



In response to comments made by the Syrian Ambassador about Lebanese detainees

UMAM Documentation and Research: He who lies once, lies again...

The Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon, Mr. Ali Abdul Karim Ali, was interviewed on June 17, 2014 by a Lebanese radio station. Responding to a question about Lebanese citizens who disappeared or were detained in Syrian prisons and detention centers, the Ambassador stated:

[T]his issue has become a symphony you [Lebanese] like to conduct, but there are no detainees or abductees or missing Lebanese in our prisons [...] your children are not in Syria. I will not accuse anyone but they are not in Syria [...] some of these missing people were hidden in Lebanon. There are forces in Lebanon that know this very well.

In truth, two sound reasons compel us to thank his Excellency the Ambassador for having made that statement. First, by asserting that Syrian prisons and detention centers are not holding any Lebanese citizens, the Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon has added yet another lie to the long series of prevarications the Syrian regime has dispensed during the last several decades. More specifically, the untruthful statement made by Ambassador Ali simply confirms that *he who lies once, lies again...*

The enormity of the Ambassador's lie, which was broadcast to the Lebanese public, is so shocking that responding to it properly is no easy job. In debunking it, however, we are compelled to remind this "statesman" that each time the Assad regime released Lebanese (and non-Lebanese whose tracks had been lost in Lebanon)—in 1998 and again in 2000—the action was preceded by a similarly strong statement that denied the existence of Lebanese political detainees in Syrian prisons. Those statements were followed later by confirmation that the individuals set free were indeed the very last of the Lebanese being held behind bars. It may also be helpful to remind the distinguished Ambassador that the regime he represents agreed previously to include the topic of Lebanese missing in Syria on the agenda that would guide Syrian-Lebanese talks held with the government led at the time by Saad Hariri. Likewise, it might be worthwhile to remind the Ambassador of the many statements made about this issue by General Michel Aoun (a Lebanese presidential candidate who receives unabashed support from the regime *he* represents), specifically the thoughts he disclosed on December 19, 2000 during an interview by *An-Nahar*. It would probably be very useful to remind his Excellency that Yakoub Shamoun, a man who vanished in 1985 into the abyss of

Syrian prisons, suddenly resurfaced in August 2012. Finally—and although we could certainly offer other reminders—we believe it is important to remind Ambassador Ali that the Lebanese Parliament is preparing to vote on a new law that would provide the same type of financial reparations given to those released from Israeli jails to those set free from Syrian prisons....

The second reason we feel obligated to thank the Syrian Ambassador relates to his reminder about the complicity of a number of Lebanese individuals relative to the disappearance of Lebanese and non-Lebanese citizens alike. In fact, instances of collusion between some Lebanese individuals and the Syrian regime are little more than open secrets. That complicity involves Lebanese political organizations as well as civilian and non-civilian institutions. Importantly, while that collaboration certainly brings no honor to those involved, it reminds us of the absolute necessity to review the "era of Syrian tutelage" from an accountability perspective. Moreover, it reminds Lebanese and Syrian citizens of the painful tasks that lie ahead, such as reviewing the recent nature of the relationship between the two countries and the two peoples. Conducting such an assessment is fundamental to establishing a revised relationship based on mutual respect and understanding.