

# Relatives of kidnapped collapse at Nijmeh sit-in

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Families of those missing and kidnapped during the war gathered on Wednesday in front of MPs at Parliament in reaction to the government's decision to consider the missing persons dead, which resulted in some elderly family members collapsing from distress.

The families, who held a 65-minute sit-in outside Parliament, clutched Prime Minister Salim Hoss and other MPs entering the premises to attend the legislative session.

"It is just tragic. I had to convince them to cut the sit-in short because many of the older women collapsed right then and there," said Wadad Halwani, spokesperson for the families. "We even had to rush one woman to the emergency unit because she fainted and wouldn't wake up."

Later in the day, Hoss, who chaired the Cabinet meeting, opened the session with a speech addressing the families.

"The result of the report I received on Monday are, unfortunately, tragic and fall within the series of tragic incidents created by the civil war," Hoss said.

The premier said that he acknowledged how difficult it was for the families to finally accept the reality that their loved ones are no longer alive. "However, neither we nor they are capable of changing these

results," he said. The premier again extended his deepest sympathies to the families, saying his only hope that the country does not go through similar experiences.

The government on Tuesday finally made a decision to consider those missing or kidnapped for at least four years during the war to be deceased. This was the first move by the government to address the sensitive issue.

A noticeably shaken Halwani, whose husband Adnan was kidnapped in 1982, said that although she expected such a reaction from the families, she found no justification for their continued presence at Nijmeh Square, citing a concern for their well-being.

"The families were simply shocked, many heard the government decision on TV and were not prepared for it," said Halwani. "My phone didn't stop ringing all night with families saying they didn't believe the government. They're in denial now," she said.

In order to convince the families to accept the government's position, Halwani wants to ensure the decision was made as a result of definitive evidence.

"I want to try to look into the details of how the investigation was conducted. In any case, this is the first time the government has assumed responsibility for one of the remnants of the civil war," she said.



MP Nassib Lahoud is confronted outside the Parliament building