

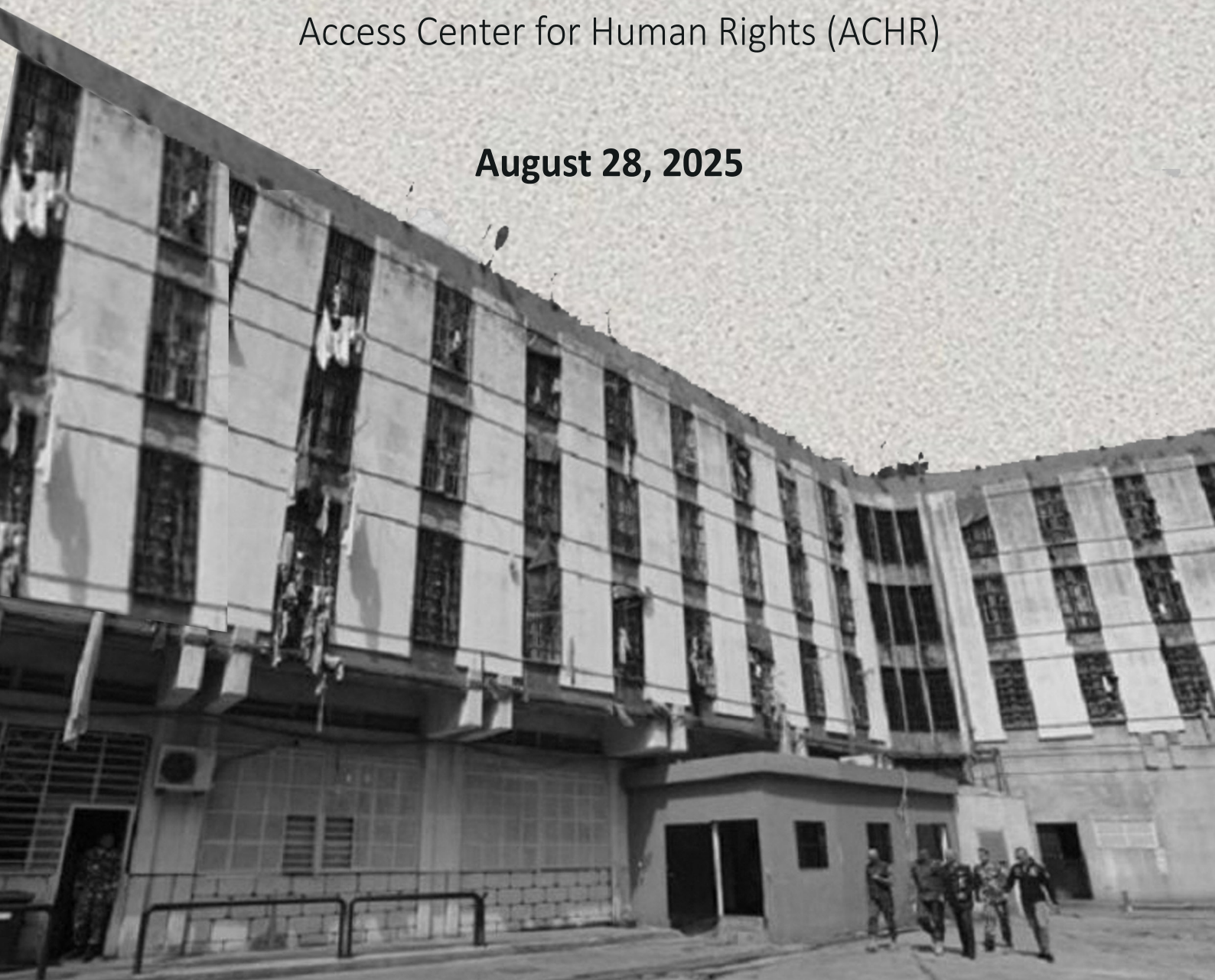


## STATEMENT

# ONGOING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND HUNGER STRIKE IN LEBANON'S ROUMIEH PRISON

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)

**August 28, 2025**



**On 11 February 2025**, over 100 Syrian refugees detained in Lebanon's Roumieh prison announced an open-ended hunger strike to protest against and draw attention to their harsh and inhumane detention conditions inside the prison<sup>1</sup>. This hunger strike comes in the context of worsening humanitarian conditions in Lebanese prisons where Syrian detainees face continuous violations of their fundamental rights, including the denial of basic human rights and inadequate essential services such as healthcare, food and medicine<sup>2</sup>. Many of these detained refugees have been subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention<sup>3</sup> without any official response to their demands. In some cases, detainees were even subjected to torture<sup>4</sup>, while others attempted to hang themselves as a result of the poor conditions in Roumieh prison<sup>5</sup>.

Since the first hunger strike, Syrian detainees have repeatedly and consistently issued statements to the public and to the Syrian and Lebanese governments to draw attention to their case, and hunger strikes and protests have been undertaken. On 14 April, a number of Syrian detainees in Roumieh prison issued both an audio and written statement demanding that Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam make an urgent decision on their case during his visit to Damascus<sup>6</sup>. There has still been no official response. As one detainee stated: "Our demand is that the Syrian state view us with a humane eye. We were not arrested because we are criminals, but because we supported the revolution. We demand the appointment of a government official to follow up on our case, because ignoring us is killing us day after day."<sup>7</sup> Most recently, Syrian detainees in Roumieh prison have launched a campaign demanding the Syrian government to repatriate all Syrian prisoners. The campaign comes about two days before a Syrian delegation is expected to visit Lebanon to discuss several joint issues with the Lebanese government, including the issue of Syrian detainees<sup>8</sup>. Families of detainees have also amplified those demands through public protests. In April, relatives rallied outside the Lebanese Embassy in Damascus, and earlier this month, families gathered at the Joussieh border crossing describing the detention in Roumieh prison as a "humanitarian and political tragedy."<sup>9</sup>

These ongoing demands and the dire situation of those detained reflect ongoing abuses in Roumieh prison which requires urgent intervention from the Lebanese authorities and the international community.

### **Arbitrary arrests and proceedings:**

Syrian refugees have faced ongoing arbitrary arrest campaigns by Lebanese authorities during security raids, arbitrary arrest and detention, prolonged pre-trial detention without proper due process, little clarity or transparency on the specific charges and unfair military court trials. Due to draconian anti-terrorism laws<sup>10</sup> – which are more restrictive in terms of time periods of legal detention (unlike other charges) and is subjected to a military court trial - Syrian refugees have been arbitrarily detained and systematically denied access to legal assistance and legal rights and subjected to military trials based on different security-related accusations, including terrorism<sup>11</sup>. Violations reported include the denial of the right to a fair trial before an impartial and independent court, mistreatment including in some cases leading to deaths in custody<sup>12</sup>, and some cases of detainees being held despite the end of their sentences<sup>13</sup>. Some Syrian families have also reported being denied visiting rights and restrictions accessing legal representatives.

## **Detainees face inhumane conditions in detention, including ill-treatment, lack of medical care and torture:**

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), Roumieh prison was created to hold 1,200 prisoners but currently holds around 4,000 prisoners<sup>14</sup>, a situation of severe overcrowding. Overcrowding has led to a deterioration of conditions and standards of Roumieh prison as well as other prisons in Lebanon, leading to a lack of basic sanitation, inadequate ventilation, lighting, and lack of adequate and nutritious food<sup>15</sup> due to the government's failure to pay outstanding bills and make necessary renovations. A lack of adequate nutrition and unhygienic conditions makes prisoners more susceptible to health issues and complications, additional psychological and mental stress, and often compounds pre-existing problems. The Roumieh prison has reportedly only one medical practitioner for each department, and this lack of medical care and medicine has impacted detainees. Recently, a Syrian detainee died inside the prison because of medical negligence, and his body was discovered with clear signs of malnutrition, according to his family<sup>16</sup>.

## **Lebanese Law and legal safeguards:**

Lebanese law contains clear provisions that should protect detainees from many of the violations currently taking place in Roumieh prison. For instance, Lebanese Criminal Procedure Code<sup>17</sup> stipulates that detention by security services may not exceed four days, with only two days extendable by written decision from the Public Prosecutor. However, this safeguard is ignored in practice, as many detainees remain in custody for weeks or even months without being referred to the judiciary. This practice amounts to enforced disappearance, which is a crime under both Lebanese and international law.

Moreover, Article 47 of the same Code guarantees detainees the right to contact their families, appoint a lawyer and receive a medical examination. These rights have been systematically marginalized in cases classified as "sensitive" such as terrorism and drug-related offenses. This not only strips detainees of their basic rights but also renders the security personnel who obstruct these rights complicit in criminal violations. Furthermore, Article 108 outlines maximum periods for pretrial detention. However, these limits are not respected and the exception relating to terrorism and state security crimes has been routinely misused to justify the prolonged detention of Syrian refugees for years without trial. Authorities often invoke the absence of adequate detention facilities as a pretext, effectively transforming what should be a narrowly defined exception into a tool of arbitrary and political repression.

## **Conclusion:**

Syrian detainees in Roumieh prison are facing multiple human rights violations, including lack of adequate medical care, food, and other basic rights that are all stipulated as necessary conditions for those detained or imprisoned, established and recognized international human rights law. ACHR's statement stresses the need to respect the rights of Syrian detainees in Lebanese prisons and to treat them according to international standards.



## Recommendations:

### *To the Lebanese authorities*

- Immediately release Syrian detainees who are being held without legal basis.
- Expedite all pre-trial detention cases, guarantee detainees' access to legal representation, and ensure fair trials in civilian courts that are independent and impartial.
- Reduce overcrowding in prisons, guarantee food supplies and adequate medical care, and improve healthcare services by appointing a full medical staff, in line with international human rights standards.
- Take immediate steps to improve infrastructure and living conditions in prisons to reduce degrading and inhumane treatment.
- End the practice of trying civilians before military courts.
- Ensure that Syrian detainees are not subjected to discrimination based on nationality or legal status.
- Abide by international and Lebanese anti-torture laws and ensure that all cases of torture that are reported are independently investigated and that preparators are held accountable
- Allow independent human rights organizations, NGOs, and UN agencies full access to Roumieh prison and other detention facilities to monitor conditions and detainees' rights.
- Repatriate Syrian detainees that wish to return, while ensuring that no one is forcibly returned to risk of persecution.

### *To the Syrian authorities*

- Prioritize diplomatic engagement on the issue of the detainees with the Government of Lebanon, including establishing mechanisms to review the legal files of all Syrian detainees that are willing to be repatriated to Syria. Further, ensure that family members of the detained inside Syria are guaranteed the right to contact those detained and visit the detained.
- Guarantee the safety of the transferred detainees and ensure that conditions of prisons inside Syria are in line with the international human rights standards.
- Ensure ongoing communication with the GoL to ensure that the rights and freedoms of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not violated and are upheld.

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