

Sudden pressure forces Lebanon to halt passport issuance

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 02 May, 2022



Lebanese authorities have said that they cannot keep up with demand for new passports and will indefinitely stop issuing them, as the country's worsening economic crisis continues to push people to leave the country.

Lebanon's General Security Organisation (GSO) announced on Thursday that the number of passports it had available to issue had dwindled, even as requests for new passports had increased tenfold over the past two years.

The body said that appointments for the issuance or renewal of passports would therefore be suspended.

It also added that the Lebanese government had been asked to pay a company contracted to produce more passports, but that it had not done so.

The head of the GSO, Major-General Abbas Ibrahim, said in December that Lebanon has been struggling to cope with up to 8000 daily requests for new passports.

Aline Fleihan, an architect and activist, waited overnight at the GSO headquarters last September just to obtain an appointment for a passport renewal.

The following day Fleihan said that she was forced to wait for hours in a queue in the sweltering heat with hundreds of others, only for employees to tell her to come back again because the office had reached its daily applications limit.

“I decided to relocate for the first time in my life, because the conditions of living are no longer bearable,” Fleihan told Al Jazeera. “It’s normal that people are willing to leave the country. How can we be able to sustain ourselves or live when there is a lack of basic human needs and rights?”

In less than three years, the Lebanese pound has lost 90 percent of its value, and three-quarters of the population has been plunged into poverty.

Many Lebanese blame the country’s ruling sectarian political parties, banks, and private sector cronies for decades of systematic corruption, financial mismanagement, and poor economic planning.

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