



# Cabinet Approves Regulations at Petroleum Authority, to Tackle Refugees File on Jan. 3

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Cabinet approved on Thursday the regulations at the petroleum authority, while introducing amendments to the salaries of its employees.

Social Affairs Minister Wael Abou Faour said at the end of the last session of 2012 that the salaries will be lowered from L.L.36 million to L.L.25 million.

The government had approved on November 27 the six members of the authority in an effort to speed up the exploitation of Lebanon's offshore oil wealth.

Abou Faour also revealed that the cabinet will convene on January 3 in order to tackle the file of Syrian and Palestinian refugees flowing into Lebanon from neighboring Syria.

MTV reported that the minister had complained to Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour about the letter sent by Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon Ali Abdul Karim Ali to the Foreign Ministry accusing the Social Affairs Ministry and Higher Relief Council of providing aid to the “armed takfiri groups” in Syria.

Abou Faour had hoped during a press conference on Wednesday that Mansour reject the letter, “especially since its allegations are baseless.”

“The large number of refugees in Lebanon fled the criminal Syrian regime and not the terrorism of so-called takfiri groups,” he added.

“It is unacceptable for any ambassador to accuse or criticize any Lebanese ministry or administration,” he declared.

Ali had said in the letter sent to the Foreign Ministry on December 5 that Syrian refugees in Lebanon have been complaining that some “extremists” are exploiting the needs of these refugees to turn them against the regime of President Bashar Assad.

Earlier on Thursday, An Nahar daily reported that Energy Minister Jebran Bassil's proposal concerning the salaries of the appointed six-member petroleum authority would be confronted by several ministers.

"The salaries proposed for the petroleum authority members are normal in comparison with workers in the international petroleum sector," Bassil told reporters before entering the session.

He had previously suggested that the monthly salary of each member of the authority be fixed to nearly \$24,000 to motivate them to remain in their positions and not be drawn to offers by private international companies.

The authority members and their families will also benefit from full healthcare.

The formation of the Petroleum Authority in November was the first major step in future oil exploration since parliament passed a law in 2011 setting the country's maritime boundary and Exclusive Economic Zone.

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