



لجنة أهالي المخطوفين
والمفقودين في لبنان

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my name, in the name of the families, in the name of the cause of the missing and forcefully disappeared in the Lebanese war(s), we are grateful about your presence and we appreciate it much more than you can imagine. Let us introduce you a bit to the third party that did itself the honor of welcoming here you next to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Beirut Bar association.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are a sect composed of thousands of Lebanese and of people residing in Lebanon, of people who went missing or disappeared forcefully and a sect composed of thousands of their families. We do not constitute a sect that is officially recognized. We started to exist gradually approximately since 1975 with the beginning of the war in Lebanon, and our number increased more and more until the end of the war. I for example joined this sect in 1982. To be honest, I have to say that no one of us wanted to join this unique sect voluntarily, no one of us chose this sorrowful path, neither the missing one nor his/her family. It is a very heavy burden for your loved one, for you, for your and his family, for his and your children, and no one can heal this wound except by searching for the missing, only by getting to know his/her path even after one hundred years, be he/she alive or death, in Lebanon, in Syria or in any other place of this world. Therefore, we have no merit: we have not chosen our path and we cannot trust anymore until we define the path of our loved ones. Believe me, time does not change anything, just some people die and the ones remaining are bitten off from life...

Dear friends,

Despite the fact that we did not choose to belong to this strange sect, please let me continue:

We are a sect composed of Lebanese of all confessions, Sunnis, Shiites, Maronites, Druses, Orthodox, Armenians and Alawites and I apologize for any confession that I forgot to mention and I am sure that that they are all represented in our sect, from all communities and from all the groups residing in Lebanon since the war years, consisting of all nationalities and coming from all places...the majority of the missing ones are of male gender and the majority of their families, especially the activists are of female gender. In our ranks you find all professions, and of all Lebanese districts. Shall we list to you district after district? We thought about listing the names of the missing and forcefully disappeared...but the listing itself would have taken more than two hours, and we do not want to captivate you all this time, although after a couple of months from today on the captivity of some of us that tears us apart from the inside actually continues for 40 years, the time of the beginning of the war.

Even stranger than this, dear attendants of this honored ceremony, is the fact that we are the only sect in Lebanon that does not have any political, religious, or societal authority. We only address the state and we only expect something from the state...likewise, we do not have any cause except for our only cause. And the day our cause is solved, in a scientific, just and institutional way, we will disappear as a sect in complete satisfaction.

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Imagine the curiosity, Ladies and Gentlemen, of a Lebanese sect consisting of all confessions and all nationalities that are residing on the Lebanese soil and it does not have any authority except for the Lebanese state. But the Lebanese state does not recognize it! Maybe because our cause does not dissolve in the sectarian stream, maybe because there is not a sectarian solution to it. Because the missing does not have a sect, either we look for him/her as a citizen, or we do not look for him/her...I don't know...but if this is the reason, shame on Lebanon and if this is in fact the reason how do we really want to establish a Lebanese state after this deep shame?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet today for this ceremony of the official handover of a copy of the complete file of investigations of the families of the missing and forcefully disappeared to the International Committee of the Red Cross (represented by the president of the mission in Lebanon), the copy that was handed over to us by the presidency of the cabinet after strong efforts and the decision by the Lebanese state council...

Let me start by saying that without the Committee of the Red Cross, without your support to us we would have not reached the point we are at now...Dear Mister Fabrizio Cabroni, we are truly proud that you are with us today...we will not forget that the International Committee of the Red Cross was our friend who alone stood next to us in hard days (as an Arabic proverb says). And more important than this is that when the hour of knowledge strikes, and this moment is close, it was due to your relentless and silent work (thanks a lot to Fabien Bourdier and the whole team that worked before him and with him sacrificing long hours for our interest). It is thanks to you that the state and we do not start from zero when the state assumed the duty to solve our cause in a scientific, just and institutional way, but we rather start with a basis characterized as acceptable, valuable and reliable.

I want to add that we hand over to you today, with complete trust and certainty in order to avoid the circulation in political and media circles, something that is "the most precious to us". We hand over to you the story of our relationship with our state, a story that became the life story of each one of us.

In addition to this, the box contains also a part of the ugly history of this country when fanaticism was ripping the immunity of our people...as it contains a picture of the origin on which our country is based and to speak more correctly on the basic duties that this country does not fulfill towards a group of its citizens and their children...We demand from this state that it acts...and that it acts for us and with us as every state has acted and acts who respects himself through acknowledging its missing and forcefully disappeared citizens, therefore that it recognizes their cause, investigates for them, defines their path and respects their families, and I speak here under the supervision of representatives of states that know very well what I mean...

My dear friends...

I want to thank once more the president Salim Hoss who formed the first official committee to investigate about our loved ones in 2000 ...I want to thank once more the government of

the president Tamam Salam for carrying through the decision of the Lebanese State Council by handing over to us a copy of this file. In both cases, the formation of an official committee and the handing over of the file of investigations, those were the achievements that were realized after the campaign "Right to know" got established and was active on the streets, and I want to use the opportunity to thank this group of citizens who stood next to us with their time, competence and creativity, in the name of the families I want to thank every single one of you...

Despite the establishment of the official committee and despite our acceptance of the copy of the investigation file two months ago, our state has not recognized us yet...

Why do I say this? I say this and I declare it loud, and I speak here with the presence and under the supervision of the representatives of states and committees (represented by the Red Cross) that set themselves to approach the treatment of similar causes in all parts of the world. I say this because our recognition is impossible by collecting statistics about us by an official committee that does not carry out its duties, and it is impossible by handing over to us an empty file without questioning someone and without investigating about any information...but instead pronouncing our relatives dead en masse although they are hidden, they disappeared in places and times en detail...this as well as that equals the redeeming in front of us and the surrender of us...not the recognition and acknowledgement of us.

Let us look forward, dear guests,

The scientific, just and institutional solution to our cause could be the following two points:

- 1) The recognition of our cause, of our relatives and of us by forming a DNA-bank and by signing an agreement between the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Lebanese government that is expected since two years to be on its way. Because the DNA secures the identity from death that follows the families with time and it gives an identity to the bones that emerge naturally on construction sites and that pile up in the fridges of the morgues
- 2) Defining the path of our relatives through passing a scientific and just legislation in the parliament, equal to what other parliaments passed...a law that closes the file of the war, because it is not closed yet, a law that maybe releases the kidnappers but does not release itself from defining the path of its families, of its kidnapped and missing citizens, no dear Ladies and Gentlemen, dear regents of Lebanon, we do not demand that you treat us like you treated the kidnappers, we demand that you treat us how you want us to treat you if – may god forbid – one of your loved ones goes missing. We are people who want the closure of the file of the war...so that we can return to life...to normal life...in order to live...because now we do not live...we only wait...do you understand this?

Our dear guests today,

We are on the streets since 32 years, we become miserable and withered. (Can you imagine what this means in the life of a person? In his balance? In his heart and body?), and from time to time we hear that we threaten the civil peace (the last time was during the failed

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recourse to nullify the decision of the Lebanese State Council)...No, no, no and a thousand times no...we do not threaten the civil peace, by no means...we act from our modest position and with all responsibility and knowledge to entrench the civil peace and to build citizenship. Our cause does not entail neither a confessional struggle nor does it even look for confessional solutions...Can you imagine: existence collapses around us, institutions collapse in our country, but Waddad Halwani, Ghazi Aad, and Im Mohammad, Nahila and Sonja, Leila Jidaa, Najat Hashisho and many more others from the families...we are threatening the civil peace..?!!

Shall I laugh or jest? Honored president of the mission, honored president of the bar, dear guests, I don't want to laugh... I cannot jest, while every day we receive calls from different regions in Syria and Iraq, questions and pain about ten thousands of missing people in both countries. And I also would like to use the opportunity to declare my solidarity with the families of the kidnapped Lebanese soldiers and security personal that live a pain that we know too well, and we hope for these families that they find their relatives healthy as soon as possible and that we do not find them among our ranks in the future.

Let me finish by addressing the representative of the bar and the judges and lawyers who are present among us today. Among us all of you represent symbolically the judicial power in its entirety, you represent justice...and justice is part of holding but also of advocacy. In 2014, the decision of the Lebanese State Council displayed us the trust in law. My teacher and brother Nizar Saghiyeh taught me that I should not thank the decisions of justice and the ones who effect them. But there is one I want to thank today in the name of the families and that is Nizar for everything he has done and he still does. And I also want to commend the historical decision of the Lebanese State Council whose value deserves international recognition. In addition to this it laid the foundation of our right to know...that renewed the strength of our declared will.

Honored representative of the bar, we understand your hospitality towards us today and your presence at this ceremony as another expression towards your commitment to our cause, confirming and recognizing our right to know...we feel from your point of view the consolidation of the positioning of the bar association with our right and therefore with us in our old struggle until we define the path of our relatives.

We thank you wholeheartedly for what you accomplished which made us after today equipped with more courage and a stronger will because we know that the Bar association, as the association of the truth, stands next to us.

Dear guests, and friends, thank you for coming, thank you for listening, thank you for your solidarity...

Wadad Helwani
Beirut, 16th of December 2014