

Lebanon secures release of American citizen from Syria

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Sam Goodwin (Source: Facebook)

Beirut: Syrian authorities have released a US citizen and he has been handed back to his family, thanks to the mediation of Lebanon, a Lebanese security official said on Friday.

The security official did not give the name of the released American, but he was later identified as Sam Goodwin, 30, from St Louis, Missouri.

“Sam is healthy and with his family,” his parents Thomas and Ann Goodwin said in a statement. “We are forever indebted to Lebanese General Abbas Ibrahim and to all others who helped secure the release of our son.”

The statement gave no other details, saying, “Right now, we appreciate our privacy as we reconnect with Sam.”

A spokeswoman for the family said Goodwin had travelled to Syria “as part of a personal interest to travel and experience every country of the world” and was last heard from on May 25.

The Lebanese security official said the country’s security chief Abbas Ibrahim had conducted the mediation. While not identifying Goodwin as the person released, the official said it was not Austin Tice, a journalist who disappeared in Syria in 2012.

The US State Department said it was aware of reports a US citizen had been released but could not comment due to privacy considerations.

Several US citizens have been held in Syria since the war began there in 2011, including people held by jihadist groups such as Islamic State.

The United States has declined to say who it believes is holding Tice, but has said it believes he is alive and has sought the help of the Syrian government’s close ally Russia to free him.

Last year the family of another American, Majd Kamalmaz, told the New York Times he had disappeared at a government checkpoint in Damascus in 2017.

Last month Ibrahim flew to Iran to complete the release and repatriation of Nizar Zakka, a Lebanese citizen with permanent residency in the United States who was detained there in 2015. (Reporting by Laila Bassam in Beirut and Lesley Wroughton in Washington; writing by Angus McDowall; editing by Samia Nakhoul, Frances Kerry and Chris Reese)

- Reuters