

Attn: Mrs. Wadad Halwani
#: 280572

Where are Lebanon's missing?

A committee formed to investigate the fate of thousands of missing Lebanese during the war is stepping up its campaign to draw as many supporters as possible to attend a day of remembrance earmarked for April 13.

During its first meeting on Thursday to coordinate the activities scheduled for the day, committee members and interested students discussed the activities it plans to hold on April 13, which marks the beginning of the civil war in 1975.

Since it began its campaign in October, the Committee for the Relatives of the Kidnapped and Missing during the War has aimed at mobilizing support all over the country so that the civil conflict is "remembered and not repeated."

"Throughout the years, our main struggle was to keep the issue of the kidnapped and missing alive. In the few months since we began our advocacy, we were able to extract a government decision to establish a com-

mittee to investigate the kidnappings," said committee spokeswoman Wadad Halwani.

In January, Prime Minister Salim Hoss established a commission of five army intelligence officers to look into the fate of thousands who disappeared from 1975 to 1990.

The committee was to report its findings to Hoss within three months. Hoss said that the timeframe could be extended if need be.

According to Amnesty International, 17,415 people are listed as missing. Some were held by militias in Lebanon and others transferred to prisons in Syria and Israel.

The committee has pressured the government to reveal the fate of the missing and regularly holds vigils near Cabinet headquarters during the weekly Cabinet meetings.

The committee's three main demands include establishing the government commission, providing the families of the kidnapped with social services and recognizing April 13 as a day to remember the missing.

Halwani told some 30 university students

that they should spread the word about the committee's work. "We need each other to ensure continuity and so that we can achieve our demands," she said.

Committee member Paul Ashqar said that more than 200 associations have joined the campaign and that up to 6,000 letters have already been sent to President Emile Lahoud asking that the demands be met.

Ashqar said the committee has decided to postpone calling for a memorial for the kidnapped, fearing it would be misunderstood.

Among the activities the committee has prepared for the day are a photo exhibition and the screening of several documentaries by Lebanese directors on war-related issues.

A seminar about remembering the war will take place on April 11 at the Press Federation. On April 13, committee members will attract as many supporters as possible to join a candlelit vigil in Martyrs' Square.

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