

Convert placed under protection of Hezbollah

By Rakan al-Fakih

BAALBEK, Lebanon: A woman who left her parents' house over mistreatment after she converted to Christianity was placed in the custody of Hezbollah's Shura Council member Sheikh Mohammad Yazbek Monday.

Banin Qataya, 24, who left her parent's house in the Baalbek village of Nabha around 10 days ago, was placed under Yazbek's protection pending her return to her family, who have pledged to respect her choices and not to harm her. Yazbek and Baalbek-Deir al-Ahmar Bishop Semaan Atallah have led a joint effort to ensure Qataya's safe return home.

Last week, Maronite Priest Walid Gharious, who is believed to have baptized Qataya, was briefly kidnapped on the road to Baalbek before being handed over to Yazbek. A source told The Daily Star that Gharious knew the whereabouts of Qataya.

Qataya was handed over to Yazbek Monday during a meeting at Sayyed Abbass Mussawi Hall in Baalbek. Among the conditions of her return was that she is not pressured to convert to Islam again.

Attending was the girl's father, Sheikh Ahmad Qataya, and families from her village along with Yazbek, Baalbek-Hermel MP Hussein Moussawi and security officials.

Speaking during the meeting, Atallah said that state authorities took part in efforts to return the girl home.

"When they telephoned me and told me that Miss Banin left her family, I telephoned Sheikh [Yazbek] and the state [authorities] ... we rely on the state to provide security for people and we have cooperated with the state to reach this happy end," he said

Atallah maintained that Qataya was not kidnapped. "The girl came and stressed that she was not kidnapped, contrary to some media reports," he said. "She stressed that she left her house by her own will."