Systematic discrimination faces Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

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The following letter was sent by a reader of the World Socialist Web Site. *It has been edited for language only.*

Being a refugee in Lebanon since my birth, I have witnessed and lived through all kinds of prejudices practiced against my people living reluctantly in Lebanon. I would like to highlight the prejudice that Palestinian refugees suffer from in the domain of work and medical care.

Palestinians are not allowed to work in many jobs, and if they are allowed, such a step would be illegal with respect to the laws enacted in Lebanon. This means that we are not allowed to work in the public services and institutes run by the government like schools, hospitals and ports. Because of this we must resort to work in the private sector, notably in agriculture, where there is discrimination in the wages and salaries paid to us and our Lebanese counterparts.

Furthermore, such jobs don't offer any kind of medical insurance or health care for Palestinian refugees. Initially, the UNRWA agency offered a kind of medical health-care system for us, but for the last three decades there has been a systematic reduction of services offered by the agency to all the Palestinian refugees in all areas: food provision, special cases and health care. Hardly anyone can find the right pharmaceuticals for the diseases they suffer from. Sometimes, the same medication is prescribed for all cases; and paradoxically, medical checks take place using eyes only and from a distance.

A tragedy normally takes place when there is a Palestinian who needs surgery, or intensive care, or long-term treatment. Public hospitals in Lebanon don't admit Palestinians for treatment. The National Security Fund does not allow Palestinians to be registered in its lists to receive medical health in private hospitals. The latter are very expensive so that even the majority of Lebanese can not afford treatment. So imagine how can a refugee even dream of being treated in any of them?

For the same reasons, Palestinian workers are not allowed to receive a pension, or severance pay at the end of their work in any institution or firm either in case of suspension or termination of employment. Moreover, they are not allowed to join any syndicate or union, or guild of any type. Besides which they are not enjoying any kind of increase on salaries or improved working conditions even if this is legislated by the government. This leaves them exposed to all kinds of social threats due to rises in prices, notably in the last months regarding gas, food, drugs and all other essential requirements.

Elaborating on a different topic, a very discriminating and unfair law has been enforced for more than a decade which deprives the Palestinians of the right to own any kind of land or property: including a house, an apartment or a field. This law has left the Palestinians prey to landlords because the price of renting houses in Lebanon is soaring, aggravating the economic agony Palestinians are already suffering. Even when a Palestinian dies, his sons or daughters cannot inherit his house; nor could anyone bequeath any of the pre-registered properties to their descendants. This law possibly constitutes the high point of the systematic discrimination against the Palestinians in Lebanon, though I don't know if I could truly rank in order of severity the agonies that we are suffering from. In any case, the list is long and all of the examples of discrimination touch directly on the life and dignity of every Palestinian living in Lebanon.

Many thanks for your time.

RM

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