

WORKING PAPER

LEBANON AND THE RETURN OF THE SYRIA DISPLACED

*Problematics & Scenarios
Towards a State Approach*

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WORKING PAPER #45

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INTRODUCTION

This paper does not aim at presenting a comprehensive analysis of the academic and archival historical research conducted to address the standards, guarantees and mechanisms for the return of displaced persons from and to Syria, the rattles around them, and the controversies preventing them. There are volumes of legal research documents, most of which are pertaining to the conventions of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, not to mention in-depth and rigorous monitoring carried out by research centers and civil society bodies on the topic itself.

This is a working paper that aims at kick-starting the debate and at launching a serious discussion on the arrangements for the return of the Syria displaced, defining the roles and responsibilities of Lebanon and the role of international community in addition to sharing burdens and intensifying work on durable solutions, hoping to contribute to framing general national policies on the subject. It commences from the point that sees that the ultimate and only solution to the Syrian displacement crisis is to find a political settlement to the war in Syria as a result of a comprehensive and just peace agreement under the auspices of the international community. But waiting for a comprehensive solution, Lebanon, within its management of the crisis of displacement, is directly concerned with the preparation of return that takes into account the "voluntary, dignified and safe" principles while at the same time adopting sound governance of the crisis.

In this context, this paper is not concerned with the Lebanese political ambiguous approaches concerning the issue of return. Rather, it seeks to adopt parts of these approaches with no political agenda, but the sole intention of clarifying any ambiguities regarding return and stressing the importance of respecting the Lebanese national security and the human rights principles within the context of the national, Arab and international laws.

This paper offers an in-depth and non-partisan discussion of how Lebanon deals with the principle of the return of displaced persons to and from Syria, and how it should deal based on dismantling any politicism, populism, and phobia in favor of an improved system of governance and sound state approach. Moreover, it highlights the international standards and guarantees as well as some spontaneous and voluntary return trends.

BACKGROUND

Ever since the Palestinian Nakba of 1948, which led to Palestinians fleeing their homeland and becoming displaced in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan as well as around the world, and as the possibility of their return has faltered due to Israeli intolerance and aggression in addition to the international community's obstruction of the implementation of Resolution 194, and the Arab world's rejection of Resolution 181, Lebanon has maintained its rejection of the settlement of refugees and re-affirmed their right to return based on the resolutions of the United Nations and the League of Arab States. Lebanon further supported this right through its close monitoring of the negotiation processes pertaining to this subject, starting from Madrid until the Arab Peace Initiative launched at the Arab Summit held in Beirut (2002).

Since then, the demands of the Lebanese state and the Palestinian refugees have remained largely unaddressed for obvious reasons which will not be discussed in this paper. However, the Palestinian Nakba remains a source of mutual unease in the Lebanese-Palestinian collective memory, driven to bloody confrontations by international, regional and local intersections resulting from it. Despite the critical attempts to repair this memory between 2005 and 2018, which has led to heavy investment factors in the Lebanese political tensions revolving around "Settlement as an Accusation" and "The Rejection of Settlement as Resistance," these heavy political investments, as well as the political and sectarian strife, made it more difficult to shift into a state where public interest policies prevail over the influence of current politics.

Although the Nakba of the Palestinian refugees still exists in the profound Lebanese political discourse, it was alleviated by the formation of a unified Lebanese vision towards the Palestinian Refugees in 2017 by the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee. In 2011, the Syrian displacement crisis has appeared as a result of the war in Syria and the political clashes since then about their displacement and the necessity to go back. The clashes began as sectarian-political and ideological in nature, and soon became socio-economic as a result of the burdens imposed by displacement. Later, this displacement affects security and sovereignty issues before finally coming back to the debate between "Resettlement as an Accusation" and "The Rejection of Resettlement as Resistance." In this regard, there has been a lack of

attention to national security and the requirements of human security in Lebanon, as politicians excelled in strengthening their positions and mobilizing their supporters and partisans instead of finding effective solutions.

In both cases, the supporters and opponents of resettlement shifted attention from the main reasons behind asylum and displacement and hindered any chances of reaching a settlement for a return that preserves their national identity and human dignity, while protecting Lebanon from any existential risks. Thus, in respect to the Return, what are the criteria and guarantees? What are the international models and trends for the return of refugees and displaced persons and what is meant by safe zones? Why is there a demagogic, politicism, and populist sectarian investment in defining the process of return in Lebanon? What are the elements of an effective Lebanese state diplomacy that paves the way for the return of the Syria displaced in a voluntary, dignified and safe manner? And until these elements are secured, what conclusions can we draw?

RETURN AFTER ASYLUM AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT: REFERENCE FRAMEWORKS – CRITERIA AND GUARANTEES¹

The Syrian crisis has become the world's leading cause of forced displacement and asylum, with more than half the population leaving their homes. There are more than 6.3 million internally displaced persons in Syria (as of March 2017), more than five million registered refugees who fled to neighboring countries and North Africa, and hundreds of thousands who arrived in Europe as asylum seekers. Between 2016 and 2017, more than 2.5 million people were registered as newly internally displaced within Syria as a result of the continuation of military operations.

The parties to the conflict have failed to protect civilians and mitigate the main causes of displacement. A deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure has also been reported, which includes basic services such as water, electricity and communications. Hospitals, schools and places of worship have also been targeted as well.

In addition, internal displacement has been increasing as more Syrians are forced to relocate within Syria due to the bad quality or complete lack of services in their local areas, such as adequate health care, social care or livelihoods, and the cost of living. A demographic change impacted by sectarian and religious considerations also affects the return and raises concerns mainly related to national identity and the nature of the political system after the end of the war.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides immediate humanitarian support to

refugees in the host country and upon their voluntary / non-forced return to their country of origin when conditions of safety and dignity are in place. As part of its mandate, the UNHCR collects data on refugees and displaced persons, responds to their needs and aspirations, and builds strategic partnerships in collaboration with host countries and communities where they were displaced to ensure a decent life for them, as well as prepare for their return.

Although the UNHCR does not have the authority or resources to engage in a political intervention which will create favorable conditions for a safe and sustainable return and cannot provide long-term assistance to returnees (three years maximum), it seems that in addition to the UNHCR's role in humanitarian and relief interventions, it is playing a leading role in finding durable solutions. This includes the preparation and planning for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes and communities, resettlement in a third country, or integration in the communities where they were forced to relocate.

UNHCR's added value is its presence in both the country of origin and country of asylum, which enables it to facilitate dialogue between countries concerned with refugees and displaced persons as a neutral / non-political party. As a result, it can play an important role in ensuring the basic preparations required for return by both countries, in adopting a regional-international approach to such activities, in supporting local reconciliation efforts with legal and security guarantees, and in contributing to the return of refugees and displaced persons guided by the principles of reintegration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, development and local integration.

Lebanon rejects the concept of integrating displaced persons and refugees on its territory and encourages resettlement in a third country, even though there is a risk that such measure would make Syria lose its diversity and the Syria displaced, their identity. Nevertheless, Lebanon is concerned with the model of "repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction," which is adopted by the UNHCR as one of the durable solutions. This model has been implemented in Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, South Sudan and Afghanistan and should be initiated in Syria in coordination with host countries, while emphasizing that the UNHCR is committed to the principles of voluntary, dignified and safe return.

The UNHCR works in coordination with all United Nations organizations and programs and has

1 International principles and conditions that must be respected for the return: (1) Principle of non-refoulement: This principle prohibits the transfer of any person from one authority to another when there are substantial grounds for believing that some of the fundamental rights of that person are at risk of being violated, (2) Safety and dignity: legal and personal safety and security and access to basic services, (3) Ability to make an informed decision: Availability and access to the most up-to-date information related to the situation at the return zone and conditions of the return.

partnerships with central governments of the host countries, local bodies (municipalities), as well as national, regional and international civil society organizations and the private sector. In addition to the UNHCR, a tendency has emerged within the International Committee of the Red Cross regarding its main missions. This tendency was discussed in a working paper issued in January 2018 on the provision of the prerequisites for a safe and dignified return, as well as the identification of a number of legal and operational considerations for the establishment of safe areas since the designation of the “de-escalation areas”² during the Astana negotiations.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has expressed its concern regarding the lack of prerequisites for the establishment of safe zones³ in Syria till this time and showed its willingness to establish areas of protection by acting as a neutral intermediary between the conflicting parties, assisting in humanitarian relief operations, restoring contact between separated family members, searching for the missing, facilitating family visits and providing legal protection for detainees. The International Committee of the Red Cross has identified a range of legal and operational considerations for the establishment, control and management of safe zones within the context of the Syrian conflict. As stated in international humanitarian law, these areas must have the conditions and capacity to provide care and protection, not cause any harm or injury, or pose any threat to life and decent living, or affect the implementation of international humanitarian law and other relevant laws and standards – civilians must remain safe at all times, both inside and outside the safe areas. It should be noted, however, that these safe zones are neither a substitute for the optimal respect of international humanitarian law, nor an alternative to a comprehensive and sustainable political solution to the conflict in Syria.

In the previous paragraphs of this paper we outlined examples of the basic frameworks of reference and the institutions entrusted to them. But the question remains: how can these frameworks of reference and their institutions be respected when conflicting parties

do not abide by any constraint and work against the humanitarian and political reconciliation process in a systematically destructive way? How can we face the challenges and resume preparation for return in a rational and viable manner so the issue will not be forgotten? How can we avoid putting the displaced and the host communities in difficult and tragic situations which could lead to further complications?

² “de-escalation areas” include a cease-fire, the creation of no-fly zones, immediate supply of humanitarian aid and return of refugees.

³ There is concern among the displaced persons inside and outside Syria about the transformation of safe zones into conflict areas in the absence of a comprehensive solution that provides safe and dignified return and preserves the rights and assets of the displaced. It should be noted that the presidential decree of the Syrian regime No. 10/2018 on the determination of reconstruction and urban development areas and the proof of ownership is considered as a legislation of the principle of expropriation for the purpose of demographic / religious / ethnic change by some.

MODELS AND GLOBAL TRENDS OF RETURN AFTER FORCED DISPLACEMENT

The right of return has a solid foundation in international law. "Every individual has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."⁴

The sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons is viewed as an operation or a combination of operations that make the former refugees and displaced population reside again in their country of origin while securing adequate conditions: safety and security, housing, livelihood, employment opportunities, and access to services that reduce the risk of secondary involuntary displacement, or displacement to another country for asylum.

If sustainable return, in the presence of political reconciliation, is fundamental for the investment in the cessation of wars, social peacebuilding, economic development, it should be noted that, in addition to voluntary return, where the UNHCR plays a leading role in securing its components, several spontaneous return examples have emerged, such as in south Sudan and Iraq. Although they were not very successful, it is important to shed light on these examples. Similarly, in Lebanon, recent attempts to return to the towns of Assal al-Ward, Beit Jinn and Mazraat Beit Jinn in Syria have been noted.

In Southern Sudan, the early return of refugees and displaced persons took place spontaneously and rapidly following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, and individuals took it upon themselves to arrange their return according to their capabilities. They were later assisted by voluntary repatriation programs which improved safety and stability networks. As for Iraqi refugees, who were similarly forced out of Iraq as a result of tensions, terrorism, sectarian divisions and human rights violations, few of them returned voluntarily. The UNHCR and UN agencies' interventions have been limited in Iraq, with more than 60% of displaced people still afraid to return because of direct threats to their lives, 30% because of insecurity in the country, and 10% because of loss or total destruction of the property they owned.

In contrast to Southern Sudan and Iraq, where the

return of displaced persons and refugees is hindered by security risks, legal threats and socio-economic insecurity, Liberian refugees' return from Ghana was intensive because of reintegration in parallel to reconstruction of livelihood. Here, the impact of the economical-socio-cultural factor at the structural level becomes evident. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 10% of the refugee and displaced population returned spontaneously, without any guarantees or the adoption of safe zones approach there. In similar cases of displacement and asylum which took place in Sana'a in Yemen, Bogota in Colombia, Johannesburg in South Africa, Khartoum in Sudan and Peshawar in Pakistan, it has been shown that the majority of individuals who were displaced from rural communities did not return to those areas. Instead, driven by certain false expectations, they settled in marginalized urban environments (characterized by a lack of basic services, infrastructure, poor housing, and job opportunities). In light of this comparative data, it remains to be seen how the return of Syria displaced, especially those coming from the rural areas, will be.

A voluntary decision to return is usually taken after reviewing the information pertaining to the conditions and expectations of the host country and the country of origin. United Nations agencies should play a role in contributing to this return by neutrally assessing the conditions and possibilities of return. The incentives vary based on the success of international actors in supporting local and central authorities to set conditions that meet the priorities of refugees and displaced persons, as well as in restoring peace, security and sustainable development.

Based on studies on long-term forced displacement, three elements were identified as critical to the decision of voluntarily return of displaced persons: (i) access to livelihood opportunities in the country of origin; (ii) potential for the recovery of assets and economic opportunities; in the case of displaced persons from rural areas, this refers to the ability to recover their agricultural land or secure access to an agricultural land, as stated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Afghanistan⁵, and (iii) access to financial resources and social protection systems

⁴ Article 13 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

⁵ Access to land and property / reclaiming assets after return is crucial for the decision of return of displaced rural communities to rural areas; in a context similar to rural Syria (i.e. ethnic and / or tribal), which is essential not only for livelihood but for regaining identity and social status (for example the decisions to return to Afghan rural areas were made by the old and elderly).

upon return⁶ (which impacts the capacity of refugees and displaced persons to reintegrate and re-establish decent livelihoods).

In other cases, displaced families are divided between a host country and the country of origin (increased livelihoods and the pursuit of quality education played a major role in delaying the return in Sudan and Afghanistan). World Bank studies indicate that opportunities for integration in the host country improves refugees' abilities to make adjustments and decisions regarding their voluntary return (including, but not limited to, gradual return or geographic dispersion of family members to maximize livelihoods and access to services and other basic priorities).

In the case of prolonged displacement, the response must go beyond addressing humanitarian and protection concerns to ensure that the development needs arising from the presence of displaced persons are taken into consideration from the start. This requires addressing issues such as expanding service delivery, improving infrastructure, as well as supporting development plans and the local and national budgets of the host country.

Hence, the crisis should be treated as an opportunity to create a favorable environment for securing livelihood and contributing to the economy of the host country. Participation in the labor market leads to less reliance on humanitarian assistance (as is the case of Syria displaced or Palestinian refugees in Jordan). This will lead to building assets and skills, maintaining or improving the social capital necessary for sustainable return, and quick reintegration in the country of origin (while employment priority should be given to host communities with regulating the labor market through investment in modern smart sectors). In turn, this would reduce local unemployment and contribute to growth.

⁶ It should be noted that poverty limits the ability to return. However, in limited cases (spontaneous return of Iraqis displaced from Syria 2007-2010) poverty was the main driver of return. Social constraints also played a part, as the roles of women have been changed, by enhancing or restricting their freedom of movement and their ability to engage in social and economic activities. Displaced families headed by women may face particular difficulties in securing livelihoods, access to housing, land, property, education and other basic services.

LEBANON AND THE RETURN OF THE DISPLACED: DEMAGOGY, POPULISM, POLITICISM, AND IMPROVISATION

The Syria displaced place a huge burden on the Lebanese economy, especially at the infrastructure and labor market levels. Originally the discourse discusses the flabby infrastructure before this forced displacement, as well as the mismanagement of the labor market in the absence of public policies to boost the economic growth on one hand and the absence of public social policies on the other. This discourse on these economic burdens, however, does not eliminate social risks, which may lead to tensions or infiltrations that may mount to framing complex forms of extremism and terrorism.

The aforementioned burdens highlight the harsh reality of both the host and displaced communities, but should also deter accusations between parties of some not wanting to Syrians to return and demonstrate that these accusations are not well founded, even though such a Syrian presence might give parties a sectarian superiority. It is worth mentioning that Lebanon faced some turmoil in 2008, during which time it was proven that such claims about displaced communities were false assumptions; nevertheless, it made Palestinian refugees the target of exploitation or stirring.

In any case, it must be understood that the forced displacement from Syria, to escape both the State terror and the acts of terrorism by extremist groups, as well as allies joining different sides, is a complex issues with multifaceted implications on the humanitarian, political, sovereign, legal, security, cultural, socio-economic and environmental levels. Since 2011, the method adopted to handle these complex issues was based on four structural features which characterize the management of public affairs in Lebanon in all sectors without exception. These features are summarized by “demagoguery, populism, politicism and improvisation” and can be better understood by reviewing examples concerning Syrian displacement present in the Lebanese political

discourse, including but not limited to:

- 'The international community and the Arab world want to resettle the displaced Syrians in Lebanon. It is the conspiracy of the century.'
- 'Some Lebanese political parties are working towards executing the conspiracy of the century, in an attempt to influence the demographic and religious balance of powers, which will be invested in the structure of the political system in Lebanon.'
- 'Syria displaced will be used as a reserve weapon during any sectarian confrontation in Lebanon.'
- 'The price of the financial support of the international community and the Arab world is that Lebanon must keep Syria displaced on its territories.'
- '80% of areas in Syria are now safe, so why don't the Syria displaced return there? Their return should be imminent and there is no need to wait for a peaceful political solution.'
- 'The establishment of temporary border shelters, under the sovereignty of the Lebanese State and sponsored by the United Nations, will become permanent camps similar to the Palestinian refugee camps, and will be transformed to terrorist camps.'
- 'Direct negotiations with the Syrian government will lead to the return of the Syria displaced.'
- 'Our most notable achievement is not recognizing these individuals as refugees and referring to them as "displaced."'
- 'If the international community does not support Lebanon, or provides insufficient assistance, we threaten to effectively expel the Syria displaced. If they do not go back to Syria soon, we will deport them to the West to threaten the stability of those countries so that they may understand the extent of our suffering in Lebanon'.

Presenting such positions may receive criticism, especially since the positions express concerns without shedding light on the facts behind them. However, it must be understood that confronting these facts must be based on an overall policy initiative rather than dwelling on the past or opening side battles for populist polarization. How should we deal with the stalemate of the political solution in Syria and the consequent delays in the return of the displaced? How do we keep the case of the return of the displaced alive in theory and in practice in light of the religious-sectarian demographic segregation and engineering which began to take place de-facto and on legal grounds in Syria? What about the displaced persons' own choices regarding return?

All of the above mentioned stances can be found in the Lebanese media archive since 2011, in addition to those that came with the obstruction of the consensus on a unifying national public policy more than once, specifically since 2016. These stances only shed light on the social tensions, begging for funding, and incitation of intimidation in the absence of any organizational and operational steps for the return of Syria displaced, whether at the national or diplomatic level.

The return of these displaced people remains affected by the demagoguery and scare tactics of "warning against a conspiracy," the "populism claiming to protect the Lebanese entity," the politicism in search of an exit strategy to the predicament, and improvisation in the absence of a structured and strategic state approach.

The question remains: who is responsible for this? And how can we shift from this surreal setting towards taking serious steps that will pave the way for the return of the Syria displaced when safe conditions, legal guarantees and economic and social conditions are secured under the auspices of the United Nations?

LEBANON AND THE RETURN OF THE DISPLACED: PRELIMINARY MEASURES AND STATE DIPLOMACY

Lebanese people unanimously agree on the return of the displaced from and to Syria. The displaced Syrians also want to return to their homeland, as has been confirmed by several studies, given the difficulties they are facing at all levels in Lebanon. Most displaced Syrians live on less than \$2 a day and the United Nations agencies and programs lack the necessary funding to improve their situation. Donor countries are worn out due to the long duration of the crisis and the faltering political peace process and host communities are exhausted and confused, be it at the level of central governments or decentralized authorities (municipalities).

As such, we have to think carefully about answering the following problematic question: can we deal with a political-security tragedy by adopting an exclusively legal-economic-social approach? Given the fragility of the matter, the limited resources and in the absence of good governance in both host and displaced communities, are we not only paving the way for new tensions and a possible rise of extremism (especially since some, from both ends of the political spectrum, are taking advantage of this using populist and politicism perspectives)?

The approach of providing economic, social, educational, cultural, legal, security, environmental, and health solutions for the Syrian crisis in Lebanon, while downplaying the importance of preparing for their diplomatic return when safety and decent conditions are met, remains truncated and unacceptable. The preparation for the return should be based on two main guiding principles: the right of these people to return home with comprehensive guarantees (legal, social, etc.) and the obligation to protect the diversity of the Syrian social fabric through this return. As for resettlement in a third country, it deserves further research outside the scope of this paper.

The pursuit of “whining tactics” both locally and internationally, which are provocative, intimidating, and, at times, manipulative is not a characteristic of genuine Lebanese state diplomacy. Also, exclusively taking a “begging approach” to seeking funding and pledges oversimplifies the complexity of the issue of Syrian return. As such, an integrated international approach concerned with human rights and Lebanese sovereignty should be adopted. Hence, important

aspects need to be addressed on the national and diplomatic levels:

A. ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

- ▶ Reaching a consensus on a public policy approved by the Lebanese government regarding displacement. This policy should be founded on evidence-based data and should pave the way for a national strategy in which the government sets priorities, objectives, responsibilities, frameworks, timeframes, and shifts from a Lebanese response to the crisis to a Lebanese response and management of a political issue (with humanitarian/ developmental dimensions) within a national plan articulated around safeguarding the national security.
- ▶ Preparing and signing a memorandum of understanding between the Lebanese Government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to define the mutual duties and responsibilities of both parties.
- ▶ Offering increased support for host communities based on an integrated planning scheme that is aligned with the investment plan presented by the Lebanese Government at the Cedar Conference (April 2018) on the basis of sound governance and transparency.
- ▶ Adjusting the status of displaced persons who lost their identification papers and consolidating statistical data, i.e., the number of displaced persons and their records, between the Lebanese State and the UN agencies, as well as defining the regions they came from and the regions they can or should return to, while making sure the personal data and information are properly protected against any leaks, electronic piracy and negative exploitation.
- ▶ Examining the problematics related to the urban and rural displaced communities, and their impact on the development crisis, the vulnerability of displaced persons and host communities, and on their return, while anticipating the risks of secondary displacement to Lebanon.
- ▶ Requesting United Nations and relief agencies working in Lebanon to intensify coordination and

joint planning amongst them in order to reduce duplication of services and adopt comprehensive and integrated programs for the displaced and host communities (centrally and locally), as well as to preserve the socio-economical-cultural capital of the Syria displaced (which is directly linked to their return and livelihood opportunities in home country).

- ▶ Asking United Nations agencies dealing with displacement and asylum in Lebanon to coordinate their activities with United Nations agencies in Syria and to provide them with an assessment of the situation regarding locations, possibilities and guarantees for a safe return.
- ▶ Starting the setup of temporary border shelters under the sovereignty of the Lebanese state and the support of the United Nations in the provision of services to pave the way for a gradual return (the case of Assal Al-Ward and Beit Jinn could be used as an example).
- ▶ Gradual scheduling of return in coordination with the United Nations according to strict regulations and provision of legal and security guarantees, as well as securing the economic-social requirements for a viable return.
- ▶ Sound and balanced governance of available resources in the displaced and host communities to decrease tension and improve social stability (by minimizing the likelihood of violent extremism, for example).

B. ON THE DIPLOMATIC LEVEL

- ▶ Listing the return of the Syria displaced on the agenda of the International Support Group for Lebanon.
- ▶ Launching a regional coordination platform with Jordan and Turkey to explore the possibility of establishing safe border areas in preparation for the return of displaced persons from and to Syria.
- ▶ Lebanon's request to participate in the Geneva negotiations and to place the return of displaced persons as a priority on its agenda.
- ▶ Lebanon's request to participate in the Astana negotiations and put forward its vision related to return (in communication with Russia, which plays an influential role in Syria).
- ▶ Requesting that the Security Council put the case of displaced persons from and to Syria on its agenda since it is an issue of the right to self-determination, and ensures the security and protection for this return, given its importance to regional and international peace.
- ▶ Requesting that the League of Arab States designate a special coordinator for the Syria displaced crisis to follow up on their right to return with all regional and international peace partners.
- ▶ Providing international protection to returnees to Syria and inviting the international community to establish a joint body between the host countries, UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian civil society, dedicated to dealing with the return of the Syria displaced

UNTIL THE RETURN: CONCLUSIONS

Some may argue that political realism entails accepting the fact that displaced Syrians in Lebanon, given the failure of the political peace process in Syria, should limit their efforts to improve their situation and receive the support of the host communities via complementary relief and development interventions, away from diplomatic illusions about the possibility of their return. However, these individuals do not understand that the foundation for the protection of the displaced as well as the improvement of their situation lies in their safe and dignified return to their land and communities through a peace and reconciliation process and the safeguarding of their identity, thus, effectively shielding Lebanon from any repercussions to its national systems.

As such, until the conditions for a dignified and safe return of Syria displaced are established under the auspices of the United Nations, with the clear support of the Security Council and the League of Arab States, the following steps must be undertaken:

1. Continued humanitarian/relief support for the displaced and the host communities, and the continued demand that the international community honor its commitments towards Lebanon and the displaced community, especially at the relief and development levels, to evade any tensions and strengthen social stability.
2. Cease the use of demagogic, populist, politicism and improvised approaches and strive to empower effective and constructive public policies. The government should play a leading role and be supported by civil society and the international community.
3. Developing scenarios for gradual return and successful models for building reconciliation, in which Lebanon can serve as a platform and the United Nations can provide guarantees in coordination with relevant stakeholders. Religious authorities can also assist in this regard as long as they steer away from any political bias.
4. Establishing a Media Charter of Honour that addresses the return of the Syria displaced and their right to access accurate and reliable information, their right to self-determination and to preserve their cultural identity (rather than contributing to the scare tactics).
5. Setting aside all dubious and suspicious comparisons of Palestinian refugees and Syria displaced, as they does not correspond to reality in most cases.

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