

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: LBN34887
Country: Lebanon
Date: 5 June 2009

Keywords: – Lebanon – Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party – May 2008 – Denbo – Danbo - Akkar

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Questions

- 1. Please provide background information and the recent history of the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party in Lebanon?**
- 2. Please provide reports on the May 2008 violence in Halba?**
- 3. Please provide information on the town of DENBO within AKKAR, northern Lebanon-geographical, sociological, historical etc.?**

RESPONSE

Preliminary Note

Legislative elections are due to take place on 7 June 2009. The main contestants are two coalitions: "March 14 Alliance" which currently holds a parliamentary majority and is anti-Syrian; and the "March 8 Alliance" which is pro-Syrian ('Main players in Lebanese elections' 2009, *Al Arabiya*, 21 May - <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/05/21/73411.html> - Accessed 3 June 2009 - Attachment 1).

1. Please provide background information and the recent history of the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party in Lebanon?

On its website, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party in Lebanon, which is a member of the "March 8 Alliance" is reported to advocate strong language:

According to Mufti, an article dated October 20, 2008, posted on the website of the March 8-aligned SSNP, titled "For an apology for the resistance and its weapons," was found to "incite hate" and use "threatening language." The article accuses the rival March 14 coalition of being "traitors" and quotes the article as stating, "the fate of traitors is punishment and

death."(Abizeid, Marc 2009, 'NGO accuses Lebanese media of inciting hatred, violence; Meeting looks at how news sources fan fires' *Daily Star*, 6 May - Attachment 2).

The "March 8 Alliance" is a political coalition – the explanation for its name is contained in the following report:

The March 8 Alliance is named after the date of a massive 2005 Beirut rally organized by Hezbollah that expressed opposition to its disarmament, support for Syria, and resistance to Israel. The coalition is primarily comprised of Hezbollah, Nabih Berri's Amal party, and the secular Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) of General Michel Aoun. Unlike Nasrallah and Berri who are Shia Muslims, Aoun is a Maronite Christian and thus draws support from this and other Christian constituencies (Amiri, Rannie 2009, 'Understanding Lebanon's June Elections' *The Palestine Chronicle*, 1 May- Attachment 3).

As of 4 July 2008 the President of the SSNP is Asaad Hardan – he replaced Ali Qanso ('Asaad Hardan assumes SSNP's reins' 2008, *Daily Star*, 4 July – Attachment 4).

In recent times the SSNP has voiced its continuing support of the Lebanese national opposition:

The Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) said in a statement issued Friday [24 April] that it would continue to support the national opposition in the June elections despite the withdrawal of party candidates at the Akkar and Aley districts.

"The sacrifices we made won't prevent us from working hard on supporting the opposition in the elections based on the party's conviction..."('SSNP party to support opposition in Lebanese elections' 2009, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 25 April – Attachment 5)

On Sunday 5 April 2009 the President of the SSNP, Asad Hardan announced the names of candidates his party had selected to contest the June elections:

SSNP leader Asaad Hardan announced on Sunday the names of his party's candidates throughout various districts in Lebanon.

The SSNP leader named: Mahmoud al-Hassan in the Akkar district; Salim Saadeh in Koura; Ghassan al-Achkar in the Metn; Marwan Fares in Baalbek; and Hardan in Marjayoun-Hasbaya districts. He added that his party would announce its candidates in the Aley district within the coming 24 hours, after concluding discussions with their allies. During the ceremony at the Coral Beach Hotel, Hardan said it was crucial to carry out the vote in an atmosphere of security and hoped they would lead "to a new period in Lebanon's history." ('Lebanese leader Al-Hariri targets "resistance's arms" in election platform' 2009, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 7 April – Attachment 6).

The SSNP are fielding two deputies(Gouëset, Catherine 2009 'Législatives 2009. Qui est qui dans les élections libanaises?' *L'Express*, 3 June

http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/proche-orient/qui-est-qui-dans-les-elections-libanaises_764860.html?p=2 – Accessed 4 June 2009 – Attachment 7).

2. Please provide reports on the May 2008 violence in Halba?

A Research Response which details the violence which occurred in May 2008 in Halba is attached (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33661*, 9 September - Attachment 8).

There is visual recording of these incidents ('Lebanon: Camera phone footage a new factor in Lebanon fighting' 2008, www.menassat.com, 19 May - Attachment 9).

These incidents are described as follows:

The headquarters of the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP) in Halba fell to the Future Movement forces," the official said, referring to the party of Saad Hariri, the leader of the March 14 camp and son of Rafiq al-Hariri, the assassinated former Lebanese prime minister.

The official said that seven people were found dead inside ('Standoff ends in Lebanon capital' 2008, Al Jazeera website, 11 May 2008 - 'Standoff ends in Lebanon capital' 2008, *AlJazeera website*, 11 May, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/05/200861423385772903.html> - Accessed 2 June 2009 - Attachment 10).

This is corroborated by this report which states that 14 persons including civilians were killed in a violent conflict between the pro-Syrian SSNP and the Future Movement forces which is the Sunni party of Saad Hariri ('Au Liban, l'opposition commence à retirer ses troupes des quartiers ouest de Beyrouth' 2008, *Le Monde*, 10 May – Attachment 11; 'Le premier ministre dénonce un coup d'Etat' 2009, *Le Matin*, 11 May - Attachment 12).

Continuing skirmishes were reported in the Akkar region involving the members of the pro-government and the opposition ('Démonstration de force du Hezbollah au Liban' 2008, *Le Monde*, 13 May - Attachment 13).

To date *Human Rights Watch* deplores the inaction of Lebanese authorities:

Another lawyer, Elie Ghassan, who represents the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, members of which died in the northern town of Halba after being beaten and ill-treated by gunmen, expressed similar frustration. He told Human Rights Watch: "We gave the prosecutor videotapes showing those who killed our members. We even gave them the names of those who appear in the film. Yet, nothing has happened. The file is frozen." ('Human Rights Watch 2009, *Lebanon: A Year Later, No Accountability for Killings*, 7 May - <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/05/07/lebanon-year-later-no-accountability-killings> – Accessed 3 June 2009 - Attachment 14).

3. Please provide information on the town of DENBO within AKKAR, northern Lebanon- geographical, sociological, historical etc.?

The Research Response cited previously contains detailed information on this town and its surrounding area (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33661*, 9 September - Attachment 8).

Lebanese sources have stated that several hundred Salafists from Tripoli (north Lebanon) have settled in Akkar, from there they hope to enter Syria in a bid to cause unrest (Sonpipet, Amédée 2009, 'Diplomatie; Les intégristes prospèrent au nord du Liban' 2008, *Bakchich*, 19 October -Attachment 15).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

UK Home Office website <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk>

US Department of State website <http://www.state.gov>

Immigration and Refugee Board Canada <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International website <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Human Rights Watch (HRW) website <http://www.hrw.org/>

International News & Politics

BBC News website <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

Le Monde <http://www.lemonde.fr/>

Le Monde diplomatique www.monde-diplomatique.fr

L'Express www.lexpress.fr

Mideast Monitor <http://www.mideastmonitor.org/>

Region Specific Links

Al Arabiya News channel <http://www.alarabiya.net/>

Al Jazeera <http://english.aljazeera.net/>

Al Manar <http://www.almanar.com.lb/NewsSite/News.aspx?language=en>

Search Engines

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

Yahoo search engine <http://search.yahoo.com>

Copernic search engine

Online Subscription Services

Jane's Intelligence Review website <http://jir.janes.com/>

Strategic Forecasting <http://www.stratfor.com/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC 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)

MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. 'Main players in Lebanese elections' 2009, *Al Arabiya*, 21 May - <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/05/21/73411.html> - Accessed 3 June 2009.
2. Abizeid, Marc 2009, 'NGO accuses Lebanese media of inciting hatred, violence; Meeting looks at how news sources fan fires' *Daily Star*, 6 May. (FACTIVA)
3. Amiri, Rannie 2009, 'Understanding Lebanon's June Elections' *The Palestine Chronicle*, 1 May. (FACTIVA)

4. 'Asaad Hardan assumes SSNP's reins' 2008, *Daily Star*, 4 July. (FACTIVA)
5. ...'SSNP party to support opposition in Lebanese elections' 2009, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 25 April. (FACTIVA)
6. 'Lebanese leader Al-Hariri targets "resistance's arms" in election platform' 2009, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 7 April. (FACTIVA)
7. Gouëset, Catherine 2009 'Législatives 2009. Qui est qui dans les élections libanaises?' *L'Express*, 3 June
http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/proche-orient/qui-est-qui-dans-les-elections-libanaises_764860.html?p=2 – Accessed 4 June 2009.
8. RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33661*, 9 September
9. Lebanon: Camera phone footage a new factor in Lebanon fighting' 2008, www.menassat.com, 19 May. (CISNET Lebanon CX200469)
10. 'Standoff ends in Lebanon capital' 2008, Al Jazeera website, 11 May 2008 - 'Standoff ends in Lebanon capital' 2008, *AlJazeera website*, 11 May, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/05/200861423385772903.html> - Accessed 2 June 2009.
11. 'Au Liban, l'opposition commence à retirer ses troupes des quartiers ouest de Beyrouth' 2008, *Le Monde*, 10 May. (FACTIVA);
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13. 'Démonstration de force du Hezbollah au Liban' 2008, *Le Monde*, 13 May. (FACTIVA)
14. Human Rights Watch 2009, *Lebanon: A Year Later, No Accountability for Killings*, 7 May - <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/05/07/lebanon-year-later-no-accountability-killings> – Accessed 3 June 2009.
15. Sonpipet, Amédée 2009, 'Diplomatie; Les intégristes prospèrent au nord du Liban' 2008, *Bakchich*, 19 October. (FACTIVA)