

For immediate release

Lebanon: Ruling Aids Families of "Disappeared"

Government Should Provide Full Findings of Inquiry into War Era

BEIRUT November 4, 2009 – A decision by Lebanese judicial authorities is an encouraging first step toward recognizing the right of families of victims of enforced disappearances during the 1975-1990 war era to know what happened to them, five international human rights groups said today.

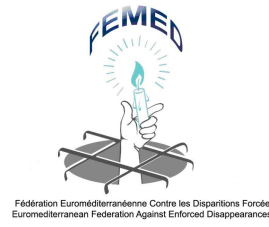
On October 23, 2009, the *Juge des Référés* (Judge of Summary Procedures of Beirut) issued a decision calling on the Council of Ministers' secretariat to provide the court with the unpublished full report and results of the investigations conducted by the Official Commission of Investigation into the Fate of the Abducted and Disappeared Persons in 2000. A lawyer for the families of the disappeared said the families will be able to see the report when it is handed to the court.

The groups called on the council's secretariat to comply with the order by providing copies of the report and its records to the court, and then publishing both. Until now, the government has only made public a three-page summary of the commission's work.

"Thousands of Lebanese have waited for more than a generation to find out what happened to their loved ones during the turmoil in their country. And this decision may finally allow the families to identify and seek official protection for mass graves sites," the International Center for Transitional Justice, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean's Federation Against Forced Disappearances said in a statement. "It paves the way for exhumations that could finally reveal the fate of missing loved ones."

The preliminary court decision came as part of a lawsuit filed on April 29, 2009 by two Lebanese Non-Governmental Organizations, the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon (CFKDL) and Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile (SOLIDE). The lawsuit aims to locate and protect the three mass graves mentioned in the three-page summary of the commission's findings, released in July 2000. The October 23 preliminary decision pertains to one of these sites, at the St. Demetrious Cemetery in Beirut, also known as Mar Mitr.

"The Council of Ministers secretariat should comply with this court order and show the families that the state of Lebanon is ready to assist them in bringing an end to their long search for information about their missing relatives," the rights groups said.



The government established the commission for a six-month term in January 2000, to investigate the fate of those who disappeared during the 1975-1990 war in Lebanon. It received 2,046 applications from families of victims. Its "summary report" said "bodies were discarded in different places in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, the North, Bekaa and the South; and some were buried in mass graves." It mentioned specifically three burial sites (the St. Demetrious Cemetery in Achrafieh, the Martyrs' Cemetery in Horsh Beirut and the English Cemetery in Tahwita), and reported that some bodies were thrown to the sea.

It concluded that all those missing for more than four years should be considered dead, and instructed the families to apply to the judicial authorities to register the death of their relatives. No measures have been taken to protect the sites of mass graves.

It is believed that 17,000 persons disappeared in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990. Families of the victims have been struggling to find out the fate of their relatives since the 1970s, in the absence of any concrete action by the Lebanese authorities.

Lebanon has signed, but not yet ratified, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Article 18 of the convention requires the release of basic information about persons who disappeared to their relatives and others with a legitimate interest in this knowledge.

Contact:

For the International Center of Transitional Justice,
Lynn Maalouf in Beirut (Arabic, English, French) lmaalouf@ictj.org + 961 3 447 039 (mobile)
Robert Ruby in New York (English) rruby@ictj.org +917.637.3845 + 410.807.2728 (mobile)

For Human Rights Watch,
Nadim Houry in Beirut (Arabic, English, French), +961-3-639244 (mobile)

For the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH),
Gael Grilhot, +33-1 43 55 90 19

For Amnesty International
Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

For the Euro-Mediterranean's Federation Against Forced Disappearances
Wadih Al-Asmar in Beirut (Arabic, English, French), + 961 70 950 780 (mobile)