

Northern Camps: Suspended Rights and Ongoing Suffering

Field Report — June 2025



The suffering of **Palestinian refugees** in Lebanon continues to escalate amid the economic and living collapse worsened by the repercussions of the recent war, alongside international pressures on **UNRWA** through funding cuts or freezes, which have negatively impacted the level of basic services provided in various camps.

In the absence of civil, social, and economic rights, and amid high rates of poverty and unemployment, refugees live in overcrowded camps with

dilapidated homes threatened by collapse, suffering from fragile infrastructure and scarcity of job opportunities and healthcare.

In this context, the **Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness)** conducted a field visit to the Baddawi and Nahr al-Bared camps in northern Lebanon, where it met with several active parties and popular committees to monitor the main challenges facing the refugees and ways to mitigate the repercussions of this difficult reality.

First: Identification Card:

The Baddawi and Nahr al-Bared camps are located in northern Lebanon, hosting approximately 56,000 Palestinian refugees — about 18,000 in Baddawi and nearly 38,000 in Nahr al-Bared. Baddawi camp was established in 1955 on an area less than one square kilometer and is adjacent to the city of Tripoli, while Nahr al-Bared was founded in 1949 and was nearly completely destroyed during the 2007 events, leading to the displacement of its entire population. Although more than 15 years have passed since those events, hundreds of families remain outside their homes awaiting reconstruction completion. Both camps suffer from severe overcrowding and dilapidated infrastructure, amid the absence of economic prospects and the decline of UNRWA services.

Second: Baddawi Camp — Fragile Services and Stability Challenges

During its northern visit, Witness visited Baddawi camp, one of the largest

refugee camps in Lebanon by population density, located within the geographic jurisdiction of Baddawi municipality. The Witness delegation met with the mayor, Mr. Hassan Al-Ghamrawi, who emphasized the strong relationship between the camp residents and the Lebanese neighbors, affirming that the municipality is doing all it can to meet life needs, especially regarding electricity and infrastructure. However, he noted persistent challenges, including encroachments on roads and electricity networks, and the lack of commitment to urban planning that preserves public spaces and safe pedestrian pathways. He also spoke of an official Lebanese approach, coordinated with Palestinian factions, to secure the camp entrances and prevent the infiltration of wanted persons, stressing that recent security measures aim to maintain stability rather than impose restrictions.

In meetings with the camp's popular committee, the Witness delegation documented a range of chronic challenges exacerbating social fragility. Local actors pointed to widespread unemployment, even among university graduates, amid the absence of effective support policies from UNRWA or the Lebanese state. They also expressed deep concern over the severe deterioration in the health sector, where most residents can no longer afford hospital care costs in private facilities, amid constant changes in contracts between UNRWA and these hospitals, favoring commercial interests over patients' needs.

The committee criticized the suspension of cash assistance for severely vulnerable groups — especially the elderly, children, and people with disabilities — replacing it with in-kind aid described as “insulting in value and quality.” They also condemned the decision to stop the French language education program in UNRWA schools inside the camp, depriving hundreds of students of multilingual opportunities. They highlighted the suspension of the home renovation program despite hundreds of dilapidated buildings threatening public safety.

Regarding employment, the committee rejected policies replacing permanent jobs with “work-for-pay” systems, considering that approach unsustainable and deepening labor market fragility within the camp. They also criticized the dismissal of some teachers under the pretext of “breaching neutrality,” even though those affected were known for their discipline and professionalism, raising fears that neutrality is being used as a political weapon.

Finally, participants expressed concern over UNRWA’s plans to merge classrooms and increase student numbers per room, which threatens the education process and burdens teachers. If implemented, this policy would represent an additional step toward dismantling the camp’s education system under the pretext of the financial crisis.

Among the observations that emerged during the meetings was the absence of effective and regular communication channels between UNRWA and the popular committees, creating a real trust gap between residents and the agency. The need for greater transparency in budget and program management was also raised, especially regarding medical and relief supplies, where a clear disparity was noted between what is announced and what is actually available in clinics.

Safad Hospital – A Vital Health Pillar in a Deteriorating Environment

As part of its field tour, a delegation from the Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness) visited Safad Hospital, affiliated with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, and met with its director, Dr. Ali Wahbeh. This hospital, located in Baddawi Camp, is the primary health center for Palestinian refugees in northern Lebanon. It also serves Syrian and Lebanese patients from surrounding areas, making it a humanitarian refuge in an environment suffering from severe fragility in infrastructure and public services.

The hospital has 38 inpatient beds and 10 dialysis beds, where over 40 chronic cases are monitored. It operates under the coverage of the Cooperation Foundation and is jointly managed with the Red Crescent. Despite its pivotal role, the hospital faces enormous pressures due to

funding shortages and lack of adequate institutional support, hindering its ambitions to expand departments or develop specialized services.

The hospital director highlighted the suffering of medical and administrative staff who work under very difficult conditions, with low salaries and the absence of a clear social protection system. Staff have repeatedly demanded the establishment of a retirement system and comprehensive health insurance—partially achieved recently in terms of insurance, while the lack of a pension system still threatens staff stability and the continuity of their efficient work.

Despite escalating union protests and demands within the hospital over recent months, all departments have continued to provide medical services uninterrupted, reflecting a high commitment from the staff to their humanitarian mission despite lacking minimum protection and rights.

This institution, which bears an increasing burden on behalf of the state and UN agencies, deserves urgent support from relevant Palestinian bodies, especially the Palestinian Authority and the Red Crescent administration, in addition to international donors. The hospital's continued operation represents the last line of defense for the health rights of Palestinian refugees amid UNRWA's gradual withdrawal from its core duties.

Recommendations regarding Safad Hospital:

1. The Palestinian Authority and the Red Crescent administration must adopt a structural plan to support Safad Hospital, including improving staff salaries and implementing retirement and comprehensive health insurance systems.
2. Donor agencies are called upon to allocate emergency and sustainable funding for the hospital, especially given the diverse nationalities benefiting from its services.
3. The hospital should be considered a strategic health facility in northern Lebanon, requiring job protection and financial stability to ensure its continuity.
4. Strengthen partnerships with international NGOs to secure equipment, medicines, and future expansion.

Third: Nahr al-Bared Camp: Delayed Reconstruction and Suspended Rights

Continuing its ongoing field monitoring of Palestinian refugees' conditions in Lebanon, the Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness) conducted a field visit to Nahr al-Bared Camp in northern Lebanon, where the delegation met with the Popular Committee, local activists, and civil society organizations. The visit aimed to document the daily challenges

faced by camp residents more than eighteen years after its complete destruction in 2007.

These meetings enabled the team to gather accurate and direct data on housing, services, education, infrastructure, and the cumulative impact of economic crises on the refugees' reality.

Continued Displacement and Declining Housing Conditions

The meetings revealed that about 1,200 families still remain outside their homes today, living in temporary or rented accommodations either in Baddawi Camp or around Nahr al-Bared. Members of the Popular Committee confirmed that Property No. 39 and the Bahloul building have been ready for months but have not been handed over to their owners due to administrative complexities related to obtaining official approval from the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee.

According to the team's observations, many families suffer from limited access to adequate housing, amid the absence of any increase in rent subsidies despite the sharp rise in rental prices—described by the committee as a clear violation of refugees' right to decent housing.

Deteriorating Services and Dilapidated Infrastructure

Popular Committee members pointed out frequent failures in the main electrical cable connecting to the Deir Ammar station, which cannot be

repaired due to its underground location, causing constant power outages across large parts of the camp.

The team noted that the electricity crisis exacerbates the water crisis, leading to reduced water availability and increased salinity in groundwater.

Complaints were repeatedly raised in meetings with civil society about declining sanitation services due to staff shortages, halted permanent recruitment, and limited appointments within the "work for money" program.

Dignity for the Deceased: A Silent Crisis Amid Lack of Planning

Among the sensitive issues raised during the tour was concern over the current cemetery in the camp nearing capacity, with no alternative property available for burials. This issue was considered a serious indicator of the absence of any long-term vision guaranteeing minimum human dignity for camp residents even after death.

Obstacles to Completing the Reconstruction Project:

- Failure of several donor countries to fulfill previous financial commitments to UNRWA.

- The worsening Lebanese crisis, especially currency collapse and recurring fuel shortages affecting transportation and equipment operation.
- Frequent closures of gravel factories and rising prices of construction materials, especially steel, increasing costs and disrupting supply schedules.



- Erratic approaches by some Lebanese official bodies to the camp reconstruction file, reflecting the absence of decisive political will.
- Lastly, archaeological explorations within the camp, requiring lengthy procedures causing further delays.

These factors show that the reconstruction project, despite some apparent progress, remains subject to political and financial variables beyond the camp residents' control, leaving hundreds of families in perpetual waiting and increasing the psychological, social, and economic pressures they have endured since 2007.

Report Recommendations

Based on its field observations during visits to Baddawi and Nahr al-Bared camps and meetings with local actors, the Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness) offers these recommendations to help address the major living and rights challenges facing Palestinian refugees in northern Lebanon:

1. Immediate financial support for **UNRWA** to resume relief, health, education, and home repair programs in northern camps.
2. Complete the Nahr al-Bared reconstruction project within a binding timeline and remove administrative and financial obstacles.
3. Improve working conditions at Safad Hospital by adopting a pension system and comprehensive health insurance for staff.
4. Ensure fair rental subsidies for displaced families and guarantee their right to decent housing.
5. Stop punitive policies against Palestinian teachers and employees within UNRWA, respecting their right to freedom of expression.
6. Ensure transparency in managing medical and relief resources in northern camps and hold negligent parties accountable.
7. Find alternative land for the Nahr al-Bared cemetery to guarantee the dignity and safety of burials.

8. Enhance coordination between UNRWA and popular committees to ensure community participation in setting intervention priorities.