

# Families of Lebanon's missing hope for answers after new law

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© AFP | Relatives of Lebanese citizens who disappeared during the civil war carry their pictures at a press conference on November 28, 2018

BEIRUT (AFP) -

Lebanese families whose loved ones disappeared during the civil war said Wednesday they hoped to finally receive answers about the missing after a landmark law was passed.

On November 12, Lebanon for the first time approved legislation to investigate the fate of thousands of people missing since the 1975-1990 conflict and to hold those responsible to account.

Lebanon's civil war killed more than 150,000 people and left some 17,000 missing, according to official figures.

The new law mandates the setting up of a commission to gather information about those who disappeared, listen to testimonies, and decide what to do with any mass graves in the tiny Mediterranean country.

"This law establishes our right to know," Wadad Halwani, head of the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Missing, told journalists at a press conference in central Beirut.

It "sets up an independent national authority... aimed at giving each family a complete answer about the fate of their missing", she said.

"That's what the families want. They want nothing more and won't accept anything less."

Since 2005, Halwani has joined dozens of women in a tent in a garden opposite the United Nations headquarters in Beirut to demand their right to know what happened to their relatives.

Many of those women were present as Halwani spoke at a press conference by the tent, holding up pictures of their absent family members.

Halwani said the relatives were now waiting for a new government to be formed so that the commission "can be set up and its members nominated".

Although the government's formation has stalled for more than six months, the activist already called on witnesses to come forward.

"Anybody who knows anything -- whatever their position or role -- should head to the authority as soon as it is established to share that information," she said.

Other commissions were established by ministerial decree in the 2000s, but failed to bring any answers for the families.

Ziad al-Qadiri, a lawmaker who backed the new legislation, said implementing it would require determination.

"There must be boldness, courage, and seriousness so that we can manage to turn this page," he told AFP.