

French ambassador tells Aoun: Implement Jeddah Agreement

Wed, 2021-12-08 01:17

BEIRUT: On Tuesday, at the request of President Emmanuel Macron, French Ambassador to Lebanon Anne Griot briefed Lebanese President Michel Aoun on Macron's Gulf tour, especially his visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which "expressed its commitment to helping Lebanon, pointing out the need to implement the commitments that have been undertaken," as stated by the media office of the Lebanese presidency.

During the meeting, Griot stressed that "Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries are ready to undertake the required steps, and that for its part, Lebanon should undertake what is required from it and prove its credibility in its commitment to reforms, especially the structural reforms that require new work tools to confront the deep crisis."

The meeting held last Saturday in Jeddah between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Macron saw the issuing of a statement concerning Lebanon, in which the pair stressed the "need (for) the Lebanese government to undertake comprehensive reforms."

The two sides also stressed the "need to limit possession of arms to legitimate state institutions," and that "Lebanon should not serve as a base for terrorist acts that destabilize the security and stability of the region, or a base for drug trafficking," further stressing "the importance of strengthening the role of the Lebanese Army in maintaining the security and stability of Lebanon."

The pair had made a joint phone call during the meeting with Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati.

During her talks with Aoun, Griot stressed the importance placed by the international community and France in the legislative, municipal, and presidential elections due next year.

In response to the Saudi-French statement, on behalf of Hezbollah, former minister Mohammed Fneish said on Tuesday that the group "will not ... substitute the symbol of our dignity and freedom with bare essentials of living conditions.

"The attempts to make us relinquish the resistance and its arms in return of resolving the economic crisis is something unacceptable to us," he added.

BACKGROUND

The meeting held last Saturday in Jeddah between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Macron saw the issuing of a statement concerning Lebanon, in which

the pair stressed the 'need (for) the Lebanese government to undertake comprehensive reforms.'

Cabinet sessions have been suspended since Oct. 12 over Hezbollah's stubbornness over the investigation into the Port of Beirut explosion. Judicial investigator Tariq Bitar is accused by the group of being biased against it, according to its chief, Hassan Nasrallah.

On Tuesday, the Civil Court of Appeal of Beirut, headed by Judge Randa Harrouq, rejected a lawsuit submitted by former minister Youssef Fenianos against Bitar "for lack of qualitative jurisdiction."

Harrouq decided to "fine the plaintiff an amount of 800,000 Lebanese pounds (\$530) and inform Judge Bitar of the content of the decision, which entails that he continues his investigations related to the file of the Port of Beirut explosion."

A judicial source told Arab News that the defendants have exhausted all the steps that could be undertaken at the Court of Appeal, and that they might resort to the Court of Cassation to obstruct the interrogation of 4 former ministers in addition to former Prime Minister Hassan Diab.

Bitar has not yet undertaken any indictments despite the fact that nearly 16 months have passed since the disaster.

According to another judicial source, Bitar has rejected all attempts to remove the brief from him and to refer the ministers and the prime minister to a court that would be formed by Parliament to try presidents and ministers, a request made by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement.



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Mikati holds key meetings in effort to restore Arab trust in Lebanon
France's Macron says hoping for progress on Lebanon 'within next hours'

[Gazan who lost 6 family members in Israeli strike loses case against Gantz](#)

Wed, 2021-12-08 00:45

THE HAGUE: A Dutch appeals court on Tuesday upheld a lower court's decision to throw out a civil case against Israel's defense minister and another former senior military officer over their roles in a deadly 2014 airstrike.

The Hague District Court ruled in January 2020 that the case against Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz and former air force commander Amir Eshel couldn't proceed because the men have "functional immunity from jurisdiction."

The Hague Court of Appeal said on Tuesday that the lower court was right to rule that Gantz, who was military chief of staff at the time of the airstrike, and Eshel had immunity because they were carrying out Israeli government policies.

The case was brought by Ismail Ziada, who lost six members of his family in the airstrike that lawyers for the men argued was part of an Israeli military operation during the 2014 Gaza conflict.

**A military slaughter in Gaza. A legal slaughter in The Hague.
That's how it feels.**

Ismail Ziada

He wanted the Dutch court to order Gantz and Eshel to pay damages and his lawyers argued that the men didn't have immunity because their actions amounted to war crimes.

Ziada said Tuesday's ruling was "in contradiction with any sense of justice" and branded the judges "cowards" for their decision.

"A military slaughter in Gaza. A legal slaughter in The Hague. That's how it

feels," he said.

Responding to the Dutch court decision while on a tour of the Gaza border, Gantz said he was proud of his command of the Israeli military, which he said "adheres to values and human rights" and observes international law "with a real goal to protect the citizens of Israel and allow them to live in peace and calm."

Roy Schondorf, a deputy Israeli attorney general, welcomed the ruling.

"The appeals court recognized their immunity from civil prosecution for anti-terror activities in the framework of operation 'protective edge.' This is a very important legal precedent that protects all IDF (Israeli military) commanders from similar attempts," Schondorf tweeted.

The lower court also said Ziada was free to sue the men in Israel. At hearings in 2019, Ziada rejected the idea that he has access to justice in Israel as "farcical as well as vicious."

Ziada told an earlier hearing that he lost his mother, three brothers, a sister-in-law and a 12-year-old nephew in the airstrike.

Israel's Justice Ministry told the court before the 2020 decision that an internal Israeli military investigation determined the airstrike had killed four militants hiding in the house.

It said the attack was permissible under international law. Gaza's Hamas rulers themselves have said that two militants were in the building.

Ziada's lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld said the judges had taken a conservative interpretation of the law.

"They had the ... legal space to decide differently in our favor, legally speaking, but then there's no precedent," Zegveld said. "So they had to do something not so much new, but something that hadn't happened before."

The ruling can be appealed to the Dutch Supreme Court.



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Dutch court to rule on Palestinian's case against Israeli defense minister
Israeli defense minister apologizes for Palestinian's death

[Geneva sisters repatriated from Syrian desert camp](#)

Wed, 2021-12-08 00:27

GENEVA: Two Swiss half-sisters whose mother took them out of the country with her when she joined the Daesh militant group in the Middle East in 2016 have been repatriated from a desert camp in northeastern Syria, the Swiss Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

The older girl, now 15, had suffered a severe shrapnel wound to her leg, requiring three operations, while the younger was said to be in poor health.

The ministry confirmed that it had repatriated the two minors from the Al-Roj camp in northeast Syria.

“The children arrived on Swiss soil on Dec. 6 at Geneva airport, having passed through Iraq,” it said in a statement.

FASTFACT

The Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps hold nationals from some 60 countries who fled from Daesh’s last enclaves.

The repatriation, believed to be the first of its kind to Switzerland, was carried out with the consent of their mother.

The government has previously said she was still in the camp and has several nationalities, although her Swiss citizenship had been withdrawn for security reasons. The girls have different fathers in Geneva.

The case had been raised by UN human rights experts in April.

The experts said then that the girls had been allegedly abducted in 2016 by their mother who joined Daesh. A senior Swiss official said at the time that it was working hard to have the girls sent home.

More than 60,000 people, two-thirds of them children, are held in camps for families associated with Daesh. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which visits the camps, has described them as a “tragedy in plain sight.”



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UK police 'treated Daesh bride families as suspects, criminals' Finland's secret school for children of Daesh fighters in Iraq

[Bethlehem is not just for Christmas, Palestinian creatives say](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-12-08 00:17

BETHLEHEM: A giant Christmas tree takes pride of place in Bethlehem's Manger Square, between the Church of the Nativity and a mosque adorned with lights cascading down its walls.

But there is more to the Palestinian city than its biblical significance, say organizers of the Bethlehem Cultural Festival, which promotes other aspects of the place revered as the traditional birthplace of Jesus.

The annual festival features dance, music, art and culinary events in a city whose main source of income – overseas tourists – has been decimated by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Around Christmas, the world prays to Bethlehem, but actually most people don't know that Bethlehem is in Palestine," said festival participant and chef Fadi Kattan as he selected fresh mint from a vegetable market.

"I cook, Umm Nabil sells herbs, there are dance troops, there are artists."

Bethlehem lies five miles south of Jerusalem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, which Israel captured in a 1967 war along with the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

The city is cut off from Jerusalem by an Israel wall, which Palestinians condemn as a land grab but Israel defends as a security measure to protect itself from attack. Talks between the sides collapsed in 2014.

For festival co-founder, Abdelfattah Abusrour, its aim is to show the world that Bethlehem exists as a living city outside the pages of history and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"It's not just a religious place," Abusrour said. "It's full of life,

culture, art, beauty, hospitality and generosity of people – despite living under occupation.”



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Hoping virus won't wreck Christmas, Bethlehem lights up giant tree
Christmas cheer at Gaza Catholic school as war damage repairs go on

[Unvaccinated Lebanese face \\$165 fine for spreading COVID-19](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-12-07 22:28

BEIRUT: Unvaccinated individuals who spread the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Lebanon could be fined 250,000 Lebanese pounds (\$165, or a black-market rate of around \$10) under a new law ratified by the country's parliamentarians on Tuesday.

The penalty charge sees an increase on the previous fee of 50,000 Lebanese pounds imposed on people who had not been jabbed but had passed on the virus, the National News Agency reported.

However, the updated legislation did not make vaccination against COVID-19 obligatory.

Lebanese health officials have been urging the public to get inoculated amid a surge in daily infections with 1,707 new cases and 10 virus-related deaths recorded on Tuesday.

On whether citizens would take notice of the fine, Health Minister Dr. Firas Abiad told Arab News: "Within the economic financial situation in Lebanon, and the poverty level, it will certainly have an impact."

However, Lebanese business manager, Hania Michele, criticized lawmakers for what she described as a "purposeless and meaningless law."

She told Arab News: "It is not my fault if someone contaminates me with COVID-19 which will keep on spreading anyway. I don't know if they are doing it purposely, to indirectly force the unvaccinated to get vaccinated.

"Even those who are vaccinated, they could still get infected and spread the virus. That's why it's impractical."

Barber Yousef said less than 40 percent of Lebanon's population had been vaccinated. "I am unsure if people, who are already bankrupt, would be able to afford paying 250,000 Lebanese pounds. So, why are people not getting vaccinated?

"It is not wrong to fine those who spread the virus, but people are broke and don't have the money to pay for PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests," he said.

Banker, Ghalia Khalil, said that due to the country's economic crisis the majority of people living in Lebanon could not afford to buy a facemask, never mind pay a hefty fine.

"Many parents and children aren't complying with health restrictions and remain unmasked ... they think if they're vaccinated, they won't get infected. The challenge will be in the implementation of the law rather than the stipulation."

Shop owner, Mohammed Itani, said the lawmakers' move was inefficient and too late.

"Increasing the fine from 50,000 to 250,000 pounds came very late. We are facing a fourth wave of COVID-19 and the daily infections are scary. Fines should have been made high to force citizens to wear masks and get vaccinated when the outbreak started," he added.

One Lebanese educational consultant, who would only give her name as Nisreen C., said she would not be getting vaccinated and would rather protect herself by wearing a mask. "I am not getting vaccinated no matter how much it costs or what it takes," she added.

Schoolteacher, Marwa E., said: "This is a good step, though late. I believe

that this steep fine, no matter how harsh it may sound amid our financial downfall, will eventually encourage people to getting vaccinated and wear masks.”



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Ravaged Lebanon on the brink of third COVID-19 surge, health officials warn
Lebanon reintroduces some COVID-19 prevention measures