

I By definition, a missing person is neither alive nor dead. A missing person is another class of citizen, forgotten as a nameless number- an invisible creature who has the essence of a ghost. (Gibeily 11). During the 1975-1990 civil war, Lebanese militias took hostages. Some were killed during the war, while others are still missing until today, and no one has heard about them. If you steal a man's son or daughter and leave him with a ghost, he shouts with rage, cries with anguish and whispers with hope all in the same breath. Statistics show that there are 17000 people listed as missing in Lebanon. It is frustrating, downright insulting, that there has not been a single official attempt to track down our lost brothers and sisters – many of whom may still be alive in Israeli as well as in Lebanese and Syrian jails. And unlike the families' grief, there is a word to describe the government's procrastination: shame.(11)

II Wadad Halawani is one of the unfortunate Lebanese women whose husband got kidnapped. The details are that in September 24th 1982, Wadad was in her home in Ras al-Nabaa with her husband Adnan and their two children Ziad and Ghassan, when two civilians knocked on her door and after showing them their detective ids asked her husband to accompany them to the police station to be part of a car accident investigation. Adnan and Wadad were surprised specially that there was no car accident that involved any of them. The two men then threatened Adnan with guns they were carrying and forced him to go with them. After some time, when Adnan didn't return home, Wadad went to the police station in search for her husband, but no one had any idea about his whereabouts. She didn't realize then that that would have been the last time she sees her husband.(Halawani)

The story, however, does not end here. After going to the police station, Wadad found out that her case wasn't unique and there were other women searching for their husbands or sons or fathers or brothers. Wadad talked with them and they cooperated with each other in order to put more pressure on the government. (Halawani) And this was the beginning of what would be known in the future as "The Committee Of The Families Of The Kidnapped And Disappeared In Lebanon".

III A From the minute Wadad found out that there were others like her, she made a call on a local radio station and invited them to a meeting. Surprisingly hundreds of women responded to her call and hence the committee was formed in November 25th 1982 under the name "The Committee Of The Parents Of The Kidnapped In Lebanon". (archives) Their main goal was to find their husbands, sons, brothers or whomever they had lost and to have them back.

B The committee stayed like this until 1995 when it was changed to "The Committee Of The Families Of The Kidnapped And Disappeared In Lebanon". It is worthy of mentioning that the committee did not have a president and a vice president but all the members were equal in their rank. However last year it was officially accepted by the government, the thing that led to the necessity of electing a president and other members for the committee under the government's supervision which will happen in the next few months. (Halawani)

IV During its 18 years of existence, the committee has done a tremendous effort to find the kidnapped and disappeared and release them. However their most important achievement

was the "It Is Our Right To Know..." campaign. (Halawani) " We, the families of the kidnapped and missing, consider them alive until our government says otherwise. We want to know the fate of our loved ones, but the government has not conducted proper investigations to learn what came of this significant cross-section of its population. ("It Is Our Right To Know Their Fate") This was their general demand. Later on, on the 29th of October 1999, in order to "accomplish those wishes and to protect the dignity of our society" ("It Is Our Right To Know Their Fate") they listed their three demands on a petition addressed to the president of the republic Mr. Emil Lahoud (a copy of the letter is attached at the end of this document):

- 1.- The formation of an official investigative committee whose mission would be to find out what happened to all the kidnapped and missing on Lebanese soil and to announce its findings within less than a year of the date of its formation. ("It Is Our Right To Know Their Fate")
- 2.- The establishment of a social welfare program to meet the needs of the parents of kidnapped, protect them from the specter of hunger, unemployment and sickness, and guarantee them a respectable standard of living. ("It Is Our Right To Know Their Fate")
- 3.- The declaration of the 13th of April of every year as the "Day of Remembrance and the Kidnapped", and the building of a monument that commemorates the ordeal of the kidnapped and condemns war crimes. ("It Is Our Right To Know Their Fate")

The petition was signed by Lebanese people such as students, members of the committee political personalities and many others who support this cause. (Khalil 1)

Indeed, three months later, on the 21st of January 2000, they succeeded in getting their first demand come true when the Lebanese government formed an official fact-finding committee to investigate the whereabouts of those who were kidnapped during the war. (Halawani)

IV B
 “The Friends Of The Families Committee” is the union of all the people who are not related directly to a kidnapped or disappeared person but who support this cause and help the families’ committee. It had started to form slowly during the mid 90’s and it became “official” on the 29th of October with the launching of the campaign (Halawani) ~~by Mr. Albert Abi~~
~~Abi~~ (Khalil 1)

V
 From the very first day when the committee was founded the government did not pay any attention to their demands but after the huge pressure they exerted on it, on the 15th of May 1995 the government put a new law approved by the parliament (Halawani). This law was actually the ~~of~~ of and old law which says if a person’s relative has been kidnapped or disappeared for ten years, this person has the right to declare him as dead. The new version of the law only reduced that period from ten to four years (personal affairs/434, 15/5/1995). However this law was not made to help the parents whose goals had changed: they sought to prove that their relatives were alive, while their goal wasn’t only that, I was

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also to release them. This law had a hidden purpose in it: the committee had open one huge file concerning their cause which involved 17000 people. And since the kidnapped were of different sects and religions, accepting this law and acting by it would split this file into 17000 small ones which would be easy to handle by the government. (Halawani) But now, as we mentioned earlier they have been able to convince the government of investigating the whereabouts of these people.

This year the committee's efforts haven't stopped and they are starting to pay off.

Its activities are also many: from April 10 ,2000 till April 15 they had a busy week:

They organized a big exhibition at Zico's house in Beirut, where they showed pictures of the war and of the kidnapped people, there were also five documentary movies about their cause including interviews with parents and films about the war. Also on April 11, 2000 there was a meeting at the Press Syndicate where people from different _____ were present, and each gave his point of view about what to forget and what not to forget about the war . On the thirteenth there was a march at the Martyr's Square. The committee had also activities outside the capital such as a march in Saida and an exhibition in Tripoli.(Halawani) Not to forget the sit-in outside Cabinet headquarters in Mathaf every Wednesday at 4pm.(Khalil 2)

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