

Dozens of mothers of prisoners in Gaza denied access to sons

Mon, 2022-04-18 00:15

GAZA CITY: As she gets older, the Palestinian Fayza Abu Al-Qumboz becomes more afraid of dying before she can once more embrace her son, Majed, who has been in Israeli prisons for 16 years.

On April 17, when Palestinians commemorate Prisoners' Day Abu al-Qambuz, 73, along with dozens of mothers of prisoners in Gaza who have been denied access to their children in Israeli prisons for nearly 6 years, feels more grief.

The last time Abu Al-Qambuz visited her son, Majed, in Nafha prison was in 2016.

Israeli forces arrested Majed, his two brothers, his brother-in-law and about 40 members of his family and neighbors during their invasion of Al-Shojaeya neighborhood, east of Gaza City, in August 2006. They released most of them at different times, but sentenced Majed to 19 years in prison, on charges of belonging to the military wing of Hamas.

SPEEDREAD

On April 17, when Palestinians commemorate Prisoner's Day, Abu Al-Qambuz, 73, along with dozens of mothers of prisoners in Gaza who have been denied access to their children in Israeli prisons for nearly six years, feels more grief.

Majed's mother said that she was able to visit him for the first time in 2012 after the so-called "dignity strike" that the prisoners held. She went in accompanied by his daughter Zina and his son Youssef, and recalls with pain that visit: "Majed was shocked and in disbelief that Youssef, who had not yet been born at the time of his arrest, was brought to the prison at the age of six, while his feelings were more emotional towards Zina, whom he had last seen as a baby."

Although human rights institutions have obtained a judicial decision to re-allow visits to prisoners after they were stopped during the pandemic, the decision excluded about 70 Palestinian prisoners belonging to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

For many years, Majed's mother participated in weekly activities in front of the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Gaza in solidarity with the prisoners, but illness and the inability to walk have prevented her from participating recently. "I am afraid to die before seeing Majed free," she said.

Various institutions and organizations organize special events on Prisoners'

Day in support of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons.

Israel prevents visits to Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners in an attempt to pressure Hamas to release four Israelis it has been holding.

Najat Al-Agha, longs for the embrace of her son Diaa, who has been in Israeli prisons for 30 years.

Diaa, now aged 46, belongs to the Fatah movement led by President Mahmoud Abbas. He was supposed to be released in March 2014, under an agreement that paved the way for the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, but Israel did not abide by it.

Despite the past three decades, which have exhausted her health by moving between visiting prisons and participating in activities in support of prisoners, Al-Agha, 71, is still clinging to the hope of freedom for her son.

“The occupation forces arrested Diaa, who was 16 years old, and sentenced him to life imprisonment, and since then I miss the true joy of any occasion. Even food no longer has any flavor due to his long absence behind bars,” she said.

She was one of the few mothers who were able to visit their sons in prisons last month. “Israel prevented me from visiting him for five years, and although I was sick on the day scheduled for the visit, I told myself I will visit him even if I had to crawl. My wish is to kiss and cuddle him before I die.”

About 5,000 Palestinian prisoners are held in the Israel's prisons, including about 220 prisoners from Gaza, most of who were arrested before the signing of the Oslo agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel in 1993.



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Israel police enter flashpoint Jerusalem holy site, arrest 2

[How serious is the threat of Daesh resurgence in northeast Syria?](#)

Sun, 2022-04-17 22:47

QAMISHLI, Syria: This year, the world watched in horror as the Syrian Democratic Forces and the US-led coalition rapidly mobilized to prevent what many observers viewed as Daesh's boldest attempt yet to re-establish its short-lived "caliphate" in northern Syria.

Since its territorial defeat in Iraq in 2017 and Syria in 2019, Daesh had appeared to be a spent force, its leaders hunted and forced into hiding, its followers either detained, dead or disenchanted, and its once-sizeable war chest depleted or out of reach.

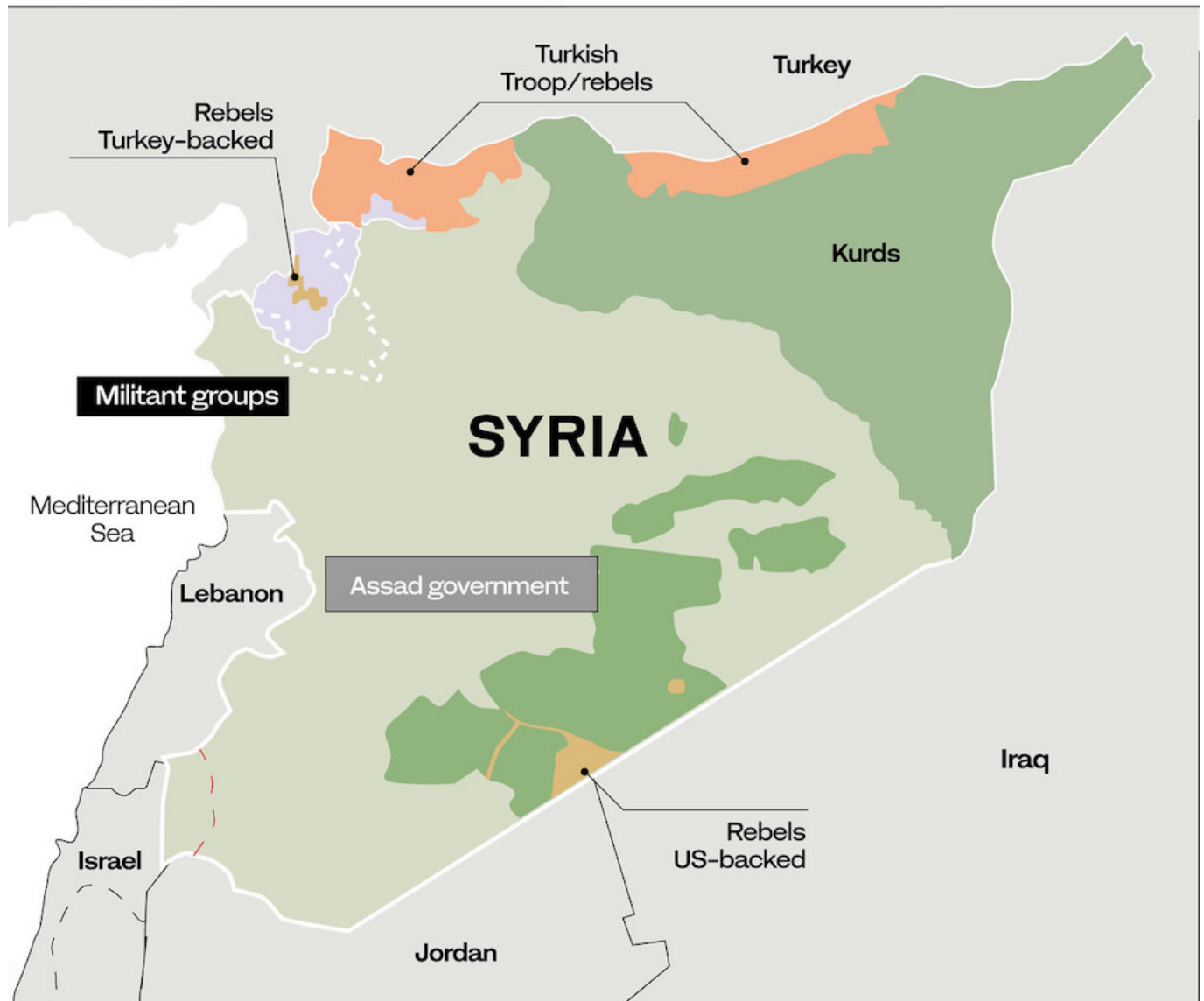
That is until January this year, when remnants of the group launched a

massive and highly sophisticated attack on a prison in northeast Syria where thousands of its former combatants were being held under guard by the SDF.

With the West now focused single-mindedly on Ukraine, and the Syrian regime's Russian allies preoccupied with activities closer to home, those on the ground in Syria warn that the threat posed by Daesh is far from over and that a resurgence could easily occur while the world's back is turned.

THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

Map showing who controls what region



Source: Jane's Conflict Monitor, The Economist

ARAB NEWS

On the evening of Jan. 20 the relative calm in Hasakah, a city of about 400,000 people in the eponymous Syrian governorate, was suddenly shattered by a thunderous blast when a truck laden with explosives detonated at the gates of Al-Sina'a Prison.

Moments later, hundreds of armed men attacked the facility from all sides with the clear intention of releasing about 5,000 Daesh-affiliated prisoners that were being held inside and returning them to the battlefield.

For several days, local forces clashed with the militants in the biggest battle the city had seen since Daesh was ousted six years earlier. The US-led coalition intervened using jets and drones, striking buildings where the militants were holed up. In response, Daesh fighters seized civilian properties near the prison, using their occupants as human shields.

“It wasn’t the kind of war where you know where the terrorists’ base is and you can go attack them,” Serhat Himo, a member of the local commando force that intervened on the first night of the attack, told Arab News.

“They took positions among civilians and because of this many civilians were killed by Daesh. We had to pull civilian bodies out of the homes.”

Some reports suggest that 374 militants were killed during the attack, along with 77 prison staff, 40 members of the SDF and four civilians. About 400 inmates remain unaccounted for, indicating that a significant number escaped.



Female members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) deploy outside Ghwayran prison in Syria’s northeastern city of Hasakeh. (AFP)

In the Jan. 27 edition of An-Naba, Daesh’s online propaganda outlet, the militants claimed “several groups managed to get out of the (Hasakah) area safely and were transferred to safe areas.”

From the perspective of the SDF, which is responsible for defending the multi-ethnic populace of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, the extremist threat was obvious long before Daesh’s highly coordinated prison attack.

More than a decade after the 2011 uprising against the regime of President Bashar Assad thrust Syria into a state of civil war, large swaths of the country have fallen into the hands of armed groups.

Syria's north and northwest, for instance, is controlled by an assortment of factions under the banner of the Syrian National Army, formerly known as the Free Syrian Army, and the Al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, or HTS.



Members of the SDF deploy outside Ghwayran prison in Syria's northeastern city of Hasakeh after having declared over the facility following its takeover by Daesh forces. (AFP)

The SNA controls the district of Afrin, having seized the area from the AANES in 2018 with the help of Turkish armed forces. It also controls Ras Al-Ain and Tel Abyad, having taken these towns in 2019, also with Turkish assistance.

Turkey intervened on both occasions to remove the Kurdish-majority People's Protection Units, known as the YPG, from areas straddling its southern border.

Ankara considers the YPG, the main contingent force within the SDF, to be the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has fought a decades-long guerrilla war against the Turkish state in an effort to gain greater political and cultural rights for Kurds in Turkey.

Both the SNA and the HTS are known to have extremist elements among their ranks. According to local sources, Daesh remnants have used areas under rebel control to regroup and evade detection.

In October last year, a US drone strike killed Abdul Hamid Al-Matar, a senior Al-Qaeda operative, in the SNA-held town of Suluk in Raqqa province. Days later, a British Royal Air Force drone killed Daesh arms supplier Abu Hamza Al-Shuhail in Ras Al-Ain.

FASTFACTS

*** On Jan. 20, 2022, Daesh militants attacked Al-Sina'a Prison in Hasakah in northeast Syria.**

*** 374 militants died in the attack, along with 77 prison staff, 40 SDF fighters and 4 civilians.**

In October 2019, just months after the group's defeat in Baghouz, Daesh's former leader and erstwhile caliph, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, was tracked down to the village of Barisha in an area of Idlib controlled by HTS. He killed himself and three of his children with a suicide vest rather than surrender to US special forces.

Just a matter of weeks after the attack in January on Al-Sinaa Prison, the SDF and US special forces traced Al-Baghdadi's successor, Abu Ibrahim Al-Qurayshi, to the town of Atmah, also in Idlib. During the course of the operation, Al-Qurayshi detonated a bomb, killing himself and his family.

Daesh announced its new leader, Abu Al-Hassan Al-Hashemi Al-Quraishi, in a recorded audio message distributed online on March 11. According to Iraqi and Western security sources quoted by Reuters, he is the brother of Al-Baghdadi.

"We defeated Daesh territorially but the mentality remains," Nouri Mahmoud, the YPG's official spokesman, told Arab News.

"Radical terrorists from Daesh, Al-Qaeda, Levant Front, the Muslim Brotherhood and others settled in Afrin, Sere Kaniye (Ras Al-Ain) and Gire Spi (Tel Abyad)."



This screen grab from AFPTV shows US soldiers gathering in an area near the Kurdish-run Ghwayran prison in the northern Syrian city of Hasakeh. (AFP)

A report published in June 2021 by Syrians for Truth and Justice, a local human rights monitor, found there to be at least 27 former Daesh militants, including senior operatives, serving in the ranks of the SNA.

“After Daesh was defeated territorially at Baghouz, many of them fled to Iraq, regime-held areas and to areas held by Turkish-backed groups, particularly Ras Al-Ain and Tel Abyad,” Kenan Barakat, co-chair of the AANES interior ministry, told Arab News. “There, they simply changed their affiliation and joined other radical groups.”

Despite the clear threat posed by these groups, the SDF and AANES have found their resources squeezed by the closure of UN-recognized border crossings and the imposition of diplomatic and trade embargoes by Turkey, which have decimated the local economy.

“As long as there is a political and economic embargo on northeast Syria, Daesh will remain,” said Mahmoud.

“As long as these other terrorist factions continue their attacks on our regions and use these areas under occupation as a rear base, Daesh will continue to seize opportunities to reorganize itself.”



More than a decade after the 2011 uprising against the regime of President Bashar Assad thrust Syria into a state of civil war, large swaths of the country have fallen into the hands of armed groups. (AN Photo/Ali Ali)

The terror group's recent attempts at a resurgence are not confined to the incident at Al-Sina'a Prison. In the days and weeks since the attack on the jail, residents of Al-Hol detention camp, also in Hasakah, have staged repeated escape attempts.

Known as "a ticking time bomb" and "the world's most dangerous camp," Al-Hol is home to about 56,000 people. More than half them are Iraqi and about 8,000 are foreign nationals or the wives and children of militants from Europe and elsewhere.

The camp's population grew rapidly in early 2019 following Daesh's territorial defeat in Baghouz. Since then, the residents of Al-Hol have made repeated attempts at creating a kind of pseudo-caliphate within the camp.

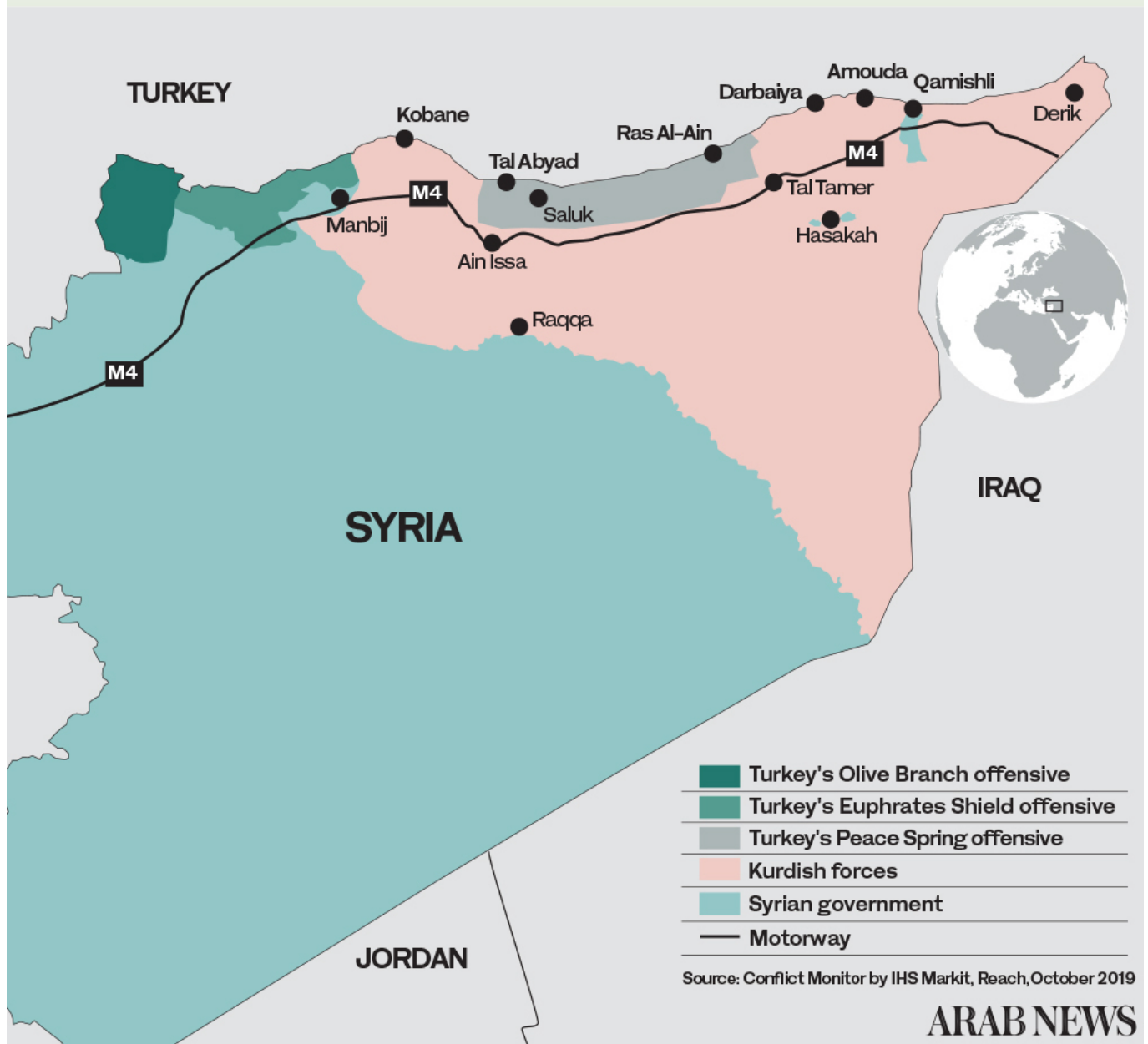
"Those in the camp, both men and women, have tried many times to start a war in the camp," said Barakat.

"They have started uprisings, burned tents and killed members of the Internal Security Forces. They wanted to recreate the scenario at Ghweiran (Al-Sina'a) Prison in the camp but our forces interfered and stopped them."

Many of the children in the camp are now reaching their teenage years, having been raised with Daesh ideology imparted by their mothers. Camp administrators fear they are witnessing the coming of age of a resentful and highly-radicalized new generation of militants.

TURKISH-CONTROLLED AREAS INSIDE SYRIA

Kurdish forces were pushed back from the border when Turkey and its Syrian proxies launched Operation Peace Spring in October 2019



Many in the local administration believe it is only a matter of time before a major escape attempt succeeds, unless the international community acts immediately.

The AANES and SDF have repeatedly called on Western governments to repatriate their citizens from the camp and to establish special courts to try foreign Daesh members so that they can be placed into proper detention facilities.

“These Daesh members are from many countries – nearly 50 nationalities can be found among them,” said Barakat. “This is not just a Syrian issue. It is an international issue. Daesh threatens many states around the world.”

He fears there is a high probability of a Daesh resurgence unless the world sits up, takes notice and takes action.

“Victory against Daesh is a victory for everyone,” he added.



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[Lebanese celebrate Easter amid election campaign](#)

Mon, 2022-04-18 00:09

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun has assured the Lebanese that parliamentary elections will be held and that all the arrangements are ready, as people celebrated Easter.

He took part in the Easter Mass, which was led by Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai in Bkerke.

Aoun said he hoped for “the resurrection” of Lebanon.

“We are living through a difficult tragedy in which problems have accumulated. I am experiencing the same situation you are and what befell you, befell me also.”

The president met Al-Rai before the Mass and then told the media: “We want better relations with Arab countries, and the return of ambassadors to Beirut is an important step in this direction.”

BACKGROUND

Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi urged people to vote in the upcoming elections because Lebanon ‘needs a national, sovereign and independent parliamentary majority.’

He hoped that the staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund would “positively affect” the situation in Lebanon and, speaking about the papal visit to Lebanon in June, wished “it would bring hope” to the country.

“Today, we live in the hope of the resurrection. As long as we are alive, we will not allow despair to get the best of us.”

Aoun also addressed the Shiite duo – the Amal movement and Hezbollah without naming them – and accused them once again of obstructing the work of the judicial investigation into the Beirut Port explosion.

“They are the same parties obstructing the Cabinet’s work, and you know who they are. The families of the martyrs should address their demands to them.”

The ministers of Hezbollah and the Amal movement boycotted Cabinet sessions last October amid their demands to dismiss the investigator into the explosion, Judge Tarek Bitar.

In mid-January, after paralyzing Bitar’s work and bombarding him with lawsuits, they started attending sessions again.

During his Easter sermon on Sunday, Al-Rai urged people to vote in the upcoming elections because Lebanon needed a “national, sovereign, independent” parliamentary majority that believed in a legitimate state, constitutional institutions, and the Lebanese army as a single reference for arms and security, as well as the unity of political and military decisions.

“If the people do not realize the seriousness of the situation and choose the forces capable of defending Lebanon’s entity and identity, and restoring Lebanon’s Arab and international relations, then the people, not the political system, will bear the responsibility for the great collapse. Lebanon is lucky that change can still be achieved democratically. The results of the elections depend on the Lebanese votes. There are no previously determined losers or winners.

“The greatest danger is misleading the people so that they elect a

parliamentary majority that does not resemble them or meet their ambitions. The people, as they choose their representatives, should realize that they are also choosing the next president, and indeed the next republic. The fate of Lebanon depends on the quality of the parliamentary majority in the new parliament.”

He also addressed Aoun: “The determination to hold the parliamentary elections, despite attempts to overthrow them, goes in line with securing the election of your successor. Everyone appreciates your efforts aimed at approving the general budget and agreeing on the recovery plan.

“The Lebanese do not want an alternative to the state, and they do not want a partner in the state. They yearn for the moment when foreign hands are lifted off of Lebanon. They yearn for the national interest to prevail over all personal and electoral interests. They yearn to have only one republic, one legitimacy, one weapon, one decision, and a comprehensive Lebanese identity.

“It is not permissible to change the identity of Lebanon’s economic system, which is not subject to any constitutional settlement or political bargaining.

“Reforms need to be combined with extending the state’s authority over its entire territory and unifying arms, per UN Security Council resolutions. It is imperative to respect the sovereignty of brotherly countries and stop campaigning against them.”

Election campaigns intensified during the Easter holiday and the Shiite duo is seeking to win not only the entire Shiite share in the new parliament but secure a majority through candidates from other sects allied to them.

On Saturday, individuals affiliated with Hezbollah and the Amal movement attacked members of the Together for Change electoral list in one of the southern constituencies supported by the Communist Party, independents, and the civil movement in Tyre. They tried to prevent the members from reaching a restaurant in Sarafand to announce their list’s electoral program.

Candidate Dr. Hisham Hayek said: “We tried to be in a democratic race and it turned out that there was no democracy. We went to Sarafand, protected by the security forces, but we were surprised by organized gangs of young men who blocked the road and shot at us. How is this a fair competition? Does the announcement of an electoral program constitute a threat to civil peace?”

Candidate Ali Khalifeh said: “The message they wanted to send through violence is well received. They will not be tolerant of others’ opinions, ideas, and programs that are committed to confronting the corrupt authority.”

The Amal movement was quick to deny its connection to the attack, as did its parliamentary bloc, which condemned what happened and stressed the movement’s keenness to achieve the electoral process in an “atmosphere of freedom and democratic competition.”

The electoral list of Hezbollah and the Amal movement in the Baalbek-Hermel constituency tried to announce its electoral program in a ceremony in the

heart of the historic Baalbek Citadel.

But civil society movements pressured the Minister of Culture Mohammed Mortada to stop this event due to its violation of the electoral law.

Article 77 states: "Public spaces, governmental departments, universities, faculties, institutes, public schools, and places of worship are not allowed to be used to hold electoral meetings or promotion."



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Palestinian families highlight plight of members in Israeli prisons
Clashes continue in Jerusalem as Jordanian king urges Israeli restraint

[Palestinian families highlight plight](#)

of members in Israeli prisons

Sun, 2022-04-17 23:40

RAMALLAH: Palestinians mark Prisoners' Day on April 17 every year to highlight the plight of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons. This year a torch was lit in Jenin and Bethlehem on the evening of April 16, a march was organised in the centre of Ramallah, and schools talked in their classes about the status of prisoners.

Palestinians consider the prisoners to be freedom fighters who sacrificed their freedom to liberate their homeland, while Israel calls them terrorists. However, there is no Palestinian home or family that did not suffer at some point or have prisoners in the Israeli jails.

Since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967, Israel has imprisoned more than 1 million Palestinians and continues to employ its policy of arbitrary mass detention through daily military raids and incursions. However, administrative detention is widely used to imprison Palestinians with no charge or trial for indefinite periods. Since 1967, Israeli authorities have issued more than 60,000 administrative detention orders.

According to Palestinian sources, there are currently 4,450 prisoners. Of these 160 are children, 32 are women, 20 are in solitary confinement, 600 are ill. There are 530 administrative detainees in Israeli jails.

Prisoners' Day comes amid an escalation of violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem for more than two weeks, as Israeli arrests of Palestinians continue.

The suffering of Palestinian families who have sons or daughters in Israeli prisons increases during Ramadan, as they are unable to visit them due to the time and distance of travel and long waits of more than 16 hours. Family members miss their captive children and relatives when they gather at the Ramadan dinner table.

Laila Zawahra, 70 years, the mother of prisoner Mohammed Zawahra, from Bethlehem, who is sentenced to life imprisonment, told Arab News that she misses her son most during Ramadan.

"I remember him and miss him a lot when we eat Ramadan dinner every evening, whenever we cook the dish he loved, Mansaf and fried chicken, and when eating the Ramadan sweets Qatayef."

Zawahra says that she travelled from Bethlehem to Jerusalem on the first Friday of Ramadan to pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque despite her poor health. She distributed the charity of Ramadan fasting on behalf of her son to the poor there, and called for his release during Friday prayers.

She remembered how Mohammed used to come at the end of the month of Ramadan and ask her about the gift she would like him to buy for her to mark the end of Ramadan.

She said that she will not be able to visit him during Ramadan while she is fasting, as the distance between her home in Bethlehem and Ashkelon Prison, where he is incarcerated, is long, and this may negatively affect her health. She visits her son once a month.

Bassam Darwish, the brother of Ghassan Darwish, 37, from Ramallah, who has spent 16 years in prison, described to Arab News the family's feelings during Ramadan: "The 16th of Ramadan passed, and Ghassan was not among us at the Ramadan dinner table, nor the suhoor, and he did not share the atmosphere of Ramadan with us."

He said that his family missed his brother Ghassan as he waited for the Maghrib call to announce the end of fasting.

Bassam said that when Ghassan was arrested, none of his brothers and sisters were married. Today Ghassan has 13 nephews and nieces but he has only seen them in photographs.

Before Ramadan, Ghassan asked family members not to visit him in his prison in Ketsaot in Negev, southern Israel, where the travel and waiting time is 16 hours. They have to travel from 7 in the morning and wait for long hours in scorching weather while the meeting with Ghassan is limited to 45 minutes. They can see him only through glass and talk to him through a telephone, while his father and older brother are prohibited from visiting him for security reasons.

"The Maqluba was Ghassan's favourite dish, and every time we cook this dish, we remember him so much," Bassam said.

To show respect for Palestinian prisoners, the PA Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh and Ramallah governor Leila Ghannam had a Ramadan dinner with Um Nasser Abu Humeid, who had 5 sons in Israeli jails.

"Prisoners are the conscience of the Palestinian people; they sacrificed their freedom to enable their people to live in freedom and dignity, and some of them have spent 42 years of their life in prison. There is no Palestinian family who has not lived and suffered from the experience of the arrest of one of its members," said Muqbil Al-Barghouti, the younger brother of the prisoner Marwan Al-Barghouti, the Palestinian leader who has spent 20 years in prison under life imprisonment.



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Fires flare in Israeli prisons amid manhunt for 6 escapees
NGO says 4,500 Palestinians in Israeli prisons

[Hundreds rally against threat to close Turkish women's rights group](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sat, 2022-04-16 23:47

ANKARA: Hundreds of people demonstrated on Saturday in several Turkish cities including Istanbul and Ankara against a move to close one of the country's most respected women's rights groups.

"It is not possible to stop our fight. We are not going to allow the closure of our association," the secretary-general of We Will Stop Femicide, Fidan Ataselim, told AFP.

An Istanbul prosecutor on Wednesday filed a lawsuit aimed at shutting down

the association for “activity against law and morals.”

According to Ataselim, the lawsuit accuses the group of conducting activities that violate Turkey’s “laws and morals.”

The association was a vocal critic of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s decision last year to pull Turkey out of the Istanbul Convention, which requires countries to set up laws aimed at preventing and prosecuting violence against women.

We Will Stop Femicide says 280 women were killed in Turkey last year, many of the murders committed by family members.

Another 217 women died in suspicious circumstances, including those officially registered as suicide, the group says.

Ataselim said the lawsuit was filed based on a complaint registered by a group of Turks through a website set up by the presidency to field citizens’ requests.

The complaint accused the group of “destroying the family based on the pretext of defending women’s rights,” Ataselim said.

The language is similar to that used by Erdogan in his decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, which Turkey signed in 2011.

Social conservatives in Turkey claim the convention promotes homosexuality and threatens traditional family values.

“Don’t prosecute women, but murderers!” Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in Istanbul shouted.

Representatives of opposition parties as well as relatives of domestic abuse victims took part in the demonstration.

“These women are fighters... I wanted to be there to support them,” said Nihat Palandoken, the father of a young girl killed in 2017.



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