Missing Lebanese in Syria: Families cling to hope as prisoners are freed

Names of Lebanese citizens believed to be in Syrian prisons have flooded Lebanese social media as many hope they may finally be reunited with their loved ones.

3 min read

Sara Matar – Beirut | 09 December, 2024

Celebrations in Beirut following the fall of the Syrian regime, on December 8, 2024 [Nael Chahine/Middle East Images/AFP via Getty]

Social media platforms in Lebanon have been flooded with lists of names and photographs of Lebanese detainees who have been freed from Syrian prisons following the fall of the Assad regime.

Users have shared audio clips and lists of names belonging to Lebanese individuals missing since the Lebanese Civil War and Syria's occupation in Lebanon.

More than 100,000 Syrians are thought to have gone missing during the country's 13-year insurgency, many of them held in prison, according to human rights groups.

Around 700 Lebanese people were also believed by relatives to be held in Syria, taken during the three decades Syrian troops were in their country, despite Syrian officials having repeatedly said there were no more Lebanese prisoners in Syrian jails.

Many had lost hope of ever seeing their loved ones again, until Syrian rebels this week took city after city in a lighting advance, freeing thousands of prisoners from the notorious Syrian prison system and toppling the regime.

Thousands of families now hope that they may be reunited with loved ones held in Syrian prisons during the Assad family's half century in power.

An unofficial list of the missing has emerged containing mostly names from Deir al-Ahmar, a town in the Baalbek-Hermel Governorate of Lebanon.

At the same time, several families of missing Lebanese individuals have shared photos, names, and phone numbers belonging to their relatives, pleading for any information from inside Syria on their whereabouts.

Jean Fakhry, head of the Deir al-Ahmar Region Municipalities Union, confirmed to *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, *The New Arab's* Arabic-language sister edition, that "all the lists circulated are inaccurate".

He added that only one name - Claude Leshaa Al-Khoury - had been verified, with images and audio recordings allegedly showing his release from a Syrian prison shared.

"We are currently waiting for a contact in Syria, who has been tasked with visiting the hospital he's allegedly been taken to, to meet him and record a video," Fakhry added.

He said the Khoury family is following up the matter and the union was also monitoring the situation so the news could be officially announced as soon as it was confirmed.

Fakhry expressed his regret that some social media platforms and media outlets had confirmed Khoury's release before it had received official confirmation.

"Regarding Suhail Al-Hamwi, whose name has also been circulated as a freed Lebanese detainee, we also have no information on him to date".

Deir al-Ahmar Region Municipalities Union recently issued a statement on its official website requesting that no names be released until they had been verified through official sources.

Fakhry also pointed out that some names shared belonged to individuals who would be over 110 or 115 years old if they were still alive.

He said the focus was on confirming missing individuals within "certain and reasonable age categories, who may still be alive".

"Regarding the names being circulated," he added, "while they belong to missing Lebanese individuals, why they are being listed as freed detainees is unclear.

"We stress that this is a highly sensitive issue that requires thorough verification and confirmation – only then will we reveal and officially announce the names, because the feelings of human beings must not be approached in a random or reckless manner."

This is an [edited translation](#) from our Arabic edition.