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## PRESS RELEASE

### Clarifying the Fate of the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared in Lebanon – Launch of EU funded programme

"ACT for the Disappeared" in partnership with "ABAAD- Resource Center for Gender Equality" and the "Legal Agenda" today launched a programme that will inform and engage families of missing and forcibly disappeared in Lebanon to advocate for their 'right to know' and to make their voices heard by decision makers.

Alexis Loeber, Head of the Cooperation Section of the EU Delegation to Lebanon, summed up the main motivation of the initiative by highlighting that "behind each and every one of the thousands of victims stand their loved ones, a family, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters and friends alike. They have not stopped seeking answers."

Over the last years, civil society organizations as well as some families of the missing and forcibly disappeared have been actively advocating for actions that would help clarify the fate of their loved ones. "Remaining in uncertainty, it appears almost impossible for victims' families to leave the past behind and face the future", Loeber highlighted.

While progress has recently been achieved on this issue through the State Council's (*Shura* Council) recognition of the 'right to know' and the submission of a draft law aiming at establishing a commission to uncover the fate of the disappeared, public awareness of these developments and its implications is rather low.

The EU-funded programme will facilitate the creation of a nation-wide network of families of the disappeared and will provide them with a platform for expressing their views to the public. To this end, ACT will organize information meetings for the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared in five regions in Lebanon. Following the information meetings, group discussions with the mothers and wives will be held to share experiences.

"Women are most deeply affected by the disappearance. They are those who were left behind to bear the socio-economic and psycho-emotional burnt of enforced disappearance. Women are also those who transform their personal anguish and sufferings into courage and determination to sustain the arduous struggle for truth", said ABAAD.

According to ACT for the disappeared, "It is essential, for the legitimacy of any process to deal with the issue of the disappeared, that the families across Lebanon are involved in its formulation and that policies are adopted in line with their needs and concerns".

Likewise, ACT will gather information that can help identify potential locations of mass graves, and develop hypotheses pertaining to the possible identity of victims. "This research project aims at

preparing the ground for an official State-created mechanism in charge of investigating the fate of the disappeared", ACT said.

In parallel, the project will support the families' associations in an ongoing judicial process, which was initiated in 2009. The objective is to lead to a judicial decision that recognizes the existence of mass graves and protect them in view of their future exhumation. "After the historic ruling of Lebanon's State Council on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014, it has become ever more important to locate the existence of mass graves in the country and to protect them through the judiciary. The judiciary is an indispensable platform to enshrine the right of the families of the disappeared to know, as it has been recognized by the State Council earlier this year" said The Legal Agenda.

### **Upcoming activities**

ACT, in collaboration with ABAAD- Resource Center for Gender Equality and the Legal Agenda, will hold information meetings with the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared in five regions in Lebanon: Chouf, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, Tyr and Tripoli. The first information meeting was held in Shatila camp and two others are planned for September 13 in Tripoli and September 17 in Tyr.

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