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**Speech of the Head of Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC),**

**Mr. Fabrizio Carboni - Beirut, 16 December 2014**

Mr. President of the Bar Association, esteemed families of Missing persons, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to receive, on behalf of the ICRC, the investigation report of the Commission on the Missing that was established in the year 2000.

I would like to thank the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and the Missing, and SOLIDE for their trust in our Institution and, more particularly, for their life-long action and their dedication to the Missing and their families in this country.

Your activism and energy - dear Ghazi and dear Wadad - is an achievement on itself and today we are here humbled by your tireless work and achievements in support of all those persons and lives that have been torn apart by the loss of a loved one, not knowing what happened, not being able to have closure. Both of you truly are an example to follow for this country and also for all the families around the world who have lost a member of their family during a war.

I would also like to thank the President of the Bar association Mr. George Jreij for accepting to host this event in this magnificent theater.

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We are fully aware of the importance of our responsibility in the examination of those documents and hope that they will further facilitate our work in support of "the right to know" of families of missing persons with the sole objective to help bring answers to grief-stricken families.

Present in Lebanon since 1967, the ICRC has always accompanied the Lebanese people during the bad and good times of its recent history.

During the terrible years of the civil war, families came to our offices across Lebanon to register their loved ones as disappeared. They didn't just register them, but they also shared with us their suffering, their despair and their hope that one day their loved one will come back home.

Our role, as accepted by most of the States around the world, is to intervene with parties to the conflict to obtain information on persons who have gone missing in order to reunite them with their families.

Sometimes our action had a positive outcome, but in many other cases after 1 week, 1 year and finally 30 years, we haven't been able to provide any news about the disappeared. Today, a lot of persons are still missing and too many Lebanese families are waiting and suffering in silence.

This tragic situation afflicted upon thousands of families all over the country and around the world, it creates a never-ending and unbearable suffering that they have to endure day after day.

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A missing person can be at the same time a father or mother, a son or a sister, a husband or a wife, and a brother or sister. The impact of the disappearance of a loved one is devastating. It affects the whole family and is passed on from generation to generation. As many of you told us, only finding out what happened will alleviate your pain.

It's often underestimated or ignored, but a missing person can also have a disastrous effect on the material condition of their family. Many of them cannot afford decent healthcare and they are in a difficult financial situation. Sometime, they also face absurd administrative hurdles.

To address those needs, the ICRC has launched a few weeks ago an accompaniment program of the families in the district of Sidon with the collaboration of local and international NGOs.

A system of psycho-social support groups will be put in place next January for the families of missing persons in the area. Progressively, this program will be extended to several districts across Lebanon.

20 years have passed since the end of the conflict, and yet Lebanon has not provided any answer to the families of the Missing, leaving them isolated and in great pain.

In the absence of a National Institution in charge of this file and seeing that no action was taken, the ICRC considers that it has a moral engagement towards the families of the Missing and that it had to act.

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Therefore, the ICRC decided to launch in 2012 a national project for the collection of information on the Missing through their family members.

My colleagues interviewed 1700 families of the Missing, who shared with us all available information on their loved ones before their disappearance.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all families for your cooperation and for the warm welcome you offered to our staff in your homes, from Akkar to Tyre and from the Bekaa Valley to the mountains. It has been a privilege for us to meet hundreds of you all over the country over the past 2 years.

It was a very humbling experience for us. We have been deeply moved by your suffering and impressed by your courage. You have given us even more motivation and strength to achieve our mission. I know that you had to reopen painful wounds, as representative of the ICRC, I'm committed to do everything possible.

In line with international practices, the information that we are collecting will be handed over to a future national independent institution with the mandate to give answers to the families of the Missing. It is the opinion of the ICRC that such an institution should be established as soon as possible by the Lebanese Parliament through a law on the Missing, as it is commonly the case in other countries in a similar situation.

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Currently, a draft law is in discussion and I would like to seize this opportunity to encourage all the political parties to support the law when it will be presented to them during the next parliamentary session.

The second phase of the ICRC project for the Missing is to collect DNA samples from the families of the Missing we interviewed. The plan is for officers of the forensics department of the ISF to collect DNA samples with ICRC technical support. For each case, 2 samples will be taken. 1 will be stored at the ISF headquarters and the second at our ICRC headquarters in Geneva.

During the preparation phase of the project, we enjoyed an excellent collaboration with the ISF. I would like to thank them for their support.

The ICRC "Collection of DNA Samples" project is ready, but due to the complex political situation in the country in the last couple of years, it has not been approved yet. However, the feedback of the government is encouraging. In order to facilitate its rapid approval by the Lebanese authorities, the ICRC recently prepared a new simplified version of the agreement to be shared with the Minister of Interior in the coming days.

Furthermore, the President of the ICRC, Mr. Peter Maurer, who will visit the country in January, will directly present the project to the Prime Minister. We remain hopeful and confident that the proposal will be quickly approved, in order to start the project beginning of 2015.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The time is neither on our side, nor on the side of the families. The majority of the Missing of the civil war were young boys in their twenties, they were the sons of Lebanon. Today, their parents are in their seventies and in some instances are not among us anymore.

It is heartbreaking to listen to the sister of a Missing telling us that her mother on her deathbed told her "Knock on my grave when you have news about your brother".

It's an emergency, entire generations need to know before it is too late.

Based on our international experience, we are deeply convinced that what was possible in other countries can be done here too. In ex-Yugoslavia, during the civil war in the 1990s, 30'000 people disappeared. Today, 20'000 families of missing know what happened to their loved ones.

I would like to conclude by saying that, the examples of other countries, Bosnia, Kosovo, Georgia, or Nepal show that addressing the fate of the Missing and giving answers to their families is also the best way forward in the process of national reconciliation. It also can help avoid any possible repetition of this terrible drama in the future. The missing are not a threat from the past to the present, they rather are a wound in the face of a nation that needs to be healed.

I would like here to reaffirm to the families of the Missing and to the Lebanese people that ICRC is deeply committed to the cause of the Missing and their families and is determined to play its role in supporting a solution for this tragic humanitarian problem that has lasted way too long.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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