



The In Defense of Christians Religious Advisory Board Stands in Solidarity with Maronite Patriarch Rai and Archbishop Mousa El-Hajj

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: July 29, 2022

Tel: 401-744-4682

Email: richard@indefenseofchristians.org

Washington, DC — We, the Religious Advisory Board of In Defense of Christians (IDC), stand in solidarity with Maronite Patriarch Rai and Archbishop Mousa El-Hajj in light of the Archbishop's unjust detention by Lebanese authorities.

On July 19, Lebanese General Security arrested and detained Maronite Catholic Archbishop Mousa El-Hajj at the Naqoura border crossing, upon his return from pastoral duties in Israel. He was subjected to a 12-hour interrogation. His passport, documents, and all medical and financial aid intended for the needy in Lebanon were confiscated.

Lebanese citizens are banned from travelling to Israel, however, special exemptions are given to Christian clergy whose duties necessitate such travel. Archbishop El-Hajj is the Maronite Archbishop for Haifa and the Holy Land, and Patriarchal Vicar to Jerusalem, Palestine and Jordan. He travels between Lebanon and Israel regularly in the course of his duties. His recent arrest and detention by Lebanese authorities occurred in flagrant contempt of his pastoral duty, and are indicative of a malign political motive.

The detention of Archbishop El-Hajj is an attempt to threaten Maronite Patriarch Rai who has steadfastly called for transparency and accountability in government, and for a sovereign and independent Lebanon. The weaponization of the state security apparatus, and other state institutions, is part of a broader campaign to intimidate Lebanon.

We applaud Maronite Patriarch Rai, and the Maronite Synod, for their firm and resolute condemnation of the Archbishop's detention and their firm stance in opposition to coercion over the Lebanese state. We call on the Lebanese Minister of Justice to hold accountable the responsible authorities.

We further call on the Biden Administration, in the interest of regional stability and human rights, to strongly censure, discontinue state aid to, and impose sanctions against, the Lebanese officials responsible for this and other acts against church leadership and lay Christians in Lebanon.

Respectfully,

Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III

Assyrian Church of the East

Bishop Gregory Mansour

Maronite Catholic Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn

Bishop Elias Zaidan

Maronite Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles

Bishop Francis Kalabat

Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of Saint Thomas the Apostle of Detroit

Bishop Nicholas Samra

Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Newton

Rev. Dr. Mae Elisa Cannon

Churches for Middle East Peace

###