

Inside the Refugee Camp in Northern Lebanon

Live Update from Nahr Al-Barid refugee camp

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Global Research, May 29, 2007

The Angry Arab News Service 27 May 2007

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

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I wanted to know the situation first hand from inside the camp because the Lebanese Army has been preventing journalists from entering the camp. So I obtained the phone number of one of the leaders in the camp, Abu Jabir of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Abu Jabir has stayed inside. He told me that he will not do it again: that he will not leave the camp except to return to Palestine.

He feels that there is a conspiracy against the Palestinian camps in Lebanon in accordance of UNSC 1559. The humanitarian situation is quite dire, he said: there is no water, no electricity, and no medicine. The Lebanese Army bombardment of the camp is unquestionably indiscriminate he said. He said that the market was bombed, as were 6 mosques inside the camp. A bomb landed on his desk, for example.

It is not true that the Lebanese Army is only bombing the north of the camp where Fath-Al-Islam is concentrated. Hospitals (they are more like clinics) were bombed as well, including Mu'assassat Ash-Shifa' which is run by the PFLP. Two general physicians are now forced to perform all sorts of medical practice, including surgery. As for the claim by the lying Lebanese government that "a mere Palestinian civilian was killed and 19 injured" in the camp, it is utterly false, Abu Jabir told me. He has the names of: 18 Palestinian civilians killed, and 105 Palestinian civilian injured. He told me that there are still civilians all around, and women were around when I was talking to him.

There are reports, he said, of Hariri goons shooting at the camp and at the refugees but he was careful to add that since he is inside he can't verify that. There are 200 houses that are fully or partially destroyed in the camp. And those who leave the camp are not allowed back in by the lousy Lebanese Army. He then told me about Fath-Al-Islam. He said that the number of Palestinians among them can be counted on the fingers of "one hand." He said that they are non-Palestinians, and he said that the people of the camp would like them to leave the camp, that they don't belong there.

He said: let those who fund them and who brought them in, take them out. They don't belong here, he told me. He said that initially, by late 2006, there were no more than 40 members of Fath-Al-Islam inside the camp. He said that suddenly by early 2007, something very suspicious started to happen: that hundreds of fighters (from fanatical groups inside At-Ta'mir (which is run by Hariri Inc, and where a Hariri militia operate) and `Ayn Al-Hilwah and other places) were brought into the camp to join the ranks of Fath-Al-Islam.

He said that the camp is watched and controlled by the Lebanese Army and security forces

from all sides. He asked how those fighters were permitted to enter the camp under the watch of the Lebanese Army. He wondered why is it that the same governments that met with Condoleezza Rice during her visit were the ones that sent arms and ammunition to the Lebanese Army this week. It is clear that people in the camp feel unfairly caught in a battle between Fath-Al-Islam and the Lebanese Army. They have no say in this battle that is hurting the refugees.

Professor As'ad AbuKhalil is originally from Tyre, Lebanon. He served as free-lance Middle East consultant for NBC News and ABC News, an experience that only served to increase his disdain for mainstream American media. He is now professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus and visiting professor at UC, Berkeley.

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