

Activists say arrested anti-Hezbollah cleric is “prisoner of conscience”

Shane Farrell

Sheikh Hassan Mcheymech, an outspoken anti-Hezbollah cleric who was arrested in Syria on suspicion of spying for Israel, was transferred to Lebanese authorities on October 11 and was charged with having collaborated with Israel on October 19, according to a statement issued Friday.

The Friends of Sheikh Hassan Mcheymesh issued a statement the Sheikh is a prisoner of conscience, adding that it would commit to following up on the Sheikh’s case until the truth is made clear.

Mcheymesh’s son, Reda, who was interviewed by NOW Lebanon in early September, said that his father was arrested because of his opposition to Hezbollah, especially through his monthly magazine, Difaf.

He also said the arrest was a warning to the Convention of Independent Shia Clerics, as Hezbollah views the organization as a threat to its authority and politics, especially in the party’s strongholds in southern Lebanon.

Mcheymesh was arrested in Syria on July 7, 2010, en route to Mecca. A year later, on August 21, the Damascus tribunal investigating the case declared that it did not fall within the jurisdiction of the Syrian Judiciary System and also called into question the evidence put before it.

According to Lokman Slim, an activist and member of the group campaigning for Mcheymech’s release, “ISF officials with whom we were in touch informed us that the file is rather thin.”

The grounds for arrest, according to Slim, are based on three phone calls, an encounter in Germany with individuals Mcheymech suspected as being from either German intelligence or Mossad, and his contact with an Austrian who converted to Shiism.

Activists say the case has similarities with the arrest of cleric Mohammad Ali Hussein.

According to Slim, “the common thread between the men is that both belonged at one time to Hezbollah. What can be said with notable certainty is that the arrest of both sheiks, despite their markedly different profiles, sends the clear message that if you are a cleric—especially if you’re a cleric—it’s forbidden to oppose Hezbollah.”

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