



**It is our  
right  
to know**



with the support of:



**Join us to  
support the  
families of the  
Missing and  
Disappeared  
in Lebanon.**



Time  
doesn't heal  
all wounds.  
**KNOWING**  
does.

“  
**Several  
Thousand people  
are missing and  
forcibly disappeared  
in Lebanon.  
Most of them  
are civilians.**

”

## **Who are the Disappeared?**

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There are several thousand people who are missing and forcibly disappeared in Lebanon. The greater majority of them went missing during the Lebanese war (1975-1990) at the hands of Lebanese militias, as well as local and foreign armed groups. Disappearances continued to occur even after the war, but on a smaller scale, namely in the context of the presence of the Israeli occupation army and the Syrian army.

A missing person is someone who went missing during an armed conflict and/or a context of internal violence and whose relatives detain no information about his/her whereabouts.

A forcibly disappeared person is someone who is detained or kidnapped by the state or an armed group, in a manner that is illegal, and whereby the party responsible refuses to reveal any information about his/her fate and whereabouts, and as such, the victim is no longer protected by the law.

## **Why were people kidnapped?**

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- To exchange them for hostages detained by opposing groups.
- In exchange for ransom money.
- To create terror in the civilian population.
- To obtain personal or political gains or for personal motives (such as revenge).

In Lebanon most of the missing and disappeared are civilians. Many were kidnapped from their homes, from the streets, or at checkpoints controlled by militias or foreign troops.

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He was 12 years old  
when he was kidnapped...

No one ever  
saw them  
again...

She still does not know  
the whereabouts of her  
mother and sister...

”



Mother of a disappeared ( at the "tent of the disappeared", downtown Beirut)

## A few stories...

- **Simon Gadeah** was 24 years old when he was kidnapped on his way back home from work. He was volunteering for the Lebanese Red Cross and a student at the American University of Beirut.

- **Ali Hamadeh** was 12 years old and the only son of Nayfeh Najjar. Ali was kidnapped as he was returning from his grand-parents' village. His mother, Nayfeh, spent months looking for him. On the night of her son's 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary, she committed suicide.

- **Adnan Halwani**, 36 years old, was a history and geography teacher, and father of two sons. He was taken from his home and never returned.

- **Richard Salem**, 22 years old, and **Marie-Christine Salem**, 19 years old, were going from the office of their family enterprise to their home for lunch. They were with their uncle Georges, 75 years old. They left around 2:00 p.m. and were kidnapped along the way. No one ever saw them or Georges again.

- Afifeh Mahmoud: " I was not at home and when one of my sisters and I returned there, we found the house burned and my mother, **Terfi Mousa Huseyn**, and sister **Jamila**, who was 13 years old, were gone." Afifeh still does not know the whereabouts of her mother and sister.

“  
**The Lebanese state  
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graves across the  
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## The little we know about their fate...

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### In Lebanon

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The families of the thousands of missing and disappeared persons have no information as to their whereabouts or fate, or whether they are alive or dead.

- The Lebanese state acknowledged that there are many mass graves across the Lebanese territory, and named three of them: the Martyrs' cemetery in Horsh Beirut, Mar Mitr in Ashrafieh and the English cemetery in Tahwita.

To this day, the Lebanese state has not taken any steps to protect and guard these sites. To this day, they were neither opened nor were the remains buried in them exhumed.

- Occasionally, remains are found by coincidence (*on construction sites or archaeological sites*). But the Lebanese judicial authorities, which are responsible for the exhumation and identification of bodies, fail to disclose any information on the progress of their work and about what they do with the remains when these are found (*are they re-buried? are they placed in a laboratory for future analysis?*).

Lebanon has the capacity to exhume the human remains that are found and identify them.

- In 2005, the mass grave located on the grounds of the Ministry of National Defense in Yarzeh was opened. 18 bodies were identified through DNA analysis and returned to their families who buried them in dignity. Thus, the exhumation of all the mass graves that were recognized by the state, and the identification of the remains can be undertaken. So it is possible to address this issue if there is a political will to do so.

- In 2006, the remains of Michel Seurat (*a French researcher*) were found and identified and in 2009, those of Alec Colett (*a British journalist*) were also found and identified. Both were abducted in 1985. Their recovery was made possible thanks to the pressure of their respective governments.

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**Hundreds of people were transferred to Syrian prisons. The Syrian government never acknowledged their detention even though they released 150 of them.**

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### In Syria

During its presence in Lebanon, the Syrian army and the Syrian intelligence services, often with the help of its local allies, illegally detained people.

- Hundreds of these detained persons were transferred to Syria where they are being secretly detained. Family associations have documented over 600 such cases. Secret detention in this case means that the Syrian authorities deny the fact that these persons are detained in their prisons and their families have no information on their fate. That is why these victims are often described as forcibly disappeared in Syria.

- Family associations and NGOs have managed to gather strong evidence pointing to these people's detention, in addition to the testimonies of some former detainees who were released over the years from Syrian prisons.

- To date, the Syrian government has never acknowledged their detention, even though since 1998, more than 150 Lebanese detainees have been released from Syrian prisons.

- In 2005, a joint Lebanese-Syrian Commission was created with the mandate of investigating the Lebanese detainees and forcibly disappeared in Syria. The Lebanese members of this commission do not conduct any investigations.

They transmit the list of names of the Lebanese missing persons to their Syrian counterpart which is supposed to conduct the necessary investigations and yield answers as to their fate and whereabouts.

- Since 2005, the Syrian members only answered back about 2 cases: they claimed that the two persons had been sentenced to death. However, they failed to provide any further information, regarding the execution of the sentence or the location of their remains.

- Concerning all the other cases, including those whose detention in Syria is recognised by the Syrian authorities (*in official documents*), the Syrian members of the Committee declared to the Lebanese members that they did not know these persons.

### In Israel

During Israel's occupation of South Lebanon, hundreds of people were abducted by the Israeli army and its local allies and transferred into Israel.

- In recent years, several rounds of exchanges coordinated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have allowed the remains of most disappeared persons to be returned to their families. But there are still persons who have not been accounted for and are believed to have been disappeared at the hands of the Israelis or their local allies.

“

It is like I have  
been holding  
a burning coal  
in my hand.

We want  
to know.

”



Words of today...

- “My son’s disappearance is like I have been holding a burning coal in my hand. It’s been hurting me for 15 years, but I cannot let go of it.”

*(A mother of a disappeared).*

- “We are searching for a human being who has a name, who is of flesh and blood, who has a family. We will not give him up and we will keep fighting until we find him, and we will succeed, because we are armed with the right to truth and with hope.”

*(Wadad Halwani, president of the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon) .*

- “There is the possibility that there are forcibly disappeared people alive as detainees in Syria.”

*(Ghazi Aad, president of SOLIDE).*

- “The issue of not knowing then becomes inherited generation after generation. People want to know where they come from or what actually happened to them to build their own history; the grandson would like to know what happened to his grandfather. And when closure does not take place at the family level or community level, it will not take place at the country level. Then reconciliation is pretty much an enigma or outright impossible.” *(Jose Pablo Baraybar, international forensic expert).*

- “We need our parents and grandparents to talk.” *(M.A, 22 years old, Lebanese student).*

- “The Lebanon that we dream of does not have any mass graves.”

*(H.K, 34 years old, Engineer).*



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**Create a National Institute to conduct serious investigations and to exhume and identify remains found in mass graves.**

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## Solutions exist

### 1. What the families want.

**They want to know the truth about the fate and whereabouts of their relatives:**

- If they are alive, they want their release.
- If they are dead, they want their remains so that they may bury them in dignity and mourn over them.

### 2. Other country experiences prove to us that it is possible to address this issue.

- In Bosnia-Herzegovina, 13,809 bodies of persons accounted for as disappeared were returned to their families.
- In Morocco, the Institute that was created by King Mohammed VI as a result of civil society's pressure has uncovered the fate of 742 cases of disappearance.
- In Cyprus, 314 persons who disappeared during the conflict between 1963 and 1974, were identified through DNA identification process and returned to their families since 2007.
- In Spain, the generation of the grandchildren of the disappeared mobilized around the demand for their right to know. As a result of their efforts, a law was adopted whereby the State has the obligation to locate, exhume and identify the remains of the disappeared.

### 3. Action plan for Lebanon.

**Over the past few years, a number of ways to address the issue of the Missing and the Disappeared in Lebanon have been developed and put forth:**

- Create an exhaustive list of the disappeared and a national file of the families of the disappeared (including a DNA database) in order to prepare the ground for undertaking the identification of remains exhumed.
- Locate sites of mass and individual graves across the Lebanese territory; ensure their protection until they are opened, and exhume any remains found; carry out the identification of these remains in order to return them to their families, for a dignified and rightful burial.
- Conduct serious investigations to gather information about those who are believed to have been handed over to Syria or Israel and take the necessary steps in view of securing the release of persons who are alive and the return of remains of those who are deceased.
- Create a National Institute to manage and implement this plan.

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The more people support  
the cause, the more  
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## We can act

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Following pressure and lobbying by the family associations, local and international organizations, the successive governments have pledged in their ministerial statements to address the issue as well as the President of the Republic General Michel Sleiman, in his inaugural oath. To date no concrete steps have been taken.

The more people support the cause of the missing and disappeared, the more chances we have to see solutions implemented by the Lebanese authorities.

What you think of the plan of action and how to implement it matters. Your opinion matters to us. Your participation in calls for action, and your support to families of the missing and disappeared and their demand to know the truth, will push the decision makers to adopt these demands and work towards implementing them.

### For more information and to share your suggestions, contact us:

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- ACT for the Disappeared:  
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Adham Abi Farraj

**17,000  
are not petty change!**