations in Lebanon with regard to discrimination, violence, government regulations and judicial decisions.

“As security challenges in Lebanon mount, so do concerns about the government failing to adequately protect human rights,” said Nadim Houry, deputy Middle East director at HRW. “Protecting the rights of both the Lebanese and of Syrian refugees is not only the right thing to do, it is the best way to ease the tensions in the country.”

The report stated that during the clashes between Army and militants in the northeastern town of Arsal last August, many residents said they were prevented from leaving danger zones.

Residents also reported that indiscriminate firing, including from the Army, hit civilian targets.

HRW’s Lebanon chapter also touched on alleged abuses by Lebanese security forces against detainees.

“Over two dozen people the Army detained in security raids told Human Rights Watch that security forces had tortured them including with whips, batons, sticks, and electricity,” the report stated.

HRW referenced a previous report, released by the U.N. Committee Against Torture last October, which concluded that torture in Lebanon is a “pervasive practice that is routinely used by the armed forces and law enforcement agencies.”

“Lebanon should establish a national preventive mechanism to visit and monitor detention facilities, as required under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), which it ratified in 2008,” the report continued.

“Reports of abuse should be investigated and those responsible held to account.”

HRW also detailed various charges and prosecutions against news outlets, journalists and bloggers that threatened freedom of expression in Lebanon last year.

The report mentioned the two-month sentence given to blogger Jean Assi for defaming and insulting former President Michel Sleiman on Twitter, and the police interrogation of blogger Imad Bazzi over his criticism of former State Minister Panos Manjenian for abuse of power.

“Ambiguous definitions of defamation and slander open the door for silencing legitimate criticism of public officials,” HRW warned, saying that the Publications Court also fined two Al-Akhbar journalists for investigative reports on corruption.

Mohammed Nazzal was fined LL27,000,000 (US$18,000) for an article on judicial corruption, and Rasha Abou Zaki was fined LL4,000,000 ($2,667) for defaming former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, after she alleged corruption and em bezzlement in the Finance Ministry, the report stated.