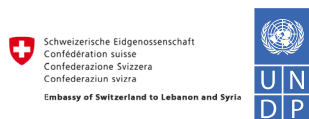


Dealing with the Past in Lebanon: Supporting the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared

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Introduction

It has been more than three decades since the end of the Lebanese 1975-1990 war, yet thousands of individuals remain missing or forcibly disappeared. Political will to address this problem remains a big obstacle that needs to be overcome. Additionally, to this day, there is no consolidated list of missing and forcibly disappeared individuals in Lebanon. Several civil society organizations have collected data over the years, but no systematic consolidation of this data has been carried out at the official level yet. The formal or official number that many refer to is the number that was published by the Lebanese government in a 1991 report estimating the missing and forcibly disappeared at 17,415 individuals (Huijgen and Touma, n.d.). Some civil society organizations are instead referring to the numbers of biological reference samples and individual ante-disappearance questionnaires collected by the International Committee of the Red Cross, respectively approximating 2,000 samples and 3,000 questionnaires (Bell, 2023).

Throughout the years, key actors that have been involved in data collection regarding the missing and the forcibly disappeared are the Committee of the Families of Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon (CFKDL), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), ACT for the Disappeared, UMAM for Documentation and Research, the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH), the Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile group (SOLIDE), and the Internal Security Forces. Several individuals and other organizations have complemented these data collection efforts with projects and programs tied to dealing with the past, the missing, and the forcibly disappeared in Lebanon, and building for lasting, permanent peace.

Keeping the unresolved issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared alive is critical to addressing the consequences of the war. Failing to deal with this issue has prevented healing for the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared, for individuals who were formerly missing or forcibly disappeared, for their communities, and for the society as a whole. This is especially important as the issue of the missing and the forcibly disappeared is cross-cutting and affects all levels and sectors of society. Healing, as such, is needed for the entire country to move forward.

Many successes and obstacles have punctuated the previous decades. The most notable achievements have been the creation of several civil society organizations advocating for the rights of the missing and the disappeared and their families, the persisting sense of ownership that

the families of the missing and the disappeared have had regarding this cause, and the innovative activism initiatives, such as the tent in the Gibran Khalil Gibran Public Park in 2005.

After decades of advocacy by the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared and support from civil society, the State Shura Council issued a decision acknowledging the right to know of families regarding their missing and forcibly disappeared loved ones in 2014 (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2014a). In 2018, continuous pressure from family members of the missing and forcibly disappeared, concerned individuals, and civil society organizations resulted in the passing of the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons (Law 105/2018). This was a breakthrough opportunity as it created a state-recognized mechanism for dealing with the past. Another major turning point was the actual creation of the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared in 2020.

Lasting obstacles include the passing of time, which diminishes hope in finding lost loved ones particularly as family members age and pass away; the death of perpetrators and witnesses that can provide vital information; scattered and non-unified data regarding those missing and forcibly disappeared; the scarcity of funding for this issue which has translated into an inability to provide psychological, medical, and legal support to the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared; and the amnesty law that was passed in 1991 at the end of the civil war which prevents holding perpetrators to account (although jurists consider disappearances to be a continuous crime, and, as such, exempt them from the law).

The role and mandate of the National Commission have also been challenged by the overlapping Lebanese political and economic crises which have limited the ability of the Commission to carry out its responsibilities and secure human and financial resources. This aspect will be further elaborated later in the paper. Activating the role and mandate of the National Commission is a priority as echoed by all interviewed informants due to the crucial leadership and investigative roles that the National Commission is entrusted with.

As such, this policy paper will focus on the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared, beginning with the exploration of the role and mandate of the National Commission as stated in the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons. This will be followed by an examination of the National Commission's application

of its role and mandate on the ground, focusing on data concerns, in particular, before ending with persisting challenges surrounding the issue of the missing and the forcibly disappeared and presenting policy recommendations to support the work of the National Commission and advance the cause at hand.

Methodology

In 2022, the Forum for Memory and Future (FMF), a national actor that is comprised of organizations and individuals working on dealing with the past, including on the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared, and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) embarked on a review of the progress made on the important case of the missing and the forcibly disappeared in Lebanon.

Desk research examined various academic articles and reports from diverse international and local organizations that have been working on the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared. This was supplemented by a roundtable that was held in December of 2022, which brought 20 stakeholders together around ‘The Issue of the Missing and the Disappeared in Lebanon: Past, Present, and Future Prospects’ to assess the progress that has been made to date, identify existing challenges, and pinpoint opportunities to overcome these challenges and support the efforts of concerned entities. The roundtable included members of the National Commission, representatives of specialized civil society organizations, parents of the missing and forcibly disappeared, activists, legislators, researchers, and international organization representatives.

The roundtable was followed by 23 key informant interviews (individual and group interviews) held with diverse stakeholders including commissioners, family members of the missing and forcibly disappeared, representatives from various political parties, human rights activists, the ICRC, youth and local actors concerned by this topic from different regions across Lebanon, and members of local and international civil society organizations working on the issue.

The process of developing this paper benefited from the valuable input and feedback from the FMF. A dedicated FMF sub-committee was consulted throughout all stages of the process. The resulting policy paper offers an overview of the issue and recommendations. It also informs the FMF and other stakeholders to engage on this important issue and support the mission and work of the National Commission.

While this paper has sought to be as inclusive as possible by adopting a wide consultative process, its main limitation remains the size of the sample of those interviewed, particularly family members of the missing and forcibly disappeared and political parties.

The National Commission's Role and Mandate According to Law 105/2018

The National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared was created through the passing of the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons (Law 105/2018). This law clearly states the role and mandate of the National Commission and details its powers.

The law enshrines the right to know; the right to equality and non-discrimination to be upheld by the National Commission, authorities, and other entities; the right of the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared to remain informed regarding the work of the National Commission and its progress; and the right to compensation based on a National Commission proposal made on a case-by-case basis to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Justice (Parliament of Lebanon, 2018).

The law also stresses the National Commission's independence. Articles 9 and 23 explicitly affirm its administrative and financial independence. Articles 9 and 11 stress its members' independence. This independence is further mentioned in Article 13, as part of the oath taken by the commissioners. Article 24 highlights the need to guarantee that any external support does not compromise the Commission's independence.

Furthermore, the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons underlines the need for authorities to provide the National Commission with information that they have regarding the missing and the forcibly disappeared, to collaborate with it as needed, and to refrain from influencing or obstructing truth-finding efforts (Touma and Zaghbour, 2020).

The National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared is composed of 10 members: 2 representatives of family members, 2 lawyers representing the bar associations of Beirut and Tripoli, 2 retired judges, 1 forensic doctor, 1 university professor, and 2 human rights activists. Nine out of ten members serve these roles voluntarily, while the National Commission's president is a full-time employee receiving monthly compensation. As such, the President of the National

Commission also cannot hold another job (Parliament of Lebanon, 2018). The other members of the National Commission are solely compensated for costs to attend sessions.

National Commission members are appointed through a decree by the Council of Ministers for non-renewable five-year terms. The Council of Ministers also appoints replacements to fill any vacancies that may occur. They are required to be Lebanese citizens for more than 10 years, in good standing with the law, older than 35 years of age, known for their independence, ethics, and integrity, and having 10 or more years of experience. They are extended immunity during their term. After being sworn in by of the Lebanese president, the 10 members elect a president, a vice president, secretary, and treasurer (Parliament of Lebanon, 2018).

According to Article 19 of the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons, National Commission members are expected to meet once per month. According to Article 15, their duties also include setting their Code of Conduct and Rules of Procedure within two months after being sworn in by the president of the republic. According to Article 20, they can create subcommittees to facilitate their work, as needed. According to Article 21, an administrative body headed by an executive director complements the work of the National Commission (Parliament of Lebanon, 2018)

In terms of resources, according to Article 24 of the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons, the National Commission is allocated an annual budget by the Council of Ministers and is allowed to accept donations from organizations, provided that they are approved through a ministerial decree and do not counter laws or infringe on the independence of the National Commission (Parliament of Lebanon, 2018).

Uncovering the fate of the missing and forcibly disappeared is done through a search process led by the National Commission. This process begins with the consolidation of lists of the missing and forcibly disappeared, garnered from all existing sources. It is also important for the National Commission to gather information regarding the events of disappearance, probable mass graves, potential detention places, and any available individual records, including medical information, eyewitness testimonies, and archival materials. The entirety of this collected data guides preliminary investigation efforts which include a context analysis.

Based on this data collection process, there are several actions that the National Commission can take, such as contacting individuals or authorities to coordinate further details, searching for bodies and recovering them, investigating matters while following international standards, and examining recovered remains to identify them by cross-checking details and available data. The actions taken will vary on a case-by-case basis. In certain circumstances where the process is complex and information is sparse, the National Commission may only be able to secure partial information on the fate of the missing and/or forcibly disappeared individual (Embassy of Switzerland in Lebanon and ICRC, 2022).

The National Commission receives tracing requests related to missing and forcibly disappeared individuals who were residents of Lebanon and who disappeared in Lebanon, regardless of their nationality (Parliament of Lebanon, 2018).

Persisting Challenges in Dealing with the Past

The Overlapping Economic and Political Crises in Lebanon

To begin with, the overlapping Lebanese economic crises and, more recently, the political void at the level of the Lebanese presidency, in addition to the Council of Ministers fulfilling a caretaker role, have negatively impacted the National Commission. The banking crisis and the depreciation of the national currency have not only devalued the annual budget that the National Commission should receive, but they have also delayed its ability to receive it and to create a bank account until mid-2023.

A caretaker government, in absence of a Lebanese president, has meant that vacancies within the National Commission cannot be filled, as these require a decree from the Council of Ministers, based on Article 16 of the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons. The selected new member(s) will also need to be sworn in by the president of the republic, according to Article 13 of the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons. Furthermore, it means that the National Commission is unable to receive external funding as the Council of Ministers might not be able to sign off on it, based on Article 24. As such, only indirect and non-financial support can be provided at this time.

The Voluntary Nature of the National Commission's Membership

Another economic challenge linked to the Lebanese crises is the voluntary nature of the positions held by members of the National Commission. The president of the National Commission is the only full-time employee receiving compensation, while the 9 other members are volunteers. Due to the economic hardships in Lebanon, these 9 individuals have had to juggle multiple responsibilities instead of being able to dedicate as much time as they would like toward the National Commission. Some have expressed the possibility of ensuring that all National Commission members receive some sort of remuneration, so that they are able to dedicate themselves more fully to their roles.

The Lack of a Headquarter Location for the National Commission

A third related challenge is that the National Commission still does not have a headquarter location or address that would enable it to receive mail or allow informants to deliver information. For the time being, the National Commission members have been meeting in cafes and other informal locations, as well as at the office of the Committee of the Families of Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon, which also has limited financial resources.

Besides the economic difficulty of securing headquarters for the National Commission, interviewed members stressed the need for this location to have certain specifications. For instance, it needs to be in an isolated location that guarantees privacy for informants. It also needs to be secured physically in terms of protecting the data that it would house, particularly as it was foreseen that there would come a time when all collected data across the past decades would be handed over to the National Commission.

Staffing and Membership Challenges

Lack of access to funds has also meant that the National Commission has been unable to hire the administrative body that should assist it in its work, including staff to manage the institution, oversee the data management process, maintain the website, and upload key documents onto it, as well as assist in the organization of outreach initiatives and events to raise the public's awareness regarding the issue.

Moreover, some members of the initially appointed National Commission in 2020 resigned early on, leading to delays in the process of working on the Code of Conduct and on the bylaws for a period of

time. Currently, two National Commission members are still missing and need to be appointed by the Council of Ministers. Political circumstances and the presidential void have further stalled their appointment and confirmation.

The Development of Internal Bylaws and a Code of Conduct

At the time of writing in early 2023, National Commission members informed us that they had completed their internal regulations, administrative and financial bylaws, Code of Conduct, and strategic three-year planning for the Commission. Moreover, they have been focusing on building these solid foundations for the National Commission members that would serve a term following them. Many members of the commission were adamant about the need to build internally before reaching out to the public at large. They did hold a press conference in December 2022 to address the public and the families of the missing and to discuss their mandate, work, and challenges.

The Risk of Loss of Institutional Memory

Because members of the National Commission serve a 5-year non-renewable term as noted earlier, an important and prevalent challenge is the risk of loss of institutional memory. So far, the members of the Commission have received training particularly from the ICRC regarding important aspects of their work and roles. It is concerning that this training might not be passed on to future National Commission members. Moreover, training requires financial and time resources. With such financial resources not necessarily being available to extend training to each incoming National Commission, there is likely to be time lost, which is a big concern, as every day that passes translates into a potential loss of evidence and an inability to reach the truth.

The Inability of the National Commission to Store Data at Present

Many individuals and entities feel uncertain about the National Commission and its capacities, mainly because of the lack of interaction with it, the limited information available about it, and the challenges it is facing. It might be difficult for the National Commission to reach a point where it would act as a hub for all collected data as long as its capacities remain limited. There is a need for specific conditions to be maintained to protect data and biological samples, something that remains far from achievable. This would require access to continuous

streams of electricity and room temperature requirements. Even if the National Commission reached a point where its situation improved, a risk analysis should be conducted according to experts interviewed to determine if it is safe for the data to be stored by the National Commission, even with the possibility, for example, of the ICRC keeping a copy of this data, given the current political and economic circumstances.

Scattered Data and the Need to Unify and Cross-Tabulate Data

Data, in itself, has many problematic elements. To begin with, all interviewed informants agreed to the need to unify data to avoid duplication and to cross-tabulate it for ease of access. They also perceived the ICRC as the most competent authority to carry out this work due to lack of capacity at present in the National Commission. Currently, the ICRC, UMAM for Documentation and Research, ACT for the Disappeared, the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH), the Internal Security Forces, and the Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile group (SOLIDE) were determined by the authors to have data related to the missing and forcibly disappeared. Some political parties also maintain their own list of missing and forcibly disappeared individuals belonging to their parties. SOLIDE's data has unfortunately been deemed inaccessible by most interviewed informants following the passing of Ghazi Aad, who managed the data (Amnesty International, 2016).

Challenges Pertaining to ICRC Data Collection

Interviewed organizational representatives have shared that their data is mostly qualitative in nature, focused on interviews with family members of missing and forcibly disappeared individuals. The ICRC specified that it was working on collecting ante-disappearance data by developing an individual sheet of information pertaining to each missing or forcibly disappeared individual following interaction with family members of missing and forcibly disappeared individuals. These sheets are based on 60 questions asking family members about their recollection of events, the victim's whereabouts, demographic information when they went missing or disappeared, what the victim was wearing, and so on.

The Covid-19 pandemic halted the ICRC's efforts, forcing them to stop data collection in 2019, but they resumed their work in this regard in 2022 with a prioritization of family members who are older

in age and therefore making the evidence more at-risk when it comes to the passage of time. There are currently close to 3,000 individual information sheets collected by the ICRC. Biological samples have also been collected in the past and preserved according to specific scientific guidelines including fixed temperature; they were also handled and are protected according to international standards.

Difficulty of Reaching the Lebanese Diaspora to Collect Data

A linked issue to data is mass migration during and after the civil war, creating difficulty to identify and reach diaspora members to collect the data that they may have about missing relatives. Around 600,000-900,000 Lebanese left Lebanon during the 1975-1990 war (Murphy, 2006). Many of the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared have gone abroad without providing the data that they have to civil society organizations or to the ICRC, noting that these entities have collected locally and nationally. As such, it remains important to consider how diaspora-related data can be collected.

Keeping the Issue Alive

Unresolved issues remain in addressing the fate of the missing and forcibly disappeared. Keeping the issue alive is one of the main problems for several reasons:

- there is still no decision with regard to advancing a multinarrative approach to the history of the civil war, as the Taif Agreement had stated that a national unified narrative should be adopted: ‘The curricula shall be reviewed and developed in a manner that strengthens national belonging, fusion, spiritual and cultural openness, and that unifies textbooks on the subjects of history and national education.’
- there is not enough introduction of younger generations to the consequences of the civil war and to the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared at the national level, despite efforts by civil society organizations, and
- there is a tendency toward secrecy in some families and towns across Lebanon as a result of the absence of serious reconciliation processes at the national level.

While there are many initiatives by CSOs and academia endeavoring to keep the issue alive, more work by CSOs and official institutions is needed, particularly in terms of reaching remote regions and the diaspora.

Furthermore, several informants stressed that the media only seems to focus on the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared as we get closer to April 13, which corresponds to the date of the start of the 1975-1990 war. Another relevant date for media activity linked to the missing and forcibly disappeared is August 30, the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. The problem with solely focusing on these two dates is that ongoing and creative efforts to keep the issue alive are either not highlighted at all or insufficiently covered.

Humanizing Families of the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared and Supporting Them

Humanizing the families was another concern, as some informants felt that the families of the missing and the forcibly disappeared have been mostly approached by individuals and the media to gather their story and have otherwise been forgotten. Many family members bear emotional and psychological difficulties due to the trauma of the civil war, and of having a missing or disappeared individual without however having access to psychological, medical, recreational, or legal support (Legal Action Worldwide, 2021).

Lasting Impact of the General Amnesty Law Passed in 1991

Following the end of the 1975-1990 Lebanese war, a General Amnesty Law was passed in 1991. This law pardoned the political crimes committed by leaders and fighters before March 28, 1991 (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2014b). As a result of this law and of the discussions leading up to the creation of the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared, it was conceptualized as a truth-finding body in its nature, meaning that its mandate is focused on finding the truth about what happened to the missing and forcibly disappeared. It cannot prosecute perpetrators or individuals for crimes committed in the past (i.e., during the civil war), but it can pursue witnesses who withhold the truth or who willingly misinform it.

Child Trafficking During and After the Civil War

Concerning child trafficking, since the 1960s, close to 10,000 children have been trafficked outside of Lebanon (Varzi, 2016). As the children trafficked during the civil war grew up, they became aware that they had been trafficked out of the country and began the arduous process

of searching for their families. They have also been pushing to be considered as missing and forcibly disappeared individuals, and therefore potentially fall under the mandate of the National Commission in hopes of being reunited with their families. A discussion on this issue is needed at multiple levels. In particular, the Commission is advised to examine this topic in its different aspects and determine whether or not to take it on, given that it is a consequence of the war.

The Controversy Surrounding Mass Graves

Throughout the years, the issue of mass graves has been controversial for several reasons. Key contentious problems linked to mass graves pertain to their undisclosed locations and to the different views held by the general public regarding whether to open them, examine the remains, and match them to data samples, or to keep them sealed off and refrain from ‘troubling the dead’ (Waddell, 2018). While the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons mandates the Commission to excavate mass graves and exhume remains, divergent views remain regarding their opening, the process, the timing, and the impact.

Another concern related to mass graves is how to determine whether unidentified remains belong to missing and forcibly disappeared individuals, especially in light of the incompleteness of data relevant to all the missing and forcibly disappeared (Lebanon Memory Archive, n.d.). As such, mass graves remain a very political and sensitive topic that the research and many interviewees point to as a continuing challenge.

Protecting Informants to Come Forward with Information

Individuals who were politically affiliated during the civil war have sensitive information that they are currently unwilling to divulge even to the National Commission due to fears of a social backlash against them and their families. While the Law on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons addresses this issue, there is a need for the Commission to move ahead with developing a solid witness protection program, learning from other countries to protect informants and urging them to come forward with information.

During interviews with political party representatives, they stressed the need for creating a witness protection program, which would contain elements inspired by international examples. This program

would focus on protecting the informants themselves, as well as their families, and should include both perpetrators and witnesses. The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) can help with this matter. A survey could be created and implemented to seek informant input on elements that would increase their sense of safety and encourage them to come forward with the information that they have.

Forcibly Disappeared Individuals in Syrian Prisons

Finally, reaching a resolution regarding forcibly disappeared individuals in Syrian prisons has been difficult. This is due to the current political situation with Syria and the breakdown of relations between the Lebanese and Syrian governments. This lack of communication and cooperation has translated into an inability to bring back forcibly disappeared individuals in Syrian prisons.

Overall, forcibly disappeared individuals in Syrian prisons and their families have the right to receive reparations. They must be included in the work of all actors working on the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared.

Policy Recommendations

Outreach Needs

Family Members

While the National Commission is strained for resources and building on the press conference it organized in December 2022, it is important to keep the outreach ongoing towards family members of the missing and forcibly disappeared. Given the advanced age of some family members, this outreach can be accomplished through collaborations with civil society organizations working on the issue. For example, national and local events can be organized to spread awareness on the subject, highlighting the existence of the National Commission and its role, as well as the ways in which it can assist them. Here, specialized civil society organizations can help devise a collaboration strategy pertaining to this need and to the data they possess on family members.

Developing a Targeted Communication Strategy

A point related to outreach is the need to develop a communication strategy for the National Commission to reach and inform the general public. While the National Commission has already been working on

such a strategy internally, it would be useful for it to receive a consultancy from an expert in these topics that could assist it in developing a more audience-targeted and goal-targeted strategy, which determines key audiences to be reached on each social media platform and ways of approaching these audiences.

Informants highlighted the power of storytelling when it comes to spreading awareness around the topic. This is another area of training and support that could be offered to National Commission staff. Concerned civil society groups working together could pool their digital marketing and presence expertise to assist with the training and to help with the interim elaboration of posts until the National Commission has the ability to recruit for this position. Having the support and presence of the National Commission members during different events surrounding the issue and incorporating an introduction into the National Commission and its work are other essential elements that need to be streamlined across the efforts and initiatives of concerned civil society organizations.

Collaborating with the Media

It is important to continue outreach efforts to remote regions and to younger generations by either going to the regions or organizing online events. Continued memorialization events are also needed. Focusing on international days remains needed; however, building a narrative around the issue being discussed is also essential. The best way to approach this would be to map out allies in the media. These are journalists, TV anchors, and public figures who have been allies and advocates of the missing and forcibly disappeared. Keeping a running list of their names would help shed light on events prior to their occurrence, so that they can schedule them into their publication deadlines and cover them.

It would be beneficial to hold a regular meeting with these media allies and to communicate a monthly or yearly schedule of events, including international days and more national and local initiatives, to ensure that all events are adequately covered. This is where concerned social society organizations can help with the elaboration of this schedule and with the mapping of key media personalities and allies. Another useful element would be to introduce universities with journalism and media departments and majors to the issue.

Collaborating with Municipalities to Raise Awareness

Families of the missing and forcibly disappeared should remain active and engaged as well, with municipalities receiving training around the issue and being encouraged to develop their own programs surrounding it in consultancy with concerned civil society organizations. These organizations could help develop a program handbook and guidelines, as well as templates for municipalities, to implement their own awareness raising events around the issue. Collaboration with municipalities suspected to have mass graves in their area is particularly important.

Outreach to Policymakers and Religious Leaders

Concerned civil society organizations can assist the National Commission in determining key political party focal points regarding dealing with the past and the issue of the missing and the forcibly disappeared, to begin lobbying efforts through the National Commission with policymakers and to discuss sensitive topics such as mass graves. The same applies to religious leaders, particularly knowing their continued ability to influence individuals, communities, and political party leaders as well as the high regard they have in Lebanese society.

Capacity Building of the National Commission**Addressing the Difficult Work Conditions of the National Commission**

In light of the concurrent Lebanese crises, it is important to continue building the capacity of Commissioners and to reconsider their work conditions, particularly when it comes to budget and resources, to allow them to perform their mandate. Concerned parties and relevant authorities must strive to ensure convenient work conditions for the National Commission, in tune with changing circumstances.

Ensuring Continuity of Knowledge

At the end of their 5-year term, each National Commission member should strive to create a handover document that would inform incoming members about progress, challenges, resources, and key areas of training, as well as lessons learned. Supporting civil society organizations can assist with elaborating the structure of these handover documents in collaboration with the National Commission.

It is also critical to ensure that all National Commission documents are uploaded onto its website for the sake of transparency, continuity, and access to information. This has not been done so far due to funding

and staffing constraints. Concerned civil society organizations can provide the expertise and assistance with this point until the National Commission has the adequate human and financial resources to be able to carry this out on its own.

Preserving Institutional Memory

Commissioners have had the opportunity to learn from international examples through a visit to Colombia. Such opportunities and other capacity-building experiences should be repeated to learn from other cases and extended to new commissioners. One additional recommendation regarding sustainability and continuity could be the extension of the term of half of the commissioners in a way that overlaps with the term of new commissioners.

Contributing to Memorialization

A monument should be co-created with formerly disappeared individuals and the families of those who are still missing and forcibly disappeared to commemorate all the missing and forcibly disappeared in a way through which meaning is co-created rather than imposed. Such a memorial should contribute to keeping the memory of the missing and forcibly disappeared alive.

Training National Commission Members and Technical Staff

A recommendation would be to allocate part of the yearly budget of the National Commission to funding training for its members and technical staff. This monetary amount can be determined by the National Commission in collaboration with concerned civil society organizations, which can facilitate or support such training. The provision of funding for this end may require an amendment through a decree by the Council of Ministers, but it would be easier and more sustainable to use part of the yearly budget than to seek external grants approved yearly. In the event that this is difficult to realize, groups working on the issue could elaborate online training modules, each centered on a specific training topic linked to the issue of the missing and the forcibly disappeared and essential for National Commission members to carry out their work. This would be developed in conjunction with current National Commission members and would be required of incoming National Commission members to complete.

Training CSO Members

It is also essential to extend training to CSO members so that they are well-versed on how to support the work of the National Commission. As the Commission currently does not have staff, training priorities should target CSO members who have expertise on the issue of the missing and the forcibly disappeared and who are working on this issue to support the Commission. CSO members who may not have expertise, but who would like to help, should also receive appropriate training.

Data Collection

Interviewed informants believe that the ICRC is the most credible and capable entity to lead on the process of data collection unification and cross-tabulation, until the National Commission is able to do so. Trained field officers from various civil society organizations could assist the ICRC by providing lists of contact information for families of the missing and forcibly disappeared that they possess after seeking these families' consent to have their information shared with the ICRC. Alternatively, the ICRC could train field officers to assist the National Commission to gather information through their questionnaire and could have them gather this information in the regions which they cover and where they have already developed ties with the local communities. Seeking municipal support in this regard is important and would ease the process of data consolidation.

The National Commission could assist by reaching out to the Internal Security Forces, the Ministry of Defense, and other relevant ministries to solicit the reports and documents that they have regarding the missing and the forcibly disappeared that could assist with the above task. This could include war-time government agencies' intelligence reports.

Diaspora Outreach

It is important to gather information from members of the diaspora. The National Commission could do so through an outreach program engaging Lebanese embassies, consulates, and clubs abroad through the foreign ministry, and in collaboration with the ICRC in those countries, to collect data and develop an individual sheet of information pertaining to each missing and forcibly disappeared individual in line with the ICRC's current data collection efforts in Lebanon.

Other Important Recommendations

The Protection and Exhumation of Mass Graves

The Commission is advised to develop and implement a coordinated national strategy and campaign regarding mass graves that is inclusive of all stakeholder voices. This is not just related to what should be done in regard to mass graves, but also in terms of what can and should be communicated regarding them to the general public. This work should begin as soon as possible, given the continued potential loss of mass grave sites due to road building and real-estate project development. It is recommended that specialized CSOs and international organizations working on the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared are included by the Commission throughout this process. These CSOs could also support the Commission in advocating and implementing this strategy and the related campaign.

Child Trafficking

The National Commission, in collaboration with concerned civil society groups, should discuss the difficult issue of children who were trafficked abroad during and after the civil war, extending the status of missing and forcibly disappeared to those children, and brainstorming ways of assisting them. This could include the development of a separate database of children who were missing or forcibly disappeared.

Support the Formerly Disappeared and their Families

Relatives of missing and forcibly disappeared individuals as well as formerly missing and forcibly disappeared individuals themselves are very vulnerable groups of society, given the disproportionate impact that the war had on them. This is not only because of the psychological and emotional impact they have endured for years to come, but also because of the economic losses they have incurred and the opportunities they have missed. It is as such imperative for the National Commission to outline a strategy to seek the assistance of the Lebanese government in supporting individuals belonging to these groups financially, legally, but also medically. Equally important is the need for the Lebanese government to recognize the hardships of formerly missing and forcibly disappeared individuals, to acknowledge their needs, and to extend help to them. Creating a specialized unit within the National Commission to assist in this regard may be advisable.

Support the National Commission's Implementation Work

The National Commission, in collaboration with concerned civil society organizations, should strive to build a coalition of support for its work. This begins through the mapping and development of an exhaustive list of civil society organizations working on the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared and of funders and funds dedicated to dealing with the past and/or the issue of the missing and the forcibly disappeared. This is helpful, as well, in attempting to secure additional funding to support the work of the Commission, especially at a time when government resources are very limited and are likely to remain so for the coming few years.

Facilitating or Mediating Dialogue and Efforts among Political Parties

Interviews conducted with political party representatives stressed their parties' willingness to collaborate with the National Commission while highlighting the need to coordinate efforts. The National Commission can play a facilitator or mediator role to this end, allowing for more dialogue and synergy between political parties, as well as enabling joint brainstorming to increase unity and address key themes and topics that must be addressed in relation to the missing and forcibly disappeared.

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