

For Immediate Release



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**Panel discussion at AUB on “The Disappeared of the Civil War in Lebanon:
The Price of Forgetting and the Absence of Post-Conflict Justice”**

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB) organized a panel discussion entitled "The Disappeared of the Civil War in Lebanon: The Price of Forgetting and the Absence of Post-Conflict Justice".

The deliberations covered the topic of the disappeared of the war, from the different legal, political and social perspectives.

Participants included author and political activist Dr. Lyna Comaty, Head of the Committee for the Families of the Kidnapped and the Disappeared in Lebanon Widad Halawani, lecturer and researcher at Saint Joseph University and AUB Dr. Carmen Abu Joudeh, lawyer and executive director of the legal agenda Nizar Saghieh. The panel was moderated by the researcher and coordinator of the "Civil Society Actors and Policy-Making" program at the Issam Fares institute Fatima Al-Moussawi.

The panel was introduced with a welcoming speech by Fatima Al-Moussawi, who said that the Lebanese popular uprising demanded many judicial, political and social reforms, and rejected all the practices that followed the Lebanese civil war. These practices destroyed the Lebanese, economically, socially, politically, but not by violence. In light of this she said, the issue of the forcefully-disappeared must be positioned on the popular demands map and knowledge must be obtained on how to interpret it through the current political and social developments.

The panel started with Dr. Comaty, who read an excerpt from her book "The Transitional Phase Post-Conflict in Lebanon: The Disappeared of the Civil War", during which she touched on the issue of the disappeared in Lebanon during the past ten years. She noted that during the "post-war Lebanon" period, the issue of disappeared persons entered a transitional period between two states, as it was not ignored but was not resolved in thirty years. Indeed, the Lebanese state embraced the issue, but the practices of the Lebanese sectarian political system hindered its

solution. Speaking of the current period, Dr. Comaty said that the October 17 Revolution held the keys to the solution of a series of problems that had been neglected since the Taif Accord, including rebuilding the national memory and revealing the fate of the disappeared. She added that "the revolution also calls for political change in depth" as, according to the National Charter and the Taif Agreement, the political sectarianism is a transitional period that we must seek to abolish, and this abolition will announce the beginning of the solution to the issue of the disappeared after thirty years.

For her part, Wadad Halawani started her speech by asking two questions: "How did we manage to convert the issue of kidnapping and concealing people during the Lebanese civil war to an issue? How did we manage to maintain it "effectively" and within one framework that brought together different parties, politics, sects, religions and all "infectious diseases" in our country causing the current situation?"

Halawani explained that the Lebanese authorities refused to reveal the fate of the disappeared persons, using flawed arguments that changed with each political stage, one of these flawed arguments being that searching for them may ignite the civil war again, or that the priority is to fight Israel, or that the Syrian hegemony prevents the opening of this file.

Halawani also asserted that there was a meeting between the demands of the families of the disappeared and the demands of the October 17 uprisings. She said: "We called on the current government to include the implementation of the law of the disappeared persons, which was passed 14 months ago, as this law will guarantee the foundations for the establishment of the state and the achievement of civil peace."

Saghieh talked about the legal effort that has been exerted so far, noting that when the Amnesty Law was passed in 1990, the concept of transitional justice was not present in public discourse and the unforgivable crimes according to this law were limited to those committed against political leaders only, which paved the way for the current system that is led by six sect leaders, and which is based on spoil-sharing and corruption.

He also referred to the issue of exhuming the mass graves that are spread across all of the Lebanese territory, saying that what prevented the search for these graves was that former warlords and current leaders fear that the horror of these graves would shake their positions and their image amongst their followers.

Saghieh added: "Today, with the bankruptcy of the country, we see with the naked eye the same hideousness that exists in the graves, how they caused the Country to fall in bankruptcy to enrich themselves, and enhance their wealth and their leadership. This is why there is great similarity between the rights of the families of the disappeared to know what happened to them and what

the October 17 revolution aims to achieve. i.e. bringing to account those who stole, and recovering the stolen money. We are not sure that we will be able to recover the stolen money and we are not sure that we will know the fate of the disappeared, but we are sure that the resistance that started with the families of the disappeared will continue with us all. "

Dr. Carmen Abu Joudeh said: "Through the October 17 Revolution, we must have the courage to acknowledge that the current political system will not solve the issue of the disappeared, so this issue should be the criterion on which we depend on, in the path towards civil peace, a state of law, justice and fairness to the victims of disappearances.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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