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His Excellency Saad Hariri, the Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Council of Ministers
Grand Sérail, Rue des Arts et Métiers
Riad al-Soulouh Square
Beirut
Lebanon

23 December 2010

Your Excellency,

I write to request information about the steps being taken by your government to address the question of the thousands of people whose fate and whereabouts have remained unknown since they went missing during and after the years of civil war that afflicted Lebanon from 1975 to 1990.

As you know, the number of those who went missing during the conflict is uncertain though it is generally estimated at up to some 17,000. Many are believed to have been victims of enforced disappearances by forces related to the various governments involved in the conflict, others are believed to have been abducted or captured by other armed groups or militias, killed in combat or in massacres, while others lost all contact with their families for reasons unknown. Their fate and related questions – what happened to them, what human rights abuses were committed against them and who were the perpetrators of those abuses – remain unanswered, despite the passage of so many years, and continue to weigh heavily on Lebanese society.

Today, many people in Lebanon continue to ask what became of their loved ones, to remember them and to hope that the day will come when they can be reunited with them or, more likely, learn where their remains now lie.

Amnesty International has long campaigned on this issue and will continue to do so in hope that the Lebanese government will establish an independent truth commission or some other form of inquiry that can be effective in obtaining and providing information about the fate of those who went missing to their families.

In this context, we were particularly encouraged by the commitment to addressing the question of the missing expressed by President Sleiman in his inaugural speech in May 2008 and to the importance attached to this matter in the Lebanese Parliament's draft Human Rights Action Plan (HRAP). These have all given new hope to their surviving relatives that the fate and whereabouts of many of the missing and disappeared may yet be made known to them. However, it has now been a year since the Lebanese Council of Ministers announced that it would "consider the establishment of a national body dealing with the issue of enforced disappearances in all its aspects" and Amnesty International remains concerned about the apparently slow speed with which this matter is being progressed and would now welcome clarification of the steps and timetable for implementing this.

We seek reassurance too that such a body will have greater independence than earlier commissions tasked by previous Lebanese governments to account for the missing, and which achieved so little. In particular, we urge you to ensure that the new body includes among its commissioners independent experts and representatives of civil society, including relatives of missing individuals, and is sufficiently mandated to investigate the fates and whereabouts of all missing people and empowered to require full co-operation from all institutions and individuals, Lebanese and international. Such a body might also be best-placed to address the right of victims and their families to justice and reparations.

Another area on which we hope the government will now quickly advance, concerns the location and protection of mass graves that have already been identified and yet, in most cases, have remained

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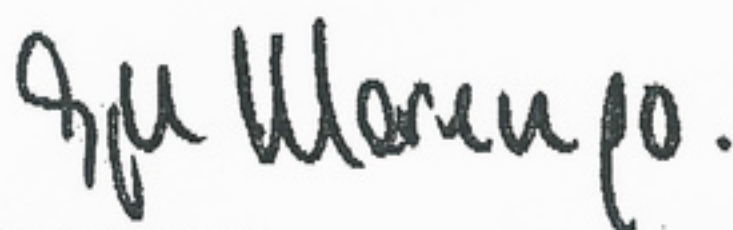
officially unrecognized and unprotected. These sites, and any new ones that are uncovered, must be officially marked, recognized and protected, with a view to possible future investigation of the identity of those whose mortal remains they contain, and it is urgent that the government should make available the means, protocols and resources to achieve this,

In the same connection, while we greatly welcome the proposal in the draft HRAP for the establishment of a DNA database, which we would recommend is funded to ensure that the families of the missing do not incur prohibitive costs, we urge the government to proceed with the establishment of such a DNA database without delay and not allow it to become dependent on the passage of the HRAP. Many of the relatives of the missing have already passed away; others are elderly and infirm and should not have to wait any longer than absolutely necessary to ensure that there is a safe and established means by which they can provide DNA evidence to assist in the future identification of their loved ones.

Amnesty International shares the view expressed by the Council of Ministers that efforts are needed to "cleanse people from the memories of the war and enhance national reconciliation", and we look to you and your Government to take urgent and concrete steps to bring this about.

We will welcome clarification of the various steps being taken in this regard at Your Excellency's earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



for Salil Shetty
Secretary General