

961

It's Time The Lebanese Government Passes The Law For Missing People During Civil War



By **961 Staff** April 14, 2017

On the 42nd year anniversary of the start of the Lebanese civil war, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is calling on the Lebanese government to pass a law about the missing people during the civil war. The law would help clarify what happened to those who went missing during the 15-year civil war (1975-1990) in Lebanon. They are also urging the government to approve a project to collect biological reference samples from the missing person's families. The head of the ICRC delegation in Lebanon, Fabrizio Carboni, told The Daily Star: "The families of missing persons have been waiting for years, anxious to receive news about their loved ones. Unfortunately, we are running out of time: mothers and fathers are dying heartbroken without knowing what happened to their sons and daughters. They have a right to know, and it is the

responsibility of the Lebanese authorities to provide some answers." 17,000 have gone missing during the civil war in Lebanon, some of whom are expected to have been or continue to be detained in Syrian jails – while most are presumed dead in Lebanon. Their families, though, don't want to give up. Many were kidnapped by the Syrian Army following their occupation of Lebanon during the civil war. Several mass graves were also found throughout Lebanon. Under International Law, governments are required to clarify the fate of persons who go missing in conflict situations. However, for some reason, the Lebanese government hasn't taken any of the necessary steps. Carboni said: "Looking at the priorities of the Lebanese government, we feel that the suffering of missing persons' families is underappreciated. This should change. A law on missing persons and a mechanism to provide answers should be made a priority."

[bctt tweet="Your war ended, their's didn't #Lebanon" username="the961com"]

ICRC's Role

Since 2012, the ICRC has been interviewing families to gather crucial and detailed information about their missing loved ones and collecting biological reference samples from their close relatives for future DNA analysis and identification efforts.

In 2015, it launched an accompaniment project in Aley, Baabda, Chouf and Sidon to create a support network for them.

Carboni said: "The families have a pressing need to learn the fate of their missing loved ones. Since the beginning of the civil war, we've been helping them. Today, we need the Lebanese authorities to assume their responsibilities."

The ICRC has been operating in Lebanon since 1967 and has carried out its humanitarian work through periods of conflict, including the civil war.

Act for the Disappeared

A great organization that is working hard to accomplish similar goals is *Act for the Disappeared*.

Their [website](#) has heartbreaking stories of those missing and their families.

[bctt tweet="Neither dead, nor alive. #Lebanon #lebanesecivilwar" username="the961com"]

The greater majority of those missing were at the hands of Lebanese militias, as well as local and foreign armed groups.

Disappearances continued after the war but on a smaller scale – mainly in the context of the occupation of the Israeli and Syrian armies.

In Lebanon most of the missing and disappeared are civilians. Many were kidnapped from their homes, from the streets, or at checkpoints controlled by militias or foreign troops.

The Taef Agreement made no mention of the fate of the thousands of missing persons. In 1991, the militias were disbanded and no conditions were imposed on them to provide information on the fate of the persons they kidnapped or to release any prisoners they may possibly be holding.

Since the end of the war, the Lebanese authorities have adopted various measures aiming at closing – but without resolving – the issue of enforced disappearances.

In Lebanon

The groups are demanding for information about the fate of the missing and disappeared. So:

- If they are alive, they want their release
- If they are dead, they want their remains so that they may bury them in dignity and mourn over them

Under the pressure by the families of the disappeared, the Lebanese authorities created a commission in 2000 mandated with uncovering the fate of the missing and disappeared. The commission was supposed to «resolve» the issue of the disappeared, the only answer given to the families was a two-page summary of the final report of the commission. The Lebanese state acknowledged that there are many mass graves across the Lebanese territory. It even named three of them: the Martyrs' cemetery in Horsh Beirut, Mar Mitr in Ashrafieh and the English cemetery in Tahwita. The Lebanese state never provided any information about the «inquiry» that led to these conclusions, and, 12 years later, it has not taken any steps to protect these sites or exhume the remains buried there. Occasionally, remains are found by coincidence (on construction sites or archaeological sites). But the Lebanese judicial authorities, which are responsible for the exhumation and identification of bodies, fail to disclose any information on the progress of their work and about what they do with the remains when these are found. In 2005, the mass grave located on the grounds of the Ministry of National Defense

in Yarzeh was opened. 18 bodies were identified through DNA analysis and returned to their families who buried them in dignity.

In Syria

During its presence in Lebanon, the Syrian army and the Syrian intelligence services, often with the help of its local allies, illegally detained people. Hundreds of these detained persons were transferred to Syria where they are being secretly detained. Family associations have documented over 600 such cases. Family associations and NGOs have managed to gather strong evidence pointing to these people's detention, in addition to the testimonies of some former detainees who were released over the years from Syrian prisons. To date, the Syrian government has never acknowledged their detention, even though since 1998, more than 150 Lebanese detainees have been released from Syrian prisons. In 2005, a joint Lebanese-Syrian Commission was created with the mandate of investigating the Lebanese detainees and forcibly disappeared in Syria. The Lebanese members transmit the list of names of the Lebanese missing persons to their Syrian counterpart which is supposed to conduct the necessary investigations and yield answers as to their fate and whereabouts. To date, the Syrian members only answered back about 2 cases. Concerning all the other cases they declared to the Lebanese members that they did not know these persons.

In Israel

During Israel's occupation of South Lebanon, hundreds of people were abducted by the Israeli army and its local allies and transferred into Israel. In recent years, several rounds of exchanges coordinated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have allowed the remains of most disappeared persons to be returned to their families. To date, there are still persons who have not been accounted for and are believed to have disappeared at the hands of the Israelis or their local allies. Follow and support them here:

- [Act for the Disappeared Facebook page](#)
- [Act for the Disappeared Website](#)
- [Fushatamal](#) (Project by Act for the disappeared to digitize the stories of those missing)