

Qortbawi: Justice Ministry Placing Final Touches to Body Aimed at Uncovering Fate of Missing Lebanese

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Justice Minister Shakib Qortbawi revealed that the ministry is placing the finishing touches to the draft project to form the independent national body to uncover the fate of Lebanese missing persons, reported the daily An Nahar on Wednesday.

He told the daily that the project should be handed over to cabinet before the end of the week after taking into consideration the remarks of the state's Shura council.

He also revealed that the Lebanese judicial council aimed at following up on Lebanese missing persons in Syrian jails will meet with recently released Yaacoub Chamoun to hear his tale over his imprisonment in Syria.

The council is seeking to determine whether any other Lebanese prisoners were being detained in Syria, said Qortbawi.

Chamoun was recently released from prison in Syria where he was detained for 27 years.

Chamoun, 49, was seized during the Lebanese Civil War in the eastern city of Zahle, and later moved to several Syrian prisons during his incarceration, including the notorious Mezze, Saydnaya and Tadmor prisons.

He was also placed in solitary confinement for four years.

He was later transferred to a civilian prison and was able to secure his release by paying millions in cash through a powerful Syrian lawyer.

The release of Chamoun in July proved that Syrian authorities were still detaining Lebanese political prisoners despite claims that they had set all of them free, said various media reports.

The Assad regime has long denied holding any prisoners of conscience, but on four different occasions between 1976 and 2000 has released Lebanese who had been held in Syrian prisons.

The man confirmed to LBCI TV network that there are Lebanese political prisoners in Syrian jails and said he had encountered five of them but he refused to name them for fears that the revelation would do them harm.

The civil war has claimed the lives of at least 150,000 people. For over 21 years, more than 600 families -- Lebanese and Palestinian -- have demanded authorities reveal the fate of the thousands believed to have disappeared at the hands of Syrian troops who entered Lebanon shortly after the outbreak of the war.