



# THE DAILY STAR

Copyright (c) 2005 The Daily Star

Saturday, December 10, 2005

## 'It's time for us to know the truth'

### *Relatives of missing urge cabinet to unearth remaining graves*

By Jessy Chahine

Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: Relatives of people who were kidnapped or went missing during Lebanon's 1975-1990 war urged the government to unearth 35 mass graves they believe exist across the country, following the discovery of three burial in recent weeks.

"The recent mass graves' excavations made us pray again and again for our loved ones to still be alive," said Widad Halawani, representative of the Committee of Parents of the Kidnapped and Missing Persons in Lebanon.

"Finally, the countdown has begun and those who were trying to hide evidence away for years are finally going to be revealed and punished for the tragedies they caused," Halawani said.

"It's time for us to know the truth," she said, dwelling on the necessity of having an investigation in Syrian and Israeli prisons.

"We hope and pray our children are still alive, but we also have to admit the bitter truth that many of them might be among those discovered in the mass graves," Halawani said, struggling to hold back tears as she remembered her own husband who disappeared 18 years ago.

In November, 13 bodies belonging to soldiers were excavated from the grounds of the Defense Ministry.

Last weekend, 30 bodies were exhumed from two mass graves in Anjar, not far from former Syrian intelligence headquarters. Lebanon vowed, to carry out a full-scale probe into their death, with many figures calling for an international investigation.

"For us parents and committee members, those mass graves are not something new," she said, "but their excavation is."

Halawani explained that in 2002, the Committee of the Parents of the Kidnapped and Missing Persons in Lebanon addressed an official document to the Lebanese government, in which it clearly raised the existence of the mass graves and requested their exhumation.

"We even mentioned the presence of bodies in the sea, but the government completely ignored us," she said.

"We were told to close our files and forget our pain because our children were already dead and those mass graves were proof of it," she said.

"They blamed us for bringing up the issue, telling us: Do you want to create another civil war just for the sake of some dead children?"

Moved by Halawani's words, MP Ghassan Moukheiber, also chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights, promised to hold a meeting to discuss the issue next Tuesday, which will be attended by representatives of human rights organizations and the International Red Cross Committee.

Meanwhile, grieving relatives still await the DNA test results, hoping "and praying" the remains will not be identified as those of their lost loved ones.

# THE DAILY STAR

Copyright (c) 2005 The Daily Star