

2002 11 21 - 0002 a - 2

Odette Salem

On 17 September 1985, in Beirut, I lost my 2 only children, Richard and Christine. They were with their uncle on their way from Hamra to our apartment in Sakiyat Aljanzeer, when a militia roadblock stopped their car and abducted the three of them. Richard was 22 years old [born in 23 January 1963], and Christine was 19 years old [born on Christmas day, 25 December 1966]. I am originally from Aleppo, married to a Lebanese Greek Orthodox from Tyre, South Lebanon. He was brought up and lived several years in Egypt before coming back and settling in Lebanon. My husband was a merchant. He died few years ^{before} their disappearance. Many pictures of Richard and Christine are distributed all over the place; in the living room, entrance and in my bedroom. In the bathroom that I have changed recently, I kept Christine's teddy bears and toys hung on the wall as if Christine has just left them. On the lavabo shelf, there are still all kinds of their perfumes, after shave, and beauty creams that belong to both Richard and Christine. I kept their tooth brushes. I did not throw any thing that belongs to them. They are still in their places. When they come back, let them throw what they do not need. In their bedroom, I kept their clothes ironed and well organized in the closet. I still clean their room as if they were there, and change their clothes according to changes of seasons. I remember my disappeared children not only through pictures as most families do, but also through their things that they were attached to. I remember them through stories that they have told ~~me~~ or things that they have written. I remember them through old posters they hanged on the wall, through their toys, gadgets and clothes. I am still waiting the return of my children. While waiting, I am getting old and weak.

They were coming back home with their uncle when they were kidnapped My children's uncle [father's brother] died soon after he was kidnapped. He was 75 years old. His wife, my sister- in- law, died 3-4 years ago. My children were born and brought up here [in West Beirut]. Every body here knows that they were innocent and not involved in politics. I visited all the responsible people of all the militias, but in vain. A friend offered to help me to pursue a legal case in Brussels. But I refused because I do not have any evidence against the suspected person. The government does not care for our cause or for our suffering. I demonstrated and participated in

2002 11 21 - 00026 - 12

many activities in order to know any thing about my children, and I will not give up. I have changed in their absence. My shape has changed after they were kidnapped. I got tired, and I have changed. When the journalists come to interview me my blood pressure goes high. My doctor who is my son's friend, asked me to stop talking to journalists and not to receive any one of them at home. I have a neighbor who visits me often. I can not bear her staying here and talking more than a short time. Now I like to live alone...