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Want to draw a crowd?☐ yes ☐ no**Lebanese news****Never-ending agony for families of war kidnap victims**[Ranwa Yehia](#)*Daily Star staff*

The war may be over, but for those people whose relatives were kidnapped and have not been heard of since the accomplishments of the past eight years are difficult to appreciate.

"People may be annoyed because we remind them of the war, especially with the arrival of a new president who has adopted the slogan of rule law above all. We tell them that we also want peace," said Wadad Halwani, whose husband Adnan was kidnapped in 1985.

Mrs. Halwani was speaking at a news conference Friday, which was attended by families who share the same plight, to appeal to the government not to forget their suffering.

The Families of Wartime Kidnapped Committee estimates that there are 17,000 people whose whereabouts are still unknown. Most of the missing were kidnapped by rival religious sects during the civil war, with some families saying they know who the kidnappers are.

A documentary entitled "Kidnapped" and directed by Bahij Hojeij was screened after the conference.

In a statement, Mr. Hojeij said that the film was one way of recording the testimonies of families who have waited too long for something to be done for them. "My only aim is to transport these images honestly and objectively so that we may never forget," Mr. Hojeij said.

In the film, 10 people speak of their plight and their lives since their loved ones were abducted. They express frustration at the lack of government attention to the issue and lament a 1995 law which allows relatives to register kidnapped people as deceased to facilitate inheritance procedures.

Sobhia Arzoun has never forgiven herself for sending her son, Imad, out to buy bread in 1982. The young man, who was 18 years old at the time, never returned. Although Mrs. Arzoun spent the rest of the war searching for her son, his fate remains a mystery. The last she heard was that he had been taken to an Israeli prison and she maintains that he is still held in Israel.

She does not want to register him as dead because that would be denying the crime committed against him.

"How can I kill my son? He's still alive, I know that. I never leave the house because I know one day he'll knock at the door and I will open it," Mrs. Arzoun said.

Mrs. Halwani, who has been active since her husband's disappearance, appears in the documentary in an office crowded with newspaper clippings she has been

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collecting since 1985. "This woman committed suicide one year after her 13-year-old son disappeared," she said pointing to a photograph. "I never expected her to do that as she was very involved in the activities to make the issue public, but on her son's birthday, she killed herself."

Majdi Geadeh was 16 in 1985 when his family received a call from a relative saying that his father, Kamal, and cousin, Semaan, had been kidnapped. "I know it has affected me. Sometimes, when I'm out with friends and we're laughing, I stop all of a sudden and blame myself for having fun," he said.

Although he had the opportunity to emigrate to Canada, Mr. Geadeh said he couldn't go. "How could I leave knowing that my father was somewhere in Lebanon?" he asked.

For Mrs. Halwani, the issue is essentially one of human rights. "The need for observation of human rights is as strong as the need for water and air and adopting and defending our rights is a responsibility and a way of life," she said.

She called on the new government to give the issue of the thousands of missing people the attention it deserved.

"We have already sent President Emile Lahoud a letter regarding the issue and we thank all the ministries that helped in providing for the needs of the families of the kidnapped," she said.

The only way the families will agree to the 1995 law is after proper investigation is made to find out the fate of their kidnapped relatives.

"I want to know where my father is. If he's dead, where is his body? Maybe it's buried under one of these new highways," Mr. Geadeh said.

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