A Quarter Century after the End of the Civil War:
Did we turn a new page?
Carmen Abou Jaoude, Fabrizio Carboni and Wadad Halwani
April 8, 2015

Summary by Hrag Bakalbashian

As Lebanon commemorates the 25th anniversary of the end of its civil war, the debate on dealing with Lebanon’s past is still present. With that in mind, IFI held a symposium within the general framework of transitional justice. This symposium was moderated by Mr. Fateh Azzam, the director of AUB's Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship; he tackled the issues of history and collective memory of the civil war, and highlighted the argument revolving around the absence of a cohesive history of the war in Lebanon – which perpetuates the open wounds of war that have not yet healed.

The first part of the panel was presented by Ms. Carmen Abou Jaoude, the director of the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) in Lebanon – where she focused on the research findings of their center and put forward an argument highlighting the importance of teaching the history of the war to the youth in order to avoid repeating it in the future. She presented a brief introduction about transitional justice and explained under what circumstances transitional justice can be practical and in which ways it can be applied to the Lebanese context. The title of the symposium, which questions if Lebanon has been able to turn
a new page, is central to the work of the ICTJ. However an emphasis was made on the vitality of justice and holding the militias that played a major role in the war responsible.

The Second part of the panel, by Mr. Fabrizio Carboni, head of the ICRC delegation to Lebanon, focused on the humanitarian side of the war and its consequences on the public, specifically in connection to the case of the abducted and the missing. “When he comes back ask him to come knock on my grave and say hi”. Carboni started his presentation with this quote, which is an excerpt of one of many statements from interviews with families of those who disappeared in the war. He described how the ICRC is active in following up on this cause and then described the strategies they are applying in order to achieve progress in the issue of the abducted. He emphasized some of the challenges that they are confronting and he censured several problems specifically within public institutions and also mentioned the lack of awareness about the topic within the Lebanese community, concerning the dispute of the interpretations of the past, in addition to the collective memory of the Lebanese civil war.

The third panel speaker was Ms. Wadad Halwani, the chairperson of the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and the Disappeared. In her presentation, Halwani showed disappointment in the failed promises of all previous governments to form special commissions that give importance and priority to their struggle, but on the contrary the government did not comply. She then criticized the current Minister of Interior and Municipalities of Lebanon because the legalization of the special commission is dependent on their approval. Halwani stated that their committee and the families don’t want to castigate the present political elites; they just want to know what happened to their loved ones and get the perpetrators to acknowledge that.
The panel was concluded by IFI Director Dr. Tarek Mitri. He described from personal experience how the Lebanese civil war was brutal and violent. He then moved to discuss the politicization of the work on finding the fate of the disappeared as it traces back to the different political parties whose interests do not concede with such a cause. To further explain this argument, Mitri made a comparative review between different states dealing with criminals of war, such as Libya, Iraq, and some Latin American states in a way to explain how the Lebanese government has neglected the issue of the abducted, at the end. Mitri expressed his backing and support to the families of the abducted, furthermore he invigorated the work of the committee and gave the floor to the audience to raise questions and comments.