

PF ES. + V. - DIR/GEN<sub>2</sub> - OP/DIR + AD - DDM/DIR - DDM/JUR - DDM/DRM - RH/DIR - RH/OP - OP/DET - OP/AF - OP/A  
 - C P/ACR - OP/MED - OP/MO - OP/AS - OP/EAN - FAD/DIR - FAD/ADM - FAD/BAT - GEN/REX - OP/DOI - SACE/MEI  
 - COM/DIR - CDG/Nessi - OSI/DIR - COM/PR<sub>11</sub> - COM/REP - COM/SN - Grabar (BPI) - COM/DICA 001

C. H. B. - (prot) / L B. / Ch. a. e.

Bejre

# For Lebanon's Abducted, Hostage Crisis Drags On

By Jim Muir

Special to The Christian Science Monitor

BEIRUT

**W**ADDAD HELWANI'S world changed forever at lunchtime on a September day in 1982.

Two men knocked on the door of her west Beirut apartment, put pistols to the head of her husband, Adnan, and took him away. They said they wanted to question him about a traffic accident, and he would be back in five minutes.

She is still waiting.

While the Western hostages are free - except for two German aid workers - there has been no such relief for thousands of Lebanese like Mrs. Helwani, seeking word of loved ones who disappeared without trace after being kidnapped by the warring factions over the years.

"Everybody wanted the foreign hostages to be freed and to be with their families for Christmas and New Year. But it's as though we aren't human beings, and our own hostages are a different species from another planet," says Helwani, huddled over a gas fire in the apartment where her two young sons, Ghassan and Nad, have grown into teenagers since they last saw their father.

"Part of me rejoices when I hear about a hostage being freed

anywhere in the world, because I can put myself in the place of his family," she says. "But what tears me up is that nobody is bothered about my case."

Nobody knows exactly how many Lebanese are still missing after being kidnapped. But 2,111 cases have been registered by the committee of relatives which Helwani helped to create in 1982, after discovering hundreds of people who shared her plight.

The majority of them are Lebanese Muslims or Palestinians. Many, like Mr. Helwani, were abducted by hard-line Lebanese Army intelligence or the Christian militia after the Israeli Army pulled out of west Beirut in 1982.

But Christians are missing too. After a car bomb exploded in west Beirut on Aug. 19, 1985, outraged Muslim gunmen set up checkpoints in the streets and seized any Christians they could find. At least 30 disappeared that day. Only three were released.

Among the victims were two Lebanese Red Cross workers, Alfred Cattaneh and Simon Jadaa. Every night, Lebanese television carries an advertisement placed by the Red Cross, appealing to the kidnappers.

"They may have been on their way to save you. Did they really deserve to be kidnapped?" it asks. The question is met by the same silence that has blocked all efforts to find out what happened to the hundreds abducted.

"I had meetings with every person I thought might be responsible or could know anything about it, including the president, [Hizbullah leader] Sheikh Fadlallah, the speaker of parliament, the prime minister," says Mr. Cattaneh's mother, Rose. "They all encouraged me, for what I don't know. But nobody did anything, and up until now, I don't know whether my son is alive or not."

The widespread assumption is that the missing are dead, murdered for political or sectarian revenge. But there is no proof, no confirmation, and bodies have not been found. The families are left in a limbo, fearing the worst, but unable to mourn or to stifle the hope that the lost will return.

"You are waiting all the time," Helwani says. "Every time there's a knock at the door, you think it might be him."

It is the uncertainty that the families find so hard to bear.

"I want to know. I hate lies," Rose Cattaneh says. "I'm not afraid of the truth. If Alfred is alive, I want to know. I want to be happy. If he's not alive, at least I will be released."

For hundreds of women like Helwani, the abductions meant not only the loss of a loved one, but also the sudden disappearance of the breadwinner in a country now in economic straits.

"Many of the women have had to go out to work in menial jobs," she says. "Of course, the government did nothing for them. But the children have to go to school, to be fed and clothed."

There are other problems too. Helwani could not sell the family car because it was in her husband's name.

When she thought to send the children out of the country to escape the bombardments, she found they could not be given passports because their father had to sign the papers.

The government, struggling to hold itself and the country together, shies away from a problem which would reopen old wounds. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which tries to trace the missing in war-

time, says it can do little. The militias say they have no more prisoners. The ICRC has managed recently to trace only six of the missing: a group of Hizbullah members captured by the Christian militia and later transferred to Israel, where they have been visited by Red Cross officials.

"At least we had the satisfaction of being able to tell the families, so they know they are alive and will one day be coming home," says Christophe Harnisch, chief ICRC delegate in Beirut. But he says inquiries must be made into the missing if Lebanon is to know true peace.

"Reconciliation starts with solving humanitarian problems, and that's what this country needs," he says.

Original document