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Push for law to uncover fate of Lebanon missing

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BEIRUT — The Red Cross and Lebanese activists made a plea on Thursday for the passage of a law to uncover the fate of thousands of people missing since the country's devastating civil war.

An estimated 17,000 people remain disappeared since Lebanon's 15-year war ended in 1990, but a draft law to create a commission of enquiry could help determine their fate.

The draft, in the works for years, has been approved by parliamentary committees and must now be voted on by the 128 lawmakers elected to office in May.

On Thursday, the International Day of the Disappeared, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and families of the missing called on the MPs to pass it.

"Tell us where they are. Even if they're just bones," said Najla Qublawi, 56.

Her eight-year-old brother went missing in 1976 in an area outside Beirut and she said her family has spent decades asking Lebanese authorities about him and protesting to demand more transparency.

"I have hope with this draft law," said Qublawi, who fiddled nervously with colourful prayer beads as she spoke.

Thursday's call came during an artist exhibit organised by the ICRC to highlight the prolonged suffering of families aching to know what happened to their loved ones.

In one room designed as a cozy kitchen, a human form made out of grayish wire sits at a table facing an empty chair.

In another, an image shows a man standing by a car with an Iranian licence plate, his face blocked out by a bright white circle.

The draft law would create a commission of enquiry led by the police and aided by special archeologists and anthropologists.

Since 2012, the ICRC has been working on a database compiling info on each disappearance case, including the area the person went missing and the clothes they were wearing at the time.

Later on, researches began gathering DNA samples from relatives of the disappeared in anticipation of the law's passage.

Lebanon held parliamentary elections in May for the first time in nearly a decade, presenting a new opportunity for families to learn the fate of their loved ones.