



LAND AND CLIMATE CHANGE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS IN LEBANON

During the winter season, Lebanon's urban coastal settlements suffer severe damage that disrupts the lives of dozens of vulnerable families. One such settlement is the waterfront Palestinian refugee camp of Rashidieh in the southern Lebanese city of Tyre. Seawater flows into the camp, destroying or causing serious damage to the refugees' already worn-out homes.

In 2019, many camp residents were forced to leave their homes temporarily and take refuge with relatives or friends, who, like themselves, were enduring financial and economic hardship. The camp's civil committee has repeatedly demanded that United Nations Relief and Works

Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) ask the Lebanese Government to permit the building of a protective sea wall and breakwater, but their request is unlikely to get approval. The committee of Rashidieh camp says that the repair of collapsing homes in the camp has also been challenging due to political, rather than financial, reasons. Since September 1997, entering building material into the Palestinian camps is not possible without a prior approval from the Lebanese Army (Palestinian Refugees Portal, 2019). The problem has other dimensions as the camp's location is part of a classified natural reserve site. From an environmental point of view, the camp should not

be where it is. Its wastewater system discharges directly into the sea while blocking the coastal promenade. Relocating the camp is almost unthinkable since the camp is not illegal and due to the politically sensitive nature of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon.

The situation of Palestinians' informal camps (referred to by the United Nations as "Palestinian Gatherings") on public properties, including in the maritime public domain, is more complex. These settlements emerged out of necessity, given that the 12 official Palestinian camps of Lebanon have limited capacity. In 2015, the Lebanese government attempted to remove all illegal constructions on public property, including the informal camps of Palestinian refugees constructed in the maritime public domain. The Palestinians of the informal camp of Jal el Bahr camp in Tyre strongly opposed this decision. This camp emerged in 1948 before UNRWA was established. Initially housed in tents, its current 3,000 residents now live in more durable, albeit poor, structures that are officially connected to the city's electricity and water networks. Like other camps, house repairs are not permitted in Jal el Bahr. Consequently, its residents must battle lashing sea waves during winter.

The seemingly obvious solution would be relocation, an idea camp residents oppose vigorously. Residents say they will only leave the

camp to return to Palestine (Felastini-Nachrichten, Sozial, Kulturell, 2015). They argue that their temporary housing is legal and that they have not violated maritime public domain regulations. To be considered as an option, relocation, they say, must be to adequate housing at a nearby location to their present camp.

Palestinians' expulsion from their homeland and dispossession by the Israelis made them refugees and asylum seekers. Despite their protracted displacement, the Palestinians, and the Lebanese State, see them as "temporary" refugees.

The decision to demolish Jal el Bahr was not carried out in view of the politically sensitive nature of the matter and because doing so would violate the Palestinians' right to establish camps in Lebanon. Finding an adequate alternative location is also difficult. Meanwhile, camp residents continue to suffer in winter.

REFERENCES

- Felastini- Nachrichten, Sozial, Kulturell. (2015). [Dialogue about the Lebanese state's warning to dismantle the Jal al-Bahr camp.](#) [Video] (Arabic). Accessed on February 2022
- Palestinian Refugees Portal (2019). [Once again, "Lulu" demolishes parts of a house in Rashidieh, and 1,300 houses are awaiting restoration.](#)

This case study was extracted from the unpublished research “**Land, Natural Resources and Climate Change in the Arab Region**”. The research explores some of the critical challenges that fall at the intersection of climate change and land governance analyses. It aims at contributing to knowledge development and encouraging policy-oriented research that seeks to protect the land tenure rights of vulnerable groups against the effects of climate change. The case study in this report discusses the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. It aims to stimulate the discussion on the tenure security-climate change nexus in Arab countries and to encourage further research on the topic. The report, and this case study, were developed by The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) in collaboration with UN-Habitat and the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) under the BMZ funded Arab Region Programme on Good Land Governance in Support to Inclusive Development, Peace and Stability.

Authors: Mona Khechen (principal author) and Petra Samaha (contributor)

Reviewers and contributors: Myriam Ababsa, Rania Abi Habib, Salah Abukashawa, Max Ajl, Mariam Al Jaajaa, Salma AlSayyad, Laila Annouri, Clarissa Augustinus, Soumaya Ayadi Maasri, Habib Ayeb, El Habib Benmokhtar, Dawn Chatty, Ali Daoudi, Fathi Egal, Ahmad El Atrash, Said Fagouri, Fiona Flintan, Fernando Garcia, Mona Harb, Louisa Jansen, Heba Allah Khalil, Khalid Khawaldeh, Raji Maasri, Giuliano Martiniello, Annalisa Mauro, Marcos Montoiro, Martha Mundy, Roland Riachi, Sina Schlimmer, Ombretta Tempra, Rabie Wahba, Willi Zimmermann, Rami Zurayk.

Adaptation: Batoul Ibrahim

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