

PORTRAIT OF WADAD HALWANI

16 December 2006, by **Emmanuel Villin**

translation: Ingrid Sfeir

"It's been 24 years that I haven't cried; I held it back too much".

Since September 24, 1982, the day her husband Adnan was kidnapped, Wadad Halawani didn't have the time to shed a tear as she was completely taken by her fight for truth regarding the fate of her husband.

In the apartment where she lives with one of their two sons there are boxes, mostly full with books, stacked, waiting to be moved out. On a shelf there are philosophy, history and political science books awaiting their turn. Sitting in her simply furnished lounge, Wadad Halawani recalls the day that changed the course of her life. "I clearly remember that day.

Amine Gemayel had just been elected president. The Lebanese army was scattered on the roads, progressively taking over the militias. From our balcony I saw a Lebanese flag. It had been a long time since I hadn't seen it! Life seemed to be taking a normal course again..." At lunchtime, two armed men who stated being from the security services showed up asking for Adnan to follow them for a simple interrogatory ... from which he never came back. He was 35, I was 31".

During the 3 previous months, marked with the horrific siege of Beirut by the Israeli army, Adnan Halawani a militant of an obedience communist party had done his best to provide the civil population with first necessity needs. What a paradox of a tragic coincidence: he was kidnapped the day when legality seemed to take over, kidnapped by men asking for this same legality.

There was then the time of "lies" in order to hide the truth from both her sons who were 3 and 6 years old and who wouldn't understand. Obligated to face the facts, Wadad Halawani sends a call on a radio station for the families who lived the same tragic event inviting them to meet in order to plead their case to the authorities. She continues very moved, "When the day came, I was expecting to see 2 or 3 persons at a maximum. But hundreds of women spontaneously answered my call". Very quickly she heads the movement: "I did not choose to do so. It was imposed on me. The women didn't know each other, so they all turned to me".

During the years of war, the movement, which became later on the Committee of Parents of Kidnapped or Missing Lebanese "was the only one to gather people from all confessions and

social origins”, highlights Wadad proudly. Regularly in confrontation with the army who forbids them to demonstrate or to visit political figures, women form the Committee show tenacity and stubbornness that still surprises Wadad Halawani now. “Through this fight, women appeared to me as being stronger, more responsible, more patient and even more sincere”, she confides.

Today, Wadad Halawani dedicates most of her time to the cause of the Missing. As soon as she finishes work at the Ministry where she is employed, she starts the meetings for the Committee all over the country. “I am always busy; I don’t have free time for myself. I have to listen, visit some families, comfort them, and advise them ... Women I meet give me the strength to continue my fight”, she explains. But her non stop activity doesn’t put her at rest. “I always feel alone”, she confides. It is a state of solitude that is continuously reinforced by the successive Governments’ lack of interest for the cause of the missing. She is upset about the issue of the missing (17,000 missing person according to official statistics) is constantly politicized and that no political party to date has listed this issue on his agenda. For Wadad Halawani, the fate of missing people is not only the problem of their families but also that of the Lebanese society. “Our fight is a fight for peace” she confirms, convinced that national reconciliation should not be the monopole of political leaders but that of their victims and finally of all Lebanese citizens. “I am tired and deceived”, she concludes. “I don’t have the right to give up. I have to be at the center of the fight, not only for Adnan, but for the thousands of men from whom we have no news”.