

ICRC

Dear families, dear Wadad, dear representatives of the Ministry of Justice and of the nominating entities, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nearly three years ago, in July 2016, my predecessor Fabrizio Carboni sat in this very same garden, next to Wadad, and announced that the ICRC would start gathering biological reference samples from families of missing persons. At the time, this endeavor generated hope for thousands of families of missing persons. A hope that alongside the ante-disappearance data, which we have also been collecting for years, the Lebanese authorities will soon have at their disposal the data they need to start working on clarifying the fate and whereabouts of the thousands of people who went Missing since 1975.

Three years later, here I stand, next to Wadad (once again!). Except that this time it is not to announce that the ICRC will do more. This time I have come to congratulate Lebanon, the Lebanese authorities, and the families of the Missing in Lebanon for the historical breakthrough your country has witnessed at the end of last year. The passage of Law 105 on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared on 13.11.2018 is a historical recognition. A recognition by the representatives of the People that the suffering the families have endured over the past decades needs to end. That they have the right to know the fate of their Missing. That no matter how many decades have passed since your sons, husbands, daughters, sons, and parents have disappeared, no matter your religion, your nationality, or the circumstances of their disappearance, no matter how much turmoil the country has faced since the end of the Civil War, no matter all this, people like Adele, Nasser, Um Ayman, Elias, Wadad, and thousands of others, have the right to receive answers about the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones.

Law 105 foresees the creation of an independent and non-discriminatory National Commission with a humanitarian mandate to clarify the fate and whereabouts of people who went missing in Lebanon. It is an unprecedented opportunity for the country not only to bring answers to families, but also to start helping its society coming to terms with a tormented past. By addressing its Missing file, Lebanon will join other countries where the national authorities have made the difficult but bold choice to address the issue of Missing people and the needs of their families. I am thinking of Argentine, Peru, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. We know, out of experience in those contexts and others, that by working on the issue of the Missing,

governments help relieve tensions that too often plague post-conflict societies.

For the Lebanese society to address its past, it needs now to start working on bringing answers to the families of the Missing. Out of experience we also know, at the ICRC, that clarifying the fate of the Missing takes time. It can take years before a Commission starts bringing answers to the families. It can take decades before families can receive answers. And it can be that some families may never receive answers. The path in which Lebanon has decided to engage is long, difficult, and most probably painful. But it is the right path, and a path that the Lebanese authorities and the families need to continue engaging on.

Once again, as the ICRC, we congratulate the Lebanese authorities and the families. We thank Wadad, the Committee for the Families of the Kidnapped and the Disappeared in Lebanon, and the families for giving us this opportunity to once again encourage Lebanon and its authorities to start taking action to clarify the fate of the Missing.