



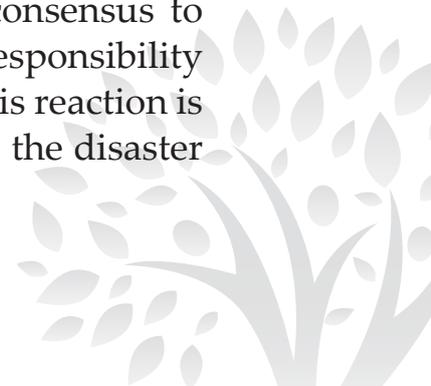
Bhanneen's "Refugee Camp" Destruction An Extra Spark in a Slow-igniting Fire?

A country still hesitating to conduct a serious investigation into the huge chemical explosion that rocked its capital a few months ago, and which caused an enormous death toll in addition to material damages, under the pretext that such an investigation would bother its fragile civil peace is not a country that can be expected to find the truth let alone enforce accountability for the flaming destruction of a camp housing a hundred Syrian families leading to the displacement of its dwellers...



As cynical as it may seem, this statement is not meant to condemn what happened on the evening of December 26, 2020, to decry the supremacist attitude of the authors of the crime, to praise the generosity of some Lebanese who rushed to offer shelter to the displaced families, or to call upon the Lebanese judiciary to assume its responsibilities...

In the direct aftermath of the episode, and in view of the magnitude of what happened, there was a kind of spontaneous consensus to depict what happened as a random act of violence, the responsibility of which does not go beyond those who committed it. This reaction is understandable as part of a response to quickly mitigate the disaster



but it would be adding insult to injury to take seriously the efficiency of this anesthetizing rhetoric. Believing that an improvised concoction of good sentiments, security, and first aid measures is the remedy to what happened in Bhanneen obviously falls short of capturing what's really at stake. This episode of violence is nothing but an additional reminder of the inflammability, no pun intended, of the refugeeism situation in Lebanon—especially against the backdrop of the generalized rotting the country is going through.

Although the full details of the Bhanneen episode remain vague and unclear, this episode calls, from various perspectives, for thorough consideration: In terms of history, the camp was originally an agglomeration of Syrian workers before being turned into a “refugee camp” when those workers brought their families from Syria to ensure their safety. This is a reminder of the longstanding ambiguity of the status of the Syrian manpower in Lebanon and its de facto hybridization under the circumstances which yielded their family reunification. And as for the episode itself, it's interesting to note that some first-hand narratives of these events suggest that what happened was far from being a violent mood swing of some uncontrolled rogue individuals but rather a planned operation aimed at freeing up the land where the camp existed.⁽¹⁾ It is also interesting to note the rush of some Lebanese media to state without proof that shooting occurred from both sides.

While it's not the pretense of the *Lebanese Initiative Against Discrimination and Racism* to offer through this statement a background and full analysis of what happened, we believe that the Bhanneen episode should not only sound the alarms but should also make clear that more tolerance vis-à-vis Lebanon's official stance regarding its Syrian refugees—a stance grounded on the principle of denying them the status of refugees and encaging them in the limbo status of “displaced”—means more intolerance vis-a-vis this community. Needless to say where such intolerance may lead and needless to conclude that as things go the destruction of Bhanneen's “refugee camp” is more of a spark in a slow-igniting fire than an all out blaze!

⁽¹⁾ See Mohammad Dheiby's firsthand account on his Facebook page: www.facebook.com/mdheiby

