



'I Want to Bury Him': Lebanon Hopes for Closure with Law to Find War Missing

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FILE - Women hold pictures of relatives who went missing during Lebanon's civil war, which took place from 1975 to 1990, during a protest in front of the government palace in Beirut, Sept. 18, 2014.

BEIRUT —

After more than 40 years of agony, families of thousands of Lebanese who disappeared during its civil war said a landmark law to investigate their fate could bring "closure."

Lawmakers on Monday voted to set up a commission to find out what happened to those who went missing during the 1975-1990 war, in which some 150,000 people died, including collecting DNA samples of living family members, and exhuming mass graves.

"I really want to close this chapter. My father has been missing for more than 40 years. I want to bury him so that we can visit him — this is so important for us," Mohammad Kassem told Reuters by phone from Beirut.

"We have cried a lot about this. And now, at the very least, we just want to bury him. It will make us cry again, but we need closure," he said, adding that his father disappeared in 1977.

There is currently no public database or exact numbers for people who went missing during the war in which Muslims and Christians who had lived side by side for centuries retreated into separate enclaves controlled by sectarian militias.

"Not knowing the fate of the missing means we are not able to turn the page on the civil war," said Rona Halabi, a spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has campaigned for the law for six years. "This law is a milestone, and now it is the government's responsibility to put in a mechanism to allow families to know the fate of their loved ones." "There was no indication of when the commission will be formed, but foreign minister Gebran Bassil said on Twitter that the country was entering a "genuine reconciliation phase" that would heal families' wounds.

Lebanon voted in May for its first new parliament in nine years after the onset of Syria's civil war, the arrival of over a million refugees and a series of militant attacks aggravated internal political rifts.

With a long-entrenched political elite including local dynasties and former warlords, Prime Minister-designate Saad al-Hariri has yet to form a national unity government.

"This would be the first time Lebanon acknowledges and addresses in a meaningful manner one of the most painful legacies of the conflict," said Lynn Maalouf, Middle East research director for Amnesty International rights group. "Appointing appropriately qualified members of the national commission should be the immediate next step."