

AL - MUNTADA

The Middle East Council of Churches

August 2021



B e f o r e



a f t e r



Beirut, in the Heart of the Church

Beirut, a City of Resurrection



HH Pope Tawadros II

Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark



One Year Post-Explosion...?

A whole year has passed since the unfortunate event, the massive Beirut port explosion, our beloved Lebanese capital, on August 4, 2020, after flammable chemicals were stored there for a long time with no precautions. The terrifying picture we saw on TV made our hearts sink... At the time, we considered it a horrific crisis and incident that would bring people together and unify hearts to face this disaster with all its humanitarian, social, economic and life dimensions. Peoples have always united in the face of disaster, hoping to get out of it with the strength and determination... We hoped and prayed for Lebanon to get back on its feet and rise healthy and strong to restore its glory, history and present in the hope of a better future for all its children...Unfortunately, as the Arab proverb says, not all the wishes can be fulfilled, nor the ties serve the purpose of the ship. Days and weeks have passed, and the year came to an end. The disaster led to crises, hopes collapsed, and frustration and despair crept into the hearts of people in Lebanon and abroad.

Individualism, subjectivity, and personal interests have prevailed, while cooperation, united work, and putting the interest of the nation first became lost values... Social

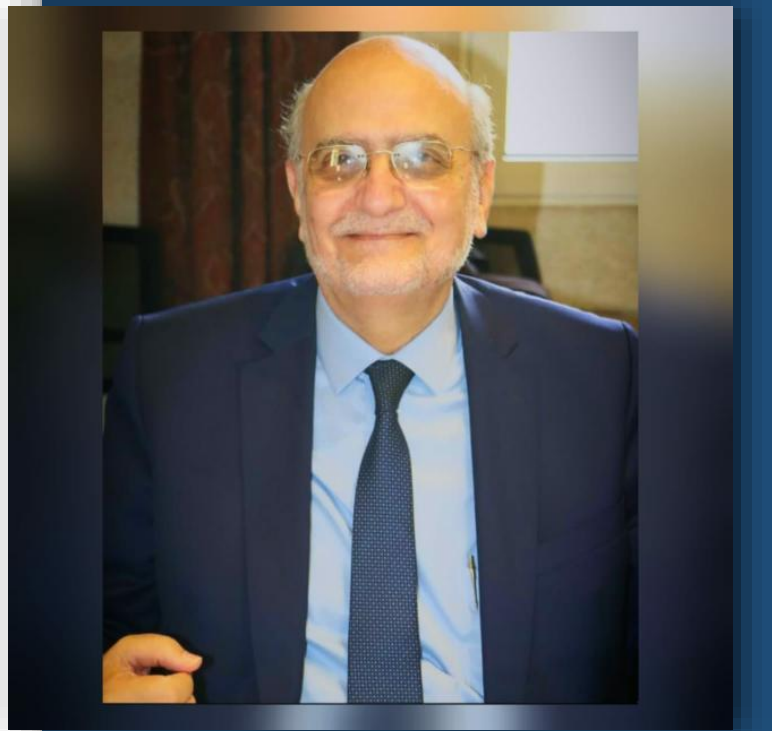
Groups, sects and religions are still competing with each other while the country breaks and bleeds in silence...My beloved brothers and sisters of Lebanon, our life is nothing but a spot of steam that would appear for a little while and then vanishes... but you own this life. Look at your sons, daughters, and children. Look at your future, your dreams, and the longings of your hearts. Look at the tired and heavy laden, whom no one remembers.

Please unite in good so your country would go back to being shining, brilliant, successful, and distinguished. Our fingers differ in shape, position and ability, and their capabilities vary... But they unite in work, beauty, and creativity... This is the Lord's lesson for every one of us...Differ as you wish, but unite under the higher interest of the nation, as one opinion, one soul, and one love for this beautiful country...

I am writing to you praying with all my heart for your unity. The time for division and partisanship is over. Rise and take responsibility, and May God grant you His peace and strength, so that you may be successful in your good work.

Dr. Michel Abs

Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches



Killing a safe people...a matter not to be considered of

Another chapter of the epic tragedy of our Antiochene Levant was drilled a year ago in Beirut.

I say drilled and not written, because what happened has been etched in our bodies as well as in our memory, and likewise in the memory of those who would care for us.

The march of flesh and blood and homelessness has not ended its chapters as yet! More than two hundred dead, six thousand wounded and hundreds of thousands of homeless people were a blow to humanity, to the whole world, to the extension of the Arab World as well as to the whole of humanity itself.

Moreover, the horror of the tragedy raised crucial questions not only to Lebanon but also to the eastern hemisphere and to the Arab world in its entirety.

Where are the limits of the safety of our people, and who and what guarantees this safety?

To be sitting at home with your family, or in your office, and suddenly find yourself dumped somewhere, covered with blood or dead, or to see the harvest of your life evaporated, this is something that you only find in the glossary of the jungle.



The Lebanese who lived through the tragedy can tell thousands of stories about what happened during those few seconds when, in no time, the dragon killed Beirut.

Beirut did not provide a safe haven for all the poems that were written for her, nor for all the courting that she had witnessed, as the dragon does not understand the language of love and beauty.

What happened, how did it happen, and why did it happen?

Nobody knows until today.

Don't people have the right to know why they were deprived of the ones most precious to their hearts, of those whom they would have readily ransomed with their own lives, and why they ended up without roof and without work?

Is what happened to Beirut a conspiracy?

Nothing indicates, in all the stages reported by the media about how these dangerous commodities arrived in Beirut and remained in it for years, nor why no how what happened was without a doubt planned in dark rooms and by dark souls. Without any doubt the biggest part of the "conspiracy" lies in our own neglect and in our lack of responsibility as well as for the absence of the feeling of accountability in our culture.

The bitterness of the Beirut port disaster is only matched by the disappointment of the Lebanese in the attempt to build a capable and just state.

Whether the explosion was the result of long-term careful planning, or the result of an accident to a misfortunate people, the institutions managing public affairs are responsible towards God as well as to the people for what happened to the Lebanese.

In managing public affairs, perseverance is necessary in order to protect people and secure their interests. Procrastination, taking things lightly and letting time do whatever seems to be necessary to solve things as well as throwing the responsibility for decision making at each other are fatal. It is not by wishful thinking that things should be considered, but rather by determination.

"Neglecting" the issue of incendiary commodities, not paying attention to their danger, and not insisting on getting rid of them, is a pattern of behavior that characterizes most public affairs institutions, since people were not raised to care for the interest of the public, nor did they acquire the culture and necessary values essential to maintaining public affairs. No one can be certain whether the "negligence" that led to the catastrophe is the result of indifference that comes as a natural trait to those who have taken up public affairs, or whether it is the result of complicity in order to reach the disaster. Only the judicial investigation will decide in the matter.



But the problem that fueled the fire of bereavement lies in the obstacles that the judicial investigation has faced to get to results, a thing that made reaching results extend for a whole year whereas the people were promised that results will appear within four days.

Rumors and interpretations abounded, accompanied by rumors about the progress of the investigation, especially when the judicial investigator was changed and when politics overlapped with truth. We all know that politics and justice are on opposite ends of the scale. Politics is the art of the possible, as some call it, while in justice the issue is either right or wrong.

Those who promote a culture of compromise and half-truths have forgotten that the field of politics is really the art of that which is possible, however it is moresow the art of serving national issues. Political settlements cannot be made at the expense of the nation's interests and destiny.

Here, we must place the explosion of this day and age in the port of Beirut in the context of what Lebanon has been

experiencing for the last two years, which is the result of three decades of accumulating mismanagement and bad credit that rises to the "rank" of treason.

The incident came after a massive popular uprising that demanded radical changes in the management of public affairs, in addition to Lebanon's plunging into the quagmire of the pandemic that is invading the world. Lebanon has become caught between two hammers and one anvil: one is the hammer of the pandemic, which exhausts the energies of an exhausted society and economy, and two the hammer of the explosion, which ranks among the highest levels of destructive action in the world. The anvil is the corrupt political system and flabby corrupted administrative practices.

The people of Lebanon, similar to many of the peoples of the region affected by disasters, have proven that they are a solid people who at the same time do not lack flexibility, able to continue their lives despite obstacles, wounds and calamities. They are a tolerant people too, endowed with more than tolerance is necessary at times.

The people are waiting, they are demanding, and they are moving towards a heart-warming yearning of the investigation and a warning to those who were the cause of the crowning of their tragedies, the wrecking of their capital.

Today, the economic conditions are deteriorating very fast and at a dangerous speed, and furthermore the quality of life and social structures are witnessing a disintegration not observed during the

decade and a half war that devastated Lebanon in the last century.

Poverty, unemployment, crime, suicide, drug addiction, domestic violence, family disintegration, migration of all kinds of professional groups, closure of institutions, school dropout rate, in addition to other eventual disasters, are on a steady rise.

Moreover, this did not save the Lebanese from the evil of more adversity: the severe shortage to the point of interruption, in basic materials such as fuel, medicines and foodstuffs, all this leads the Lebanese to the edge of despair, despite their optimistic and life-loving nature.

The Beirut bombing, as well as the time when it occurred, marks the end of one era and the beginning of another. A

transitional phase that may be long or short depending on the overlapping and interaction of the variables that are related to what has happened, but it is certain that regardless of what has happened, and whatever transformations will result from it, this would not affect Lebanon as an entity, nor Lebanon as a people, nor Lebanon as a culture.

Beirut will rise again, and with-it Lebanon and the destroyed Antiochian Levant as it is rooted in the victory of Saint George as its patron, the Green who killed the dragon, and should falsehood have a round, Truth has many more rounds and Truth is the victor with the resurrection of the Crucified Incarnate One.

Beirut will prove that killing a safe people is a matter not to be considered of!

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Beirut, in the Heart of the Church Beirut, a City of Resurrection

One year has passed and the Beirut explosion tragedy is still growing, angrier and stronger. No memory can contain the pain it caused, while no time could ever make it go away. Since last August, Beirut is praying in the name of the Father for every son, brother, sister, mom, or dad who went to work and never came back. 216 victims within seconds. Thousands of injured, hundreds of whom made it with no permanent disabilities. More than 80 thousand household, business, school, hospital, and historical location that stood long enough to watch Beirut grow and bloom were destroyed. For 365 days, the parents of the victims have been crying out for justice for their loved ones. They don't want to bury their memory the way they buried their corpses which they had to send in for a DNA test.

Beirut was murdered. Beirut rose over spite, violence, and extremism. It is the city of life, love, and dialogue where religions would come together... so they destroyed it when there was no State to protect it. They emptied it from its children through pain and displacement! If it wasn't for religious organizations, civil society associations, and volunteers from young Lebanese men and women, our beautiful city would've never risen from the ashes of neglect and corruption.

Ever since August 4, 2020, you could hear its voice, while passing by the port, saying to everyone: "I am Beirut. They killed me in cold blood. They destroyed me and murdered my children. They betrayed me, I, who loved them all, and they sold me down the river!"

Beirut is the city of resurrection. Its residents are people of hope. Their bells and minarets have been asking for a year now in a united voice for justice, mercy, and human dignity.

Beirut churches pledged with a warming heart to help and assist the people of their parishes who lost their homes, their jobs, and even their identification papers. In this special edition of "Al Muntada", Church leaders reveal how they went with their parishes through hell and back, and how they overcame that pre-planned tragic experience with their children. The bishops in Beirut formed an ecumenical committee in collaboration with the Middle East Council of Churches to stitch up the wounds caused by the explosion. They joined efforts so that the voice of "The Call of Beirut" that the Council started could be heard loud and clear. Beirut is the immortal, unkillable city.

Beirut is in the heart of the Church!

Huguette Salameh





Photo: Diego Ibarra Sanchez/ the New York Times

The Middle East Council of Churches' Statement to the Churches of the World and to Its Partners

Support to the devastated city of Beirut and to its distressed people

AUGUST 20, 2020

Christ is risen indeed He is risen! For two thousand years, Christians in the Middle East have been continuously proclaiming Christ's Resurrection to express at the same time their faith and their confrontation with death, the greatest threat to humanity and creation. Due to its religious, cultural and commercial vivacity and its presence in the heart of the ancient world, their region did not really witness true peace except for intermittent periods. In fact, it was in most cases, a crossroad, a meeting place and starting point on the one hand, and an arena for conflicts and confrontations on the other. Due to raging conflicts and wars, for more than half a century, the Middle East has

tremendously suffered violence, extremism and killing, uprooting its inhabitants from their lands and displacing them, tampering with their fate, and undermining human dignity.

On August 4, 2020, a horrendous explosion hit Beirut devastating the capital and plunging it into darkness, blood and pain, horrifying the population. Half of the city today is completely destroyed causing more than 177 victims, 30 missing, more than a hundred in critical conditions and thousands wounded, including young men, women and children ... More than 300,000 Beirutis are homeless today, lost their homes, their loved ones, their friends, their businesses, offices, their livelihoods, their children's future. Moreover, three major

hospitals, many churches, mosques, schools and universities are destroyed ... Houses emptied of their inhabitants, disorder, debris, destruction and ruins reign in the streets. People, are broken, traumatized and unable to grasp the magnitude of the shock. The tragedy stunned the entire world and shuddered the conscience of the people, pushing countries and organizations to rush to help this long-standing city and its distressed citizens.

Despite the many tragedies it has faced, Beirut never closed its doors to displaced Palestinians, Iraqis and Syrians ... Instead, welcomed everyone in open arms and became a global forum for civilization, art, culture, education, remedy and tourism. Beirut suffered and continues to suffer from destruction, displacement and humiliation, but its great history, its rich cultural heritage, and the model of living together as an existential reality, regardless of religious, ethnic, political and intellectual affiliations, reflect and convey a unique mission. Beirut is a Forum of peoples and civilizations, and Lebanese are a nation of inspiration and creativity.

Beirut does not fear disasters. It is rather afraid of those who do not respect its status and mission and tamper with human dignity in its midst. This is not a valid way to build nations and care for citizens. Did Lebanon not bear enough corruption and mismanagement during the past centuries, leading to financial distress and eventually, to unprecedented levels of poverty and destitution? Isn't it already suffocating because of unemployment, collapse of institutions and banking system and the spread of the Corona pandemic? The recent explosion destroyed the Lebanese people's last hope of getting out of the crisis without external help. Today, Beirut is in desperate need of the others, its friends and supporters.

Beirut is grateful for all those who came to its aid from all over the world. Losses exceeded expectations at various levels whether human, material, or spiritual... Rebuilding the stone is not enough. It is rather necessary to "rebuild" the human being who was wounded by the horror of evil and its destructive repercussions. It is necessary to reestablish the social cohesion between the people of Beirut and restore life, the living together, joy, literature and arts, far from political quotas and sectarian extremism. It is imperative to guarantee a sense of security for those who were traumatized by death.

Since its inception in 1974, the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) has always stood by the oppressed and the desperate, the suffering and the victims of war. It stood by the victims of failed policies and natural disasters. It stood by Beirut during and after the civil war (1975-1990), the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982, and in July war of 2006. Today, it is also standing with Beirutis, mobilizing all its human and material capital, relying on its partners from around the world and on their support and backing.



Stemming from its mission and *raison d'être*, the Council launched an appeal to the churches of the world and their partner institutions to help Beirut and its people. It calls on the member churches from all Middle Eastern countries to support Beirutis, heal their wounds, show solidarity and help their spiritual leaders to fulfill their human, moral and



spiritual responsibilities. The Council also calls on states, international institutions and peoples of the world to extend a helping hand and defend the afflicted and the innocents. Today, every move, no matter how simple, every act of generosity, no matter how little, and every word of empathy, have a great human value and contribute to strengthening the fraternal bond between human beings.

The Middle East Council of Churches reiterates the basic principles that can restore Beirut's mission and the dignity and life of its residents, and calls upon all officials to help establish firm rules aiming at advocating for mankind and its righteous causes in this city:

1- Human dignity transcends all ranks and sovereignties because human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. It primarily includes the right to life, freedom of expression and religion without compromising the dignity of the other.

2- The importance of revealing the truth and identifying the responsible will prevent the tragedy from repeating. This is the basic right of all victims and of all the Lebanese people. Unless the truth is revealed, human beings will remain in danger of losing their human characteristic and *raison d'être*.

3- Maintaining the need for safety, security, work, food, medication and education as basic needs of human dignity as well as providing psychological and spiritual support for the victims and the traumatized, is renewing the human being as the essential component of the social fabric.

4- Safeguarding religious freedom and difference of opinion, managing pluralism and diversity judiciously and wisely to prevent conflicts, is the way to achieve equal citizenship and a true sense of belonging that will restore the image of Beirut as a unique model of coexistence.

5- Launching a rapid rehabilitation project of demolished houses and historical buildings, will certainly contribute to the preservation of the social fabric of Beirut and its cultural and archaeological environment.

6- Establishing a sound political system in Lebanon which is not based on corruption as a means of exerting power, nor the impoverishment and starvation of the people as a means of accumulating wealth, nor violence as a means of silencing those who are claiming their legitimate rights. Good and just governance as well as care for the people, are the basis of state policy. The least that a true citizen can ask for is a proper establishment of the state, good governance and the accountability of those he elected to run his country and its affairs.

The Middle East Council of Churches calls the world for prayers, for the innocent victims of the Beirut explosion, that this tragedy is not repeated nowhere in the world.

The MECC Believes that the Resurrection of Beirut is the responsibility of the Lebanese, for they only know how to rebuild it, preserving its mission, as they have done repeatedly throughout history. Beirut is theirs! And they are the guardians! It is true that this tragedy hampered and shocked Beirutis, but the Lord of Hope is able to lighten this burden, enlighten them with Christ's resurrection, planting the seeds of Hope in their hearts, and inspire them to hold on to their cry of faith, emanating from within their hearts, until they rise victorious over the evil and the death: Christ is indeed risen.

HE Archbishop Elias Audi

Metropolitan of Beirut and its Dependencies of the Greek orthodox



Archbishop Audi:

‘After the August 4 explosion, they tried to convince residents to sell the houses they got from their ancestors’

‘They are trying to change the demographics of Beirut, we will not tolerate that!’

On his face, you can see Beirut. In his voice resonating every Sunday in St. George Cathedral in Beirut, you hear the voice of Beirut. Through his aching heart, and his saddened eyes ever since August 4 of last year, you can feel the pain of Beirut, gem of the Middle East, mourning in her black dress...

Far from his political opinion that disdains our irresponsible leaders, and his stance against corruption and the corrupted, Metropolitan of Beirut and its dependencies of the Greek Orthodox Bishop Elias Aude said during the mass of commemoration of the blast victims:

“The Ghost of death is still haunting Beirut as we still live in the deadly unknown. One year has passed since the explosion, the truth is still concealed and there’s still no answer as to what had happened, is it a coincidence or is someone intentionally hiding the truth? Is the prosecution of the criminal this hard? How would the judge face the people while he is failing to do his job? And would he still hesitate if he didn’t have anything to fear? It is shameful for a person to intentionally fail at his duties.” He continues: “we hope that the prosecutor would continue his job with

professionalism, honesty and courage, and that efforts would be poured into helping him uncover the truth. We hope that Lebanese judges would remember that they are primarily the voice of justice and conscience, a voice that resonates ever so loud. If the Lebanese court does not come to rule with justice, or is subjected to political pressure, we encourage and back victim families to seek an international investigation to sort the crime of the century.”

The brave Metropolitan with strong stances remembers the moments of the explosion, far from the political and prosecution conditions, and tells us how the Archdiocese stood by its people in this tragedy to bring back Beirut’s bright colors to life.

Bishop Aude was close to Al-Nahar news agency when the explosion happened, he was heading towards the Archdiocese in Ashrafieh, he says: “it was a horrific moment. The sound of the explosion alone put people, including us, in panic mode. Glass was falling around us, we didn’t know where to go or how to get out of this situation. We were lost like everyone else, with no way out. After some time and a lot of efforts, we arrived to the Archdiocese where we were greeted by the most terrible of sights. Walls were collapsed and there was destruction everywhere. The Deacon was with me so I asked him to find us a place where we could sleep. After looking everywhere, he comes back to tell me that there isn’t any. We decided to go to St George Hospital, but it was even worse. Patients were in the parking lot, and the medical staff was trying to send them to other hospitals away from all the destruction. My sister called to tell me she was at our brother’s house in Adma, so I went there to spend the night. In the morning, I came back to the Archdiocese. At night, I started blaming myself for leaving the

Archdiocese so the next day I asked the men to get me a mattress so I can sleep there.”

The Bishop adds, smiling: “from the very first moment, the youth took upon themselves the rehabilitation of the Archdiocese and our damaged institutions. We prioritized 3 schools that needed to open their doors to students again, and 4 churches to host masses for believers again. The historical Ecole des Trois Docteurs was severely damaged. The school was built in the 19th century, it was the home of many writers and leaders, and it is a testimony of our presence here. Some call Ashrafieh the real capital. Zahret Al-Ihsan School and the Annunciation School were destroyed, and the students of the latter are in desperate need of help. We never stopped assisting them while at the same time rehabilitating our institutions. Residents’ houses were also our priority because some people tried to take advantage of the tragedy to change the demographics of Beirut, which we will not tolerate. We know who tried to convince residents to sell the houses they inherited from their parents and grandparents, especially in Gemmayzeh, Mar Mkhael, and Mdawar... These houses are precious to us and to their residents. One who sells such a house would be selling his soul and heritage. During two consecutive masses, I preached about it for ‘he who has ears, let him hear’. I told them that what they were doing was a crime. They were depriving people from the houses and properties of their ancestors. I told residents that whoever comes to you with pockets full of money has an empty and ugly conscience. If you take their offer, you will regret it. My heart filled with happiness when I heard that a lot of residents had already refused such offers and proudly declared on the media ‘My home is not for sale’, I wasn’t surprised for how much I sympathized with them.”

We ask the bishop how they faced this twisted plan since many were impoverished and were forced to leave their homes following the blast.

His answer was reassuring and firm: “Our children are taking care of them. We formed two committees to take care of different relief plans. I am only telling you about the headlines, but you can get the details from the youth taking care of every need. I entrusted them to help every needy, vulnerable, or poor person who comes our way. As long as we are able to provide help we won’t stop, and we won’t ask for anyone else’s help.”

Khaled Tueini:

Beirut Blast, a Crippling Blow to Our Parishes



Before the Beirut Blast, Beirut Archdiocese had always taken care of the needy in the parish, down to every little detail. The church was already taking care of many families before the 17-October revolution helping them with medical needs, accommodation, schools and financial assistances, even if with small amounts.

Vice president of the Beirut Greek Orthodox Parish Financial Comity and Treasurer of Saint

Porphyrios Association Mr. Khaled Tueini describes how the association alongside the Parish, presided by Metropolitan Elias Aoude, helped Beirut citizens post-blast, he says: “the Archdiocese took under her wing hundreds of families in need living in Beirut providing them with financial, food and medical assistances along with academic support for students in Orthodox churches in Beirut for the next 5 years. However, after the revolution started on the 17th of October 2019, people’s needs increased along with the worsening of the economic crisis. Therefore, the church doubled its efforts to provide as many assistances as possible”. He added: “the Parish owns three dispensaries located in Ras Beirut, Ashrafieh and Souq El Ghareb. They offer medical services for everyone without exception, including but not limited to providing medicines, free consultations and dental treatments, in addition to the Saint George Hospital University Medical Center offering free consultations. However, the 4-October 2020 Blast was a crippling blow like no other causing ripples of destruction no parish, church or association can fix alone. Tueini stated that some of the Archdiocese institutions witnessed damages estimated at more than 60 million American Dollars, like Saint George Hospital University Medical Center, VAP nursing home and center (Vieillir Avec Plaisir) taking care of the elderly and the Archdiocese suffering from deep cuts. The three Orthodox churches: The Three Moon School, Annunciation Orthodox School and Zahret Al-Ihsan School, were the subject of massive destruction while the dispensaries experienced less damage. Let’s not forget that these damaged architectures built before 1860 hold a historical symbolic value to the existence of the Orthodox church in the region.

Tueini noted that according to the parish engineering office post-blast statistics of the Orthodox church members, 419 homes were damaged out of which 130 were completely destroyed and 120 witnessed major damage. Priests houses were also destroyed. On August 9, priests were given instructions to report, in each parish, names of the victims of the blast, the injured in hospitals, and the missing to keep the search operations going. In this context, Tueini explained that Beirut Greek Orthodox Archdiocese took the initiative, through its Financial Comity and Saint Porphyrios Association, to rehabilitate the associations and 25 households within the parish with the available limited means including the parish's financial reserve. He added that household rehabilitations are going to be a long process due to the large number of houses, the evaluation process and contracting agreements. In parallel, the Archdiocese will continue providing assistance programs all year long. The Archdiocese even offered compensations to those who paid for the rehabilitation of their houses on their own, each depending on the reparations needed.

Tueini insisted that it was mandatory to rehabilitate Saint George Hospital University Medical Center in order to treat the sick and the injured, the schools in order to reopen their doors in the upcoming academic year and the Archdiocese in Ahrafieh. However, according to Tueini the Archdiocese doesn't have a source of income to finance these

projects. It received local and international, financial, in-kind, food and medical assistances, from individuals, institutions and many churches like the Cypriot, Russian and Coptic churches and the Middle East Council of Churches... These assistances are distributed to affected families "even if we faced some troubles receiving financial assistances due to the Lebanese banks crisis and international food assistances". Donors contributed with necessities and tools needed for ground work. But "there's so much to do and the Lebanese government is nowhere to be found. Some parties didn't do their part of the job like the High Relief Commission... as we received numerous calls from official institutions to ask for information, but that was all". Tueini insisted on how serious the damage is compared to the provided assistances and on the urgent need today of financial assistances in order to rehabilitate as many households as possible. The estimated cost for this project is at 40 million American Dollars. It is also essential to rehabilitate the people, he said mentioning the efforts of Saint George Hospital University Medical Center direction board and medical personnel. "They didn't receive the credit they deserved for their heroism on the 4th of August. They evacuated the hospital without electricity nor elevators and they tended the wounded in corridors and on the patio of the hospital despite the injury of many doctors and nurses". Finally, Tueini thanked "every person who contributed through actions or words and who stood by us and by the people affected".



HE Archbishop Boulos Abdel Sater

Curial Bishop of the Maronite Archdiocese of Beirut

Archbishop Abdel sater:

“We finished 30% of restorations and what’s left is the damage the state needs to fix”

“Church property, if sold, like some suggested, would not be enough to save Lebanon from collapse”

“People turn to the Church as a mother and a home”



One year after the Beirut port explosion, 131 Maronite parishes had their churches destroyed and 145 priests went from serving masses to becoming relief teams. From focusing on the spiritual life to protecting dignities, homes, and rights... After one year, we meet with Archbishop Boulos Abdelsater of the Maronite Archdiocese of Beirut to ask him: “How did you treat the wounds of Beirut? Are there still bleeding wounds left?” Archbishop of Beirut said a few weeks before the 4th of August that he does not trust that the identity of the person behind the explosion would be exposed, stressing on the fact that the state is responsible for revealing the truth. He pointed out that Lebanese people are looking for security and dignity and it is indecent for people to fight over a box of milk...

One year after the explosion, how would you describe the city today? Did the wounds heal? Is it still affected by the blast?

Of course, the effect of the explosion started to slowly disappear from destroyed buildings and homes on the day following the tragedy, as young people started coming from all around the country and worked for weeks to remove debris from homes and glass and rubbles from the streets... This is when Beirut’s face started to reappear. One year after the explosion, it is safe to say that building restorations has significantly progressed, putting into consideration the capabilities of the Church, world Church organizations, world humanitarian organizations cooperating with non-governmental institutions in Lebanon.

A lot of houses were not entirely restored as only the necessary parts were fixed, just so their owners could return home. We have worked on 5,000 houses amongst thousands of destroyed houses. This is not enough, but the restoration process takes time and effort, it also requires money that was supposed to be provided by the state as well as the necessary restoration crews.

We finished 30% of the restorations, what's left are a few houses in need of minor restoration like windows or building facades.

We know that there are still some severely damaged buildings that could only be fixed through the help of the state's financial and logistic capabilities, but the state is ignoring them still. The Governor of Beirut and the president of its municipality have promised to take care of the task but haven't done anything about it yet. Today, Beirut looks way better than it used to on August 4 of last year. Life has once again filled streets and restaurants and we witnessed a noticeable boom in tourism. However, this does not mean that wounds have entirely healed. Some's homes are still in desperate need of restoration, some owners are not repairing their buildings so the tenants won't come back to be able to destroy and rebuild the building or to sell the land... we hope that Beirut gets even better in the days and months to come.

In numbers, what were the losses? What kind of relief plan did you provide? How many? How many people benefited from them? What are the remaining needed reliefs?

Days after the explosion, the Hungarian state provided financial aid worth about one million euros, through Caritas Cyprus and Caritas Lebanon. In coordination with the Maronite Archdiocese of Beirut and the Hungarian State, more than 1,000 homes have been renovated in Beirut. Other countries also provided financial aid through Caritas International to Caritas Lebanon, where it is still used to this day in restoration operations and the provision of food rations to meet people's needs.

In numbers, within the Archdiocese of Beirut, 1,800 to 1,900 houses were repaired so that people could go back to living in them, in cooperation with Caritas, CRDP, Solidarity, and other non-governmental organizations. The role

of the Archdiocese of Beirut was to coordinate, select the most vulnerable families, and organize aid distribution through detailed lists of each beneficiary's information. The Archdiocese also distributed 5,000 food boxes that were paid for by the Archdiocese itself and through international donations. We also received a donation of food boxes and clothes from France, and another donation from Malaysia. The Middle East Council of Churches contributed with food boxes that were distributed to the most vulnerable families. We also received electronic home appliances like washing machines and fridges. These donations were distributed in collaboration with the priests of each affected parish. The Lebanese army handled the organization of restoration work through dividing Beirut into sectors where they conducted field surveys of damages and victims.

The churches and institutions affiliated with the Maronite Archdiocese of Beirut were afflicted with damages estimated at about 3 to 4 million US dollars. The restoration of St. George's Cathedral in downtown Beirut and the Hospitality University costed around one million dollars each, Sagesse School in Ashrafieh's restoration costed more than one million dollars... And finally, the complete restoration of the Archdiocese costed about 500 thousand dollars. Thankfully, we were able to secure these amounts through international donations, notably from France.

Do you believe that a new hope would fill the Lebanon and its citizens after the failure to contain the consequences of the Beirut port explosion and the economic crisis sinking the country?

After the explosion and the worsening of the economic crisis, people still need help securing food, medicine, and clothes, and paying house rents and hospital bills... they also need kitchen appliances and daily life necessities...

We used the donations we receive on the restoration of homes in need of necessary appliances, we rehabilitate bathrooms and kitchens... we are now done with the restoration of 80 houses, but there's still work that needs to be done. The Archdiocese cooperated with priests to secure food donations to the parishes and distribute them to different locations to be able to fight famine and distribute hot meals to people in case of a worsening economic situation. We chose the parishes equipped with a semi-industrial kitchen for this task and provided them with the needed equipment. However, if this initiative fails, the food and equipment will be distributed to the people in need. Our field relief work is based on ecumenism since we've been helping all the children of the church because we're all going through the same tragedy.

The Church is always asked to stand by its people, do you agree, or do you believe that this is the responsibility of the state? And why?

The Church cannot play the role of the state, the capabilities of the state are supposed to be wider. However, the Church should always stand by its people as much as possible. People turn to the Church as a mother and a home when the state ignores their needs claiming it lacks financial resources. In times of need, the Church keeps offering help with love. During the World War One, the Church in Lebanon helped people survive famine! However. The people should know that the state also has responsibilities to assume. The people should know that they also have a role to play in saving the country. At the same time, they should know that the Church capabilities are limited, and selling the Church lands, as some suggested, will not generate the money needed to save the country's economy. It is unacceptable that the Lebanese state didn't

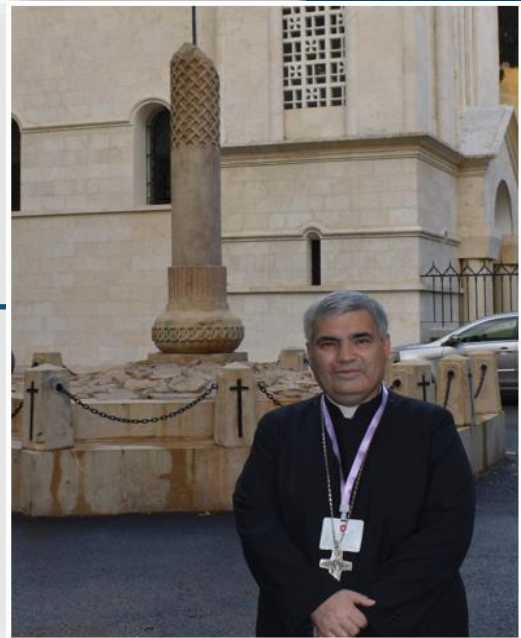
blink an eye after the Beirut port explosion. It is unacceptable that Lebanese officials didn't help reviving the city and removing the rubbles. Here, in the Archdiocese, we gathered our efforts to offer help in every way possible, but our capabilities are still limited due to the economic and bank crises. We are thankful that the Sagesse school restorations would be completed by the end of August because it suffered from severe damage. We hope that students could go back to school soon, depending on the spread of the Coronavirus and the authority's instructions. Our next year plans revolve around finding the balance between securing necessities for the continuity of the institution and providing the staff salaries while trying not to burden parents even more. What I can tell you is that this year we are not aiming for profit.

One year after the explosion, do you have any plans to secure the future of your people, especially the youth, to involve them more in the parish and keep them from leaving the country?

Ever since the explosion, people have been going through some faith and psychology crises. The Archdiocese created a hotline to answer all the questions of people in doubt, but faith remains the only answer to many questions: "why did this happen?", "Why did he/she die?" What we know for certain is that Jesus Christ defeated death through his resurrection, and that dying in Jesus means resurrection. Priest tried to stand by people, they accompanied them through thick and thin, until a brotherly and fatherly bond was born between them and believers who strengthened their attachment to their churches even more. Even priests' lectures and spiritual and religious celebrations are now seen through another perspective.

HE Archbishop Georges Assadourian

Patriarchal Vicar of the Armenian Catholic Church



Assadourian: The Patriarchate pledged to restore 200 houses in the stricken Beirut

The moment the explosion took place in the port of Beirut he was heading to the Patriarchate in Achrafieh – Jeitawi. In less than seconds, the Archbishop started transporting wounded people to the hospital with his car!

His Eminence Archbishop Georges Asadourian, Patriarchal Vicar of the Armenian Catholic Church narrates the tragic hours that followed the blast and what came with it of tragedy, misery and sorrow that tore Beirut citizens, the Lebanese people and everyone who loves Lebanon across the world. He discussed rehabilitating the houses and the people, the Beirut appeal, the Catholic Armenian Church's needs. This interview took place in his office in the Patriarchate in Achrafieh that is also highly damaged. Months after the blast, Archbishop Assadourian says: "I found myself running in streets and hospitals searching for my wounded friends, family members and children of my diocese. I kept on helping in the hospital until around 3 am. I swept the glass and removed rubble; I also helped in cleaning parking lots

that became a space to receive hundreds of injured and wounded people. I even received a call from the United States asking me to save an old lady stuck on the balcony of a Hospital because of the severity of the Blast. The children of the diocese and the Achrafieh region specifically, know his Excellency since 1987, during wartime, where he used to serve his diocese; he even prepared a small truck to pick up garbage and to distribute gas, water and hot meals. Assadourian continued "We, as the Armenian Church we have a lot of faith in our children, they are always ready to support the weakest. The genocide that took place against Armenians united us. This is how we were raised, Armenian are always in solidarity no matter where they are. The proof is what is happening today in the war against karabakh where all Armenian people are united to defend their homeland and brothers and to support in all ways possible." Later on Assadourian spoke about the relief operation to the affected Beirut citizens and he reveals that the patriarchate took it upon itself to restore 200 houses of the

diocese that were destroyed by the blast. As of the first day, we headed towards the destroyed streets and we visited the people to at least help restore their doors and main entrances, in order for the families to be able to sleep safely away from robbery and danger. This is in addition to the churches that were greatly damaged, including the Grand Cathedral in Al-Dabbas square in Beirut, the headquarters of the Patriarchate in Achrafieh, the churches of Bourj Hamoud and Zalka. The restoration of those churches will be postponed until after the restoration of the houses of the families before winter comes". He continues, "Since the beginning of the economic crisis, almost since last Christmas, we started offering a daily lunch for about 200 families. We cook and distribute the meals in Bourj Hammoud and the areas around it. We also distribute food rations, once a month to approximately 850 families. We lack medicines, especially in the exceptional circumstances imposed by the coronavirus pandemic and the elderly who do not have any financial support. This is where we find it important to intervene to provide treatment and sometimes we try to secure access to hospitals. We always thank God for his blessing, we have a greater blessing today embodied by the solidarity between the Churches of Beirut and the Middle East Council of Churches, which was organized by creating an Ecumenical Committee for the relief of Beirut, and I had the honor to join this committee with my church. The tragedy of the port caused a lot of pain, but we thank God that it united people and it ignited the flame of charity between them." Assadourian also added, regarding the suffering of the Middle Eastern people and the price they pay each time to stay in their Homeland "We are invited to be witnesses in this East, and to be witnesses to the inevitability of the Christian presence. Therefore, our presence as Armenian people in Lebanon is the foundation of our existence and future, so we

stress the importance of youth presence in Lebanon and we try to prove to them that "there is no place better than Lebanon" and they will realize that when they experience living abroad, where they will find human values, but on the other hand there is a painful absence of religious and spiritual values. These spiritual values are the message of the Church in Lebanon, where we are witnessing to the world what it means to be Christians. And you as the Middle East Council of Churches, you gather Christian families and you prove to everyone that our solidarity strengthens the hope in the hearts of the Middle Eastern Christians and it confirms that serving others is the source of happiness and peace for the families you are helping. The Lord works through you, and with you, he says to our brothers and sisters, "the Church and the Council of Churches are gathered, to take care of you, to help you, and to rehabilitate your homes. Many of those who received food rations considered as consolation in the name of Christ. You are working in the name of Christ, who gave you the grace, to work and sow hope. Moreover, the problem is not when we fall down, but it is when we are not striving to rise again". Regarding the most important necessities, he expects that the citizens will need in the future, His Eminence Archbishop Assadourian concludes, "today people need all kinds of assistance, and we hope that they will be helped, especially in the restoration of their houses that were damaged by the Beirut blast. We notice that what is also important is securing education for our children, so His Beatitude Patriarch Gregoire Gabroyan decided to insure 2/3 of the tuition fees in our schools. We cannot allow our children to go to non-Armenian schools in which they lose their Armenian language and their spiritual and religious values that we are keen on raising them on.

HE Archbishop Shahe Panossian

Primate of the Armenian Orthodox Church in Lebanon



The Armenian of the World Rushed to Help their Communities in Lebanon

The restoration and rehabilitation committee taking care of the August 4 explosion destruction completed its duties with success.

The Beirut port explosion damaged a big part of Armenian residences in Beirut. The Armenian Orthodox Church played a big role in rehabilitating what was destroyed during what we may call the biggest crime against Lebanon. Primate of the Armenian Orthodox Church in Lebanon, His Eminence Archbishop Shahe Panossian explains how the Church stood by its children

A few days after the tragedy that burdened Beirut, Archbishop Panossian says: “A committee was started with the blessing of the Holy Catholicos Aram the First of the Armenian house of Cilicia. The committee included representatives of all three Armenian communities, political parties, and Armenian charitable and social institutions. The goal was to rehabilitate Armenian houses and properties in Lebanon.”

Panossian continued: “the committee started by examining and surveying the damaged sites, especially Armenian

houses and stores, in Beirut and Metn. Secondly, they requested the targeted Armenians to visit centers to drop off documents and papers that prove the losses and damages they suffered from due to the explosion. We got 3,000 house application, 1,500 stores, 15 churches, 11 school, 15 clubs, 5 charitable institution, and 10 religious centers.”

It wasn't hard for the Armenian Orthodox Church to determine the number of the affected Armenians in its parishes in Beirut. Everyone there acts like they are one family, they celebrate and mourn

together... After receiving the applications, a group of engineers and specialists scanned the affected sites and surveyed losses and damages, then offered a two-steps monetary donation to 1496 affected families. Parents of martyrs, 14 families, also received monetary compensations. Specialists started rehabilitating churches in September 2020.

On the first of December, the committee issues a report calling all those affected by the blast who didn't benefit from the first two steps to present the documents proving they were victims of the explosion, but those refunds got delayed because of the Coronavirus and lockdown.



After one year, the initiative was complete, Panossian explained: "on Friday July 23, 2021, after concluding all the

tasks with devotion and responsibility with the last donations distributed to 455 Armenian families, we ended the program. Monetary donations were distributed in LBP while taking into consideration the market dollar rate."

He added: "We thank everyone who participated in this humanitarian duty, whether financially or morally, or through volunteering their work and effort in the biggest initiative we've worked on so far. The call for help the Catholicos sent to Armenians all around the world was met with positive responses as Armenians rushed to help their Armenian brothers and sisters in Lebanon already struggling with bad political, economic, and health conditions."

The Archbishop finally concluded: "This initiative led to the participation of everyone whether as individuals or entities (Armenian financial and charitable companies and organizations around the world), especially Artsakh Republic, therefore it gives hope and appreciation to the nobility, humanitarianism, and consciousness that distinguishes the Armenian community all over the world, due to the solidarity, will, and love that bring them together."

"We raise our prayers to the Lord, hoping for this to be the last of the Lebanese crises, and that Lebanon would be once again peaceful, safe, and stable."



HE Bishop Mar Mathias Charles Mrad

Syriac Catholic Patriarchal Vicar of Eparchy of Beirut



The Syriac Catholic Church in Beirut, Living the Tragedy alongside its Parish

Bishop Charles Mrad: 'August 4 was a hard test that we passed with faith and solidarity'

It was destroyed and went through pain alongside its children, it mourned and cried with them in times of despair, then it rose and held on to its hope in Jesus Christ. Indeed, these are the churches of Beirut, houses of God, the one safe refuge, source of faith and resilience amidst the tragedy and loss that took over Lebanon on August 4, 2020. A date holding a memory of death, despair, distress, and fear... however, churches refused to surrender and chose to rise, as once did Jesus Christ.



The churches of Beirut weren't spared from the explosion destruction. Each was severely damaged to its core, as it suffered the unbearable losses of its children. All these churches went through hardships, but they stood alongside their parishes until this day, facing the blast implications, as a brave mother would stand by its children.

As did the Syriac Catholic Church in Beirut, bearing its cross with great hope, under the patronage of His Eminence Bishop Mathias Charles Mrad, Syriac Catholic Patriarchal Vicar of Eparchy of Beirut, Our Lady of Annunciation Syriac Catholic Cathedral, surrendering its fate in God's hands. What kind of damages did it suffer from? Which

initiatives help saving it? What about its children? Questions we had to look for their answers in that unfortunate day, as we remember what the Syriac Catholic Church did to face this trying hardship.

We visit the Syriac Catholic Archdiocese near the Beirut Museum, where we are greeted by Bishop Charles Mrad. We take a trip down memory lane with him to remember what the church went through on the day of the blast.

He revisits these atrocious moments with us, saying: “At first we didn’t know what was going on. We thought there was a bomb dropped in the neighborhood behind the Cathedral since we saw it was destroyed heavily and lost its windows and doors... the Archdiocese suffered the same fate. However, we soon realized how serious the explosion and its implications were through the media.”

He continues: “we immediately started contacting our parish in Beirut and near the port to check on them, and some people called us asking for help. Our first move was to visit our parish children, give them moral support, and ask about their needs. This is how the Church presence was a positive support for people.” Then Bishop Mrad talks about the steps that followed: “Nongovernmental organizations started their relief duties to help people with damaged homes, while the youth launched its field work to assist the biggest number of people possible. They also cooperated with Beirut parishes priests to visit Beiruties and pray with them, supporting them morally and financially.”

Was the Syriac Catholic Church able to assist people all alone or did it seek help from other initiatives? Bishop Mrad answers: “The Syriac community from all over the world started sending donations immediately, like the churches of Suede, Canada, and Belgium for instance, we also received individual financial donations to rehabilitate the church and assist families.”



He adds: “Needs were diversified, but we managed as a church, with our capabilities, to help around 50 to 60 houses secure their daily necessities and electronic supplies like fridges, TVs, washing machines, and stoves... with the help of organizations working on the rehabilitation of houses. The church was the mediator between the people and the organizations, keeping records of the people’s needs and distributing donations.”

“The charitable association of the Syriac Church was also present, as it helped

people pay rent and school fees and secured medicine and medical services... let's not forget that after August 4 the economic crisis worsened in the country."

Bishop Mrad is saddened by the total absence of the State during the phase we went through after the explosion. He wishes it had put a little effort and done its job towards the Lebanese people. Did the Church play the role of the State in its relief plans? The Bishop stresses that: "the Church played a great role within its limited capabilities, and was able to provide where the State wouldn't on many occasions." Those who broke his heart the most were the people who used to help others and became needy of help themselves due to the bank and economic crisis."

Bishop Mrad explains: "Indeed, material donations are important and necessary, but families also need someone who checks on them, who listens and comforts them with words that would heal their broken hearts. I started visiting the people of the parish myself to help them feel the presence of their church. This initiative spread happiness and joy among many of them... The Archdiocese's doors were always open for every person in need, no protocols, for the church's mission is to serve humanity."

The Bishop explains how he is constantly working on improving his relationship with Syriac believers through a continuous communication between them: "They know that their church will be there for them, not just in facing the consequences of the

blast." He tells us: "Syriac Christians live all over Lebanon and usually go to the closest church to celebrate Sunday's mass, but they always come back to their one and only church near the museum on big liturgic celebrations, knowing it's their one and only home and refuge." This is how the Syriac Catholic Church became the safety net of its community, no matter where they are. Bishop Mrad concludes his story by going back to where time froze, to the unexpected tragedy, and describes the people back then: "They lost their joy and entered in a state of despair. It was not easy for them to lose the memories they built and the things they owned, especially their houses, their warm and safe houses with which they lost their dignity. The people affected by the explosion felt so broken inside that it started to greatly affect their lives. The conditions surrounding them sunk them deeper into depression." Bishop Charles Mrad adds with great hope: "Our Lord Jesus Christ knows what we keep in our hearts. August 4 was a test for everyone of us. It gave us the opportunity to rethink our outlook on life and brought us together, but more importantly, it strengthened our faith. "We boast of faith that was always divine, "Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5: 3-5)

Reverend Dr. Rima Nasrallah

The Evangelical Churches of Beirut



Between Faith and Confusion, We Won't Forget the August 4 Tragedy

Reverend Nasrallah:

We try as much as possible to encourage one another, putting our fate in the hands of Jesus Christ

On the August 4 of last year, joy turned into sadness and hope into despair. A tragedy targeted us all. Even churches were wounded crying from their children's pain. It is true that churches were severely damaged, but it stood tall and remained the one refuge that spread strength and will. It saved people from despair and put them back on the path of hope, tranquility, and safety, for there is no savior other than Jesus Christ who tell us: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)



The Evangelical churches in Beirut got their fair share of damages. They fell victims, mourned, stood up, and held on to their divine faith accompanying their children in sickness and in health. This Church family contributed greatly to offering spiritual, psychological, moral, and financial support to heal the wounds of Beiruties and wipe the tears of Beirut.



We remember what happened to our churches, material and human damages. How did churches overcome this tragedy? What are the needs of the parish one year after the explosion? Reverend Dr. Rima Nasrallah answered our questions going through the stages of this tragedy once again. That unfortunate event froze time at 6:07 pm of that date, engraving it in our minds forever.

Dr. Rima first described the state of the evangelical churches in Beirut after the explosion: "Churches were severely damaged, like the Armenian evangelical church in Ras Beirut and Berj Hammoud... our church in ashrafieh was also destroyed due to its close location to the port of Beirut. It lost windows, doors and was trashed on the inside... this is why its

rehabilitation took such a long time. The Episcopal Church in Zeitouna lost its windows, doors, benches... its floors and offices were demolished..."



Reverend Nasrallah explains: "destruction wasn't only limited to houses of worship, it also hit our church's institutions like the Armenian Evangelical School in Ashrafieh, and the two evangelical churches of Ras Beirut, and the Faculty of Theology that suffered from severe destruction. The houses of the people of the parish were damaged as well, some partially and some entirely, in Ashrafieh, Mar Mekhael, and Geitaoui ..."

We asked if anyone passed from the parish and Dr. Rima answered: "One old man passed away after being in a coma for a month, but a lot of people got injured. Trying to understand what happened wasn't easy between destruction and injuries."

How did the Evangelical family stand next to its people? Dr. Rima says: "the four evangelical churches exerted efforts to

meet the needs of its people and help the most vulnerable. First, we surveyed house damages because a lot of people didn't have a place to stay anymore. Then, we worked on distributing food and water to families. We also provided daily necessities like mattresses, tissues, pillows, kitchen utensils, cleaning supplies, sanitary products, and many more."

She mentioned that "Tahanan" organization affiliated to the evangelical Synod rushed to help with restorations. A lot of people lost their jobs and their sources of income, this is why we helped them look for jobs or rehabilitate their businesses... this initiative took the whole year to complete."



The wounds of the Lebanese people didn't mend, even after a year has passed. Their needs are continuously increasing while the country dives deeper in its crises. The explosion was the last straw of the different political and economic issues burdening the country and its people. Reverend Dr. Nasrallah explained: "People are torn daily between confusion and hope while they live

a life that lacks dignity and the possibility of a better tomorrow."

Nasrallah concludes: "amidst confusion, people hold on to their churches and try to encourage one another putting their worries in the hands of Jesus Christ." Dr. Rima reminded us of the daily increasing needs of people. Many cannot afford their rent, others are in desperate need of food, or necessities like medicines, oxygen machines, diapers, and school supplies. We followed up with families about the latter, we paid school fees and provided electronic necessities for online education along with backpacks filled with copybooks and pens..."

One year after the explosion, Reverend Dr. Rima Nasrallah can still not contain her grief, the one common feeling amongst people nowadays: "We try to encourage one another, relying on faith and putting our fate in the hands of Jesus Christ."



Me Melhem Khalaf

Head of the Beirut Bar Association



When Lebanon's Lawyers represent their People

Head of the Beirut Bar Association in Beirut Melhem Khalaf: The Beirut Port Explosion was an intentional crime

"We will not let Lebanese people sink in despair"

As a first response to the crime of the century, and so the criminal does not escape from justice, the Beirut Lawyers Syndicate filed a lawsuit as a party affected by the blast and started an office presided by the Head of the Beirut Bar Association Melhem Khalaf to represent all those who fell victims of the explosion.

Melhem Khalaf then directed the founding of a central operation room and the setup of a few offices in different locations in Beirut to help people file lawsuits.

They were the first to raise their voices when everyone was afraid. They sent a letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations with explicit clauses asking for help in their fight for justice and for satellite pictures that would reveal what

happened on that unfortunate afternoon. Did they get an answer? A feedback? Is there hope at all?

During our visit to Melhem Khalaf at his office one month after the blast, he explains to us the response the syndicate adopted, and how it is fighting the many attempts to silence justice and bend the law to save the killer from the punishment.



From his office always swarming with follow-ups and complaints, the president told us how the syndicate rushed to the help of Beiruties, he said: “A horrible explosion happened on August 4. On August 5, we filed a motion to the public prosecutor asking to contain the crime scene and protect the remaining clues. Then, we asked that the investigation be carried out by international specialists.

In the same day, we formed an office of our best penal lawyers.

We set up 7 different offices in Beirut that allowed victims to file lawsuits and protect their rights. We collected 1570 lawsuits including those who suffered physical damage like the parents of the martyrs, their file would be annexed with a medical death report and a distribution of heritage... another group would be those whose losses were material. Here, we collaborated with estimation specialists who made a list of volunteers to help around 250 volunteering lawyers. Many notary public offices also offered free help.

“We followed the investigation day by day, and it was the first time in history a lawyers syndicate undertook such an initiative.”

The syndicate sent a letter to the UN Secretary General through his representative in Lebanon Yan Kobish as one of the parties of the lawsuits to acquire satellite pictures as a document to back up their lawsuit.

Should Lebanese people have faith that justice will be served at the hands of the Lebanese courts? Khalaf answered this question that has been on the mind of

people for a year now saying: “We’re still in the investigation and interrogation part and the judicial investigator is sworn to secrecy, but justice is bound to happen.”

“Actually, one could say that the Beirut port explosion investigation is an international process with the supervision of the Lebanese court. This is the court’s chance to prove itself and regain people’s trust. If it fails, it would have proven that we live in a broken corrupted state.”

The term “corrupted state” is the not so new nickname of Lebanon and its government these days, but Lebanese citizens are still hoping that justice would escape the grips of politics and despair. When asked about the possibility of that happening, Khalaf said: “If politics goes this low, both the country and its judicial corps would have failed. I hope it doesn’t come to this, but if it does, I will raise the tone even more.”

Melhem Khalaf anticipated what was going to happen and asked for the investigation to go through the pyramid from top to bottom. He thinks that the prosecution has the right to interrogate ministers even if immunity wasn’t lifted. He stated many times that there shouldn’t be any constitutional, legal, or political immunity: “Prioritizing leaders is not an option when it comes to justice. Khalaf confirmed that they will not give up on the blast victims, as they will not give up on following the investigation until the last verdict is released. We will do what needs to be done. We’re here for the people, for they are our people.”

Does the historical tragedy that happened in Beirut classify as neglect or terrorism? A question Khalaf answered: “in reality, there are two crimes: explosive and military products were stored in the port of Beirut on Lebanese territory without an official decision from the government as stipulated in article 17 of the law of arms.”

“The second crime was the explosion itself that needed to be stimulated to happen. The latter requires a know-how in explosives. This is an intentional crime, and

it holds accountable all those involved in the administration of the port and its security, employees and politicians. We will not tolerate a crime that would damage half a city, displace its citizens, destroy its buildings, wound more than 5 thousand citizens, kill 200 not to mention 7 disappearance cases. “

In a country said to be a lost cause, the syndicate president disagrees: “We are the ones who create hope, we will not let Lebanese people sink in despair!”



Lawyers Syndicate Operation Room

Me Ali Jaber:

1570 Lawsuits against Beirut Murderers



To preserve justice in this unjust country, Beirut lawyers Syndicate stood next to the people affected by the Beirut Port blast from the start, giving them the opportunity to press charges before the Lebanese court and demand justice through creating a crisis cell and operation room in the syndicate to follow up on the case.

While going through the details of this first of a kind initiative – both nationwide and worldwide, attorney at law Mr. Ali Jaber explains the grounds and mechanisms of

execution. He says: “as they say, a right is never lost, as long as someone strives to claim it. Head of the Beirut Bar Association Melhem Khalaf took the initiative of creating a crisis cell to support the families of the Beirut Port blast victims by legally escorting them through trial in order to obtain their rights and conserve their dignities. By that we don’t only mean pressing charges to collect financial compensations for the High Relief Comity takes care of that matter. We are talking

about a lawsuit before a Public Prosecutor looking after people's right to a compensation and playing an effective role in bringing the guilty to justice. Today, we see a unique awareness dealing with wounded Lebanese as they call not to ask about financial compensation but to know whether or not the identity of the people responsible for the blast was uncovered, when they would be prosecuted and when they would pay the price of the harm they caused to their families and loved ones.

Jaber added: "This case will preserve the rights of the Lebanese people. This is the first time in the history of the country people get a chance to prosecute officials for any damage caused directly or indirectly by the state, public sector employees, ministers, deputies... more than 1570 lawsuits have been filed, as the operation room still receives new cases every day from 9 am till 5 pm."



The syndicate operation room facilitates filing lawsuits for citizens and offers free services. This process requires many procedures, documents and reports. The operation room also verifies the submitted files and check all needed documents to

then have a lawyer file the lawsuit before the Public Prosecution or the judicial investigator, Judge Fadi Sawan.

"The operation room team opened doors to filing lawsuits through the field-based stations of volunteer lawyers set in different affected locations in Beirut like Ashrafieh, Rmeil, Mar Michael, Ain Mreisseh, Karantina, Bourj Hammoud and Basta, or online via the Syndicate website for those who cannot reach a station."

Jaber explained the importance of applying through the website. The affected can benefit from legal representation and press charges by filling an online form with the information needed for the files. Applicants are required to send a picture of their ID or an individual extract, their address, a medical report of the physical damage, pictures of material damage and any other proof of damage. Applicants can also find the Google maps location of the stations on the website. Files are being handed randomly to around 320 volunteer trained lawyers.

Then, Jaber spoke about the duties of on-site volunteers. They receive those who wish to file a lawsuit and visit those who can't fill an online application by themselves. Some people need help, others want to ask questions in person... After submitting the aforementioned documentation, the lawyer would help citizens fill an online application.



Either way, lawyers contact applicants in case of missing information or documents or to fill them in on any news, Jaber confirmed. Lawyers Syndicate operation room prepares the documents of every file and writes a report of the annexed damages before transmitting a hardcopy to court. Lawyers syndicate is cooperating with real estate experts to estimate the value of recorded material damages.

Jaber introduced the “know your legal rights” initiative the syndicate started in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program UNDP. It’s a platform helping citizens know their rights related to the blast and its repercussions. Citizens can contact the team through the phone or over the website and they will be directed to the party in charge of helping them depending on their case. Jaber pointed out the many legal issues the explosion uncovered that people will

dealing with “Lebanese-style”. Some tenants don’t have a rent lease, and some owners in Mdawar and Gemmayzeh used the damages to push tenants out. Who would compensate the losses of these people? Do they benefit from insurance companies?

We answered 4,200 questions regarding rent as it was an urgent issue, but we also received questions about insurance, necessary documents for determination of inheritance, the High Relief Comity, or the Lebanese army...

With hope, Jaber concluded his interview “Lebanese-style” saying: “Legal practice is a career and a calling. Our duty is to help with public service and represent those who are unable to access their rights”.

It seems that the Lebanese lawyers are determined to fight alongside the Beirut port explosion before the court.



After the August 4 Explosion A Call from the Middle East Council of Churches to Help 45 Thousand Affected Beiruties



Written by Samer Laham

Regional Director - MECC Diakonia Department

Till this day, our world still witnesses painful events and structural economic, social, and political changes. These events only affect the lower social classes, or what became today 85% of citizens in the countries still facing crises and a continuous worsening of economic, social, and political conditions. Corona introduced a new lifestyle, altering our social and familial relationships, imposing an online education that affected our children's mental health and academic performance.



The economic crisis affected mostly those who work day by day to put food on the table, and those who lost their jobs due to long lockdowns. The banking crisis and the black market ate up the middle-class people's savings and consumed the money in their accounts.

Despite all countries facing the same international challenges, the latter had a different impact on the Middle East where crises are here to stay. This region has been going through crisis after crisis ever since its independence and is now so frail and weak that relief plans are no longer enough to help sustain life in the region with minimum dignity, not to forget the increase of marginalized groups in children, youths, women, and people with special needs. One started to dream about the most basic human rights in these countries, like access to water, electricity, education, health care, and job opportunities. Leaders' lack of vision, transparency, and credibility got these countries to lose hope in a better tomorrow, which resulted in a massive brain drain.

The Middle East Council of Churches realized these challenges ever since its founding and understood that words should be followed by actions, hence the Diakonia program at the pillar of the Council's framework till this day. The program and its partners never failed to offer help to the most vulnerable, to become the testimony of the work of God and not a witness to unfortunate events, to act and not react. Diakonia program helped preserve people's dignity for it is God given. Today, the Council is involved in humanitarian and development programs following the

principles of equity, transparency, neutrality, and professionalism, but most importantly the respect of the beneficiaries' dignity. Everyone working in the program goes by the golden rule of protecting beneficiaries, keeping from hurting them and respect their needs by including them in the program as partners and business owners, not just people receiving help. A lot of these people used to be the ones who would help the vulnerable, but now the tables have turned.



How the Council handled the August 4 explosion repercussions of last year is a great example. That explosion wiped the city, flesh and stone, in the blink of an eye, adding even more pain to the city, killing, scarring and displacing thousands of people. In a country burdened with crises ever since its civil war, the latest being the Corona pandemic and the economic crisis, we are still living in the repercussions of the blast on the economic, national, and personal level, directly or indirectly.

In a few days, one year would have passed since the explosion, with no clues to why it

happened and no investigation results. Victims and martyr parents are still waiting for answers to warm their aching hearts.

This tragedy urged the Council to call on its international partners and regional member churches. Everyone rushed to help, especially His holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria and patriarch of the See of St. Mark who immediately sent food and medicine to Lebanon with the help of the Egyptian government. Other partners also pitched in with what they could offer from food to health care products and medicine... monetary donations were also sent for the restoration of houses to put life back on its normal track and face the long-lasting crisis repercussions.

“ Until this day, the Council was able to help 45 thousand Beiruties through different relief plans, and the work is still going to reach the most vulnerable with flexible monetary donations and business restorations in the affected region. ”



Needless to say that the needed help is beyond the Lebanese state capabilities and those of international and national authorities, however, every helping initiative puts a smile on a victim's face, spreads hope and mends a broken heart, reassuring them that faith-driven organizations like the Council are there to help for god said: “Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me. And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25: 45-46)

Help us, God, to be righteous servants in your garden, and melting candles lighting others' path.



We Will Never Forget You...

This is the fourth of August, what was supposed to be an ordinary day, despite the unusual circumstances we were going through on many levels.

I was home, what everyone calls a “safe place”. I didn’t know there was a ticking bomb about to explode, depriving us martyrs, victims, injured, and doomed of our lives.

They wanted to stain us that August 4 with blood, fear, despair, and surrender, for they are the sons of darkness, and leaders of a world unfamiliar to mercy and humanity. But once these negative feelings touch our souls, we take our gowns of worry and disability off. We are now stronger, and surrender is not an option we are willing to consider.



With every piece of corpse buried, with every child, boy, girl, man, and woman who closed their eyes for the very last time, we find strength to revive ourselves. We are the children of light, faith, and resurrection. We do not fear those who murder flesh.

With every unbearable cry of pain, with every tear shed, with every thought of an unknown future, we hold on even more to our faith. We carry our cross with joy with He who carried his cross towards his own death to save us.

I am not just writing theories, these are facts I experienced throughout the year.

Yes, I was in great pain due to my severe injuries. Often, pain was unbearable. I asked God many times: "Why me? Why all this pain?" I had so many questions, but I only got the answer from within, from my conscious and my subconscious: "How dare I complain about a little pain when my savior went through the most horrible of tortures for me?"

It is true that the sights engraved in my memory from that bleak day are harsh, it's hard for the human brain to process them.

I stand here, distressed voices in my head, the smell of death haunting every corner... in the port, in the streets, the cars, and the hospitals, where blood cover our faces and every inch of our bodies, where destruction, emptiness, darkness, and broken glass fill the roads.

I stand here for hours, with the faith that the Golgotha path we've crossed will surely be rewarded with a resurrection from death, rubble, wounds, and pain. This path watered with a blood that covered the smell with death with that of a sweet perfume leading us towards salvation.

Dear August 4, I assure you, you did not break me, even though you broke my body. You did not destroy my will, even though you tried to taint my soul with despair. You did not shake my faith, even though you were a living proof of evil growing in my country. You did not deprive me of my strength for I get it from the Lord of this world. You did not take away my hope for justice for I believe in a heavenly justice that never fails.

Dear August 4, remember us well... remember the martyrs and victims, remember the scars you left on our faces and bodies, remember the tears of mothers and the heartbreak of fathers, remember the children asking about their moms and dads, remember the hopelessness of the homeless.

Remember us all... because we will never forget you!





**Between The Port of Beirut and St. Anthony the Great, a Story of Neighbors,
Blood, and Tears**

Parish Priest: “Resilience is the word of the year, it is impossible to forget”

**“100% of the parish children sought emigration, but church remained their
only safety net”**

Explosion victims: “They killed us and nobody cared to check on us!”

Investigation and pictures by Elia Nasrallah

Before the evening of August 4, 6:07, the port of Beirut was considered one of the most important ports of the Middle East, and a breather to Lebanon and its neighboring countries.

Before that unfortunate seventh minute, St. Anthony the Great church facing the seaside, neighboring the port, was engulfed

with trees, its dome nested birds, one step closer to heaven.



Time was running out, soon ward n.12 would explode after maybe hours of fire and destroy by that the whole port devastating half of Beirut, including St. Anthony the Great church that suffered along with its parish from deep wounds. These wounds did not heal, even after the rehabilitation of the church bringing life back to its heart, pumping with the strength of the Holy Spirit.

We visited St. Anthony the Great church, holding our questions and memories at heart, about those painful moments, about the hope that rose from ashes, about defeating tragedy with cooperation. We met with the parish Priest who survived the explosion, still carrying a cross weighing with the church's material and human losses. We sat in his humble office and took a trip down memory lane to talk about what happened one year ago, in front of us, a window uncovering the port ruins. This sight leaves you speechless, as you can only ask for God's mercy and the intersection and prayers of St. Anthony



Hope Amidst Tragedy

The parish Priest talks about his memories of the day of the explosion, at around 5 pm when he left the church to go back home. He lives close to the church but he says: "had I stayed in the church, I would've definitely be one of the victims right now. My neighbor passed away and my house was deeply destroyed. During August, we put evening masses on

hold and, instead, only celebrate morning daily masses, this is why there was no one inside the church when the explosion happened."

We ask him about the damages of the church, he answers: "there are no words to describe what happened. The body of the church stood still but everything on the inside was blown away. We found the benches in front of the church, doors were broken, the altar utensils were dispersed, and the hall of the church suffered severe destruction..."

The Priest continues: "My parish and I were so happy to find the cross, the statues of the Holy Spirit and the angels and the offerings still in their places. The mosaic picture of St. Anthony on the back outer wall of the church was untouched, despite it being on the wall directly facing the port. The parish witnessed signs of hope amidst destruction and tragedy. The church remained their home during everything they've been through."

He adds: "The church was damaged like everyone else, it will not rise alone when everyone's homes are still destroyed. Instead, it went through the stages of cleaning, rehabilitation, and restoration like every other house, depending on the donations and initiatives it received. The church healed at the same time as its neighborhood, not one day faster, nor one day slower. People took care of their church to be able to celebrate the holy mass, and they did a great job as we were able to celebrate a mass on the Sunday following the explosion."

Regarding the rehabilitation, the Priest states: "On the day following the disaster, we started to remove the rubble with the help of volunteers who came from many Lebanese regions. We did not want masses to be suspended. Thus, the residents helped each other to rehabilitate the church and restore the glass, windows, doors, and the altar... with the support of the archdiocese. They also cleaned and repaired the water and electricity supplies..." he emphasized that: "Believers did not leave their church. They sought shelter in it. Their faith increased as well as their attachment because it was their only place of refuge when they felt that they were betrayed by the State, the security forces, and some of the people and organizations that did not keep their promises..."

Initiatives to Save the Region

With a heavy heart, the parish Priest describes the reality of the neighborhood: "the scene was immensely violent and homes buildings have suffered from a tremendous destruction. Unfortunately, most people were inside their homes and the injuries were serious. Some of them went into comas..." the humanitarian conditions were extremely difficult and misery took over. Therefore, rising above this tragedy was not easy and understanding what had happened took a tremendous amount of time.

What about the aids? What were the initiatives that supported the parish and the residents of the neighborhood? He responds: "some people helped us and we received aids from generous individual initiatives until non-governmental organizations started to carry out their field work. Initially, the work of some of the organizations was very good and it contributed in the restoration of houses. However, other organizations did not keep their word."

Damages were also significant in terms of furniture and house necessities such as kitchens, bathrooms, electricity supplies, water tanks, and necessary electrical tools..." people did not have the financial resources to restore and repurchase them, given the aggravated economic crisis in the country. Until this date, this restoration phase is not yet completed. He adds: "there are a lot of homes whose restoration has not begun in the first place and we have witnessed unfortunately a spate of robberies increasing our tragedy."

The parish Priest praised the work of volunteers and indicated that there was something special amidst all that was happening in Beirut which is that: "people worked in collaboration and cooperation which positively affected the general atmosphere."

The neighborhood residents received food boxes. However, the distribution process was not organized and fair. There was no coordination between the concerned people and beneficiaries. The parish Priest underlines here: "the need was not limited to food. There were many residents that could not make use of them because they lost their electrical machines and utensils. The church served as the

mediator between the people who wanted to help and beneficiaries, particularly in regards to the distribution of the individual financial initiatives generously provided and helped many families acquire their necessary needs, in addition to the aids which were provided by the Lebanese armed forces."

Human Damage and Displacement

As soon as we asked the parish Priest about human damage, we noticed a sad look upon his face. He said: "the parish suffered from an immense number of victims. There were 16 or 17 victims, in addition to injured people whose injuries ranged between severe and serious". The most distressing thing for him was that: "due to the explosion, the parish witnessed a 100% displacement wave. Everyone left their homes. The first person to return came back two months after the explosion and restored his house at his own expense."

Why did the majority of residents not return? He replies: "at the beginning of last November, a small percentage of the residents of the neighborhood began to return to their homes. Until this date, the percentage of the residents who returned home did not reach 30%. Regarding the remaining 70%, some did not restore their homes, others got into a dispute with the owner, and some do not want to conduct the necessary rehabilitation in the first place."

Between cleaning and funerals, the Priest talks about the amount of pain he went through. On the day following the disaster: "while we were removing the rubble and sweeping the glass, despite all the dust that covered me, I wore my cassock and went to the cemetery to pray for the soul of one of the victims. Then, I came back to the church to continue working... I no longer knew what to say to some people. Between the 'thank God for your safe return' I said to a girl who was injured from the explosion and 'may the soul of your mother rest in peace', I was lost. The situation was extremely difficult."

Jesus Christ, our Only Strength

Until this date, the psychological wounds of the survivors, the people who witnessed the explosion,

Beiruties, and all the Lebanese people, have not healed. Everyone is still under the shock and horror of the blast and its repercussions. What about the psychological state of the people? Has their faith wavered?

The parish Priest answers: “The explosion destroyed all the parish, but St. Anthony remained a sign of hope despite all difficulties. In front of all disappointments, faith remains our only strength. People were strong in faith and spirituality when they were morally weak after the humanitarian and material losses they suffered from, adding to the tormenting loneliness they went through.”

He adds: “many are those who cried alone, fighting tragedy, broken. They couldn’t believe how the State handled the blast nor its victims. It pained them that their deputies, leaders, and investors of the region didn’t care to check on them... they lost hope in their political and civil authorities... ‘thank God for your wellbeing’ became their only consolation, for they still need moral support after the tragedy they went through.”

The Priest describes the terror the neighborhood residents went through when the Beirut port took fire one month after the explosion. In that moment, horror came back! It is true that people don’t believe in their worsening security systems anymore, but during the holy mass, we do not fear, nor worry.”

On the spiritual level, he says: “as long as people will see their church destroyed, they will still live in fear. This is why we worked on reviving our church so it is not just a place for funerals and mourning, but a place for hope. Had the church failed to resist destruction, its children would’ve had no refuge, no spiritual guidance, and no hope.”

He stresses: “what’s important here is that the parish stayed together. Believers came back to their church, we even celebrated weddings last summer despite the remaining damages. The church remained the home of all, where we unite in Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus will never let us down, no matter how many times people fail us. What brought hope were the neighborhood churches, people held tight to their faith and their churches and found refuge in the house of God.”

A Passage from Death to Life

One year after the unfortunate explosion, the Priest hopefully describes the course of events with one word: Resilience. People resiliently faced the blast and its horrific repercussions. Residents resiliently stayed in the neighborhood where they were born and grew up, constantly repeating: ‘We want to stay, we don’t want to leave.’ It is true that they are very resilient, however, the war they are facing is great, and defeat is still a possibility.”

The Priest ends his story with: “believers sought their church to participate in the holy mass and the church service, holding tight to God, their only source of hope and strength. What happened was very hard, we still need a lot of time to get over what we went through and understand what happened in order to move on and plan for the future. People did not heal in moral, society, politics, and security... it’s not easy to forget what happened...”

Stories and Tales:

“Our Lives Changed Forever”

The Priest tells us about the stories of the parish residents who rose from beneath ashes and rubble. These stories would be shared from generation to another, keeping the memory alive forever.

We wanted to hear them each tell their own story. Are the wounds still deep? Is there still hope for a better future to this country? We moved across the street from the church, where we met Mrs. Therese Saleh and her friend Mrs. Najwa Hayek.

Mrs. Therese is haunted by painful memories of that unfortunate day, she tells us: “on the day of the explosion, we first heard a loud noise and saw fire coming from the port of Beirut. We saw a plane fly over the port. Upon the explosion, window glass started to break, and doors and furniture were destroyed. I was buried with a pile of wood and glass...I was severely wounded and bloody... everything around me was destroyed as I lie there on the floor for hours... I remember having glass in my mouth, hair, and back... there was water on the floor but I didn’t know where it came from...”



Mrs. Therese Saleh

She goes on: "I remember our neighbor's son yelling as he saw those horrific sights: 'Mommy, mommy... Mommy died!' our foreign worker was wounded in the head. I lost all my electric supplies and necessities like my fridge and my stove... it was total destruction!" She adds: "the night of the explosion, I stayed home, in the dark, because of the spate of robberies that took place. Within a month, restoration works in my house was complete and I was able to move back in."

Despite everything that happened, Mrs. Saleh still holds on to her faith, but lost hope in the country rulers giving the circumstances. With a heavy heart she yelled: "This is unacceptable!" After one year, she says: "We are mentally drained, we changed from who we used to be. We do not know the meaning of laughter and joy anymore amidst all the pressure we live in, putting us in a state of despair."

We ask Mrs. Najwa Hayek about her own experience. She answers painfully: "when the explosion happened, I was at work in Hamra, and my daughter at home. At first, we didn't know what was going on. My son called me and told me not to be afraid. However, a few minutes later, my niece sends me a voice note yelling her lungs out, asking for help: 'please help me! The explosion reached our house, my dad lost his sight, my mom is on the ground, and my husband is wounded.'" But her biggest shock was when she learned that her daughter was severely injured: "I started running from Ashrafieh to home to save her." Mrs. Najwa

recalls the glass on the floor and the blood covering the streets, she continues: "I couldn't understand what was going on! All I wanted to do was to get home and see my daughter." Her daughter Lara, a 43-year-old HR director, full of energy and life.

She Adds: "when I got home, I saw her bleeding. First thing I did was find an ambulance, then we started looking for a hospital. When we arrived to the AUB Medical Center at 7 pm, she had already passed out and her heart stopped beating. They tried to rescue her, and she gained her conscience back. She then entered a coma and stayed in the Medical Center for two months, then we moved her to Bhannes Hospital where she is still in a coma till this day."

In Najwa's house, prayers are still going. She reveals honestly how challenging it was to hold on to her faith: "God, why us? Why my daughter?... this is how I started losing hope. Then, we started making vows for Saints and kept on praying. Each time I started doubting that my daughter would wake up, I would try to hold on to my faith and pray to be able to have patience, since I have a long road ahead and doctors gave us little to no hope."

Najwa says in faith: "I ask God to heal her! I lost hope in medicine, this is why I put her fate in the hands of the Mother of God. Some days were unbearable. We never thought such a tragedy would happen in Lebanon." Najwa's brother-in-law lost his sight, her sister escaped death by a thread, and her niece and her husband were gravely wounded.

Najwa says with grief: "This is not us, our lives turned upside down. I'm not me anymore, there's something wrong with me! I lost my strength and my energy. They killed us on the inside! They killed us mentally, spiritually, and emotionally! Nothing makes us happy anymore!" she asks herself how to be happy when your soul is mourning, when you don't feel safe, in a loop of endless crises? She cries: "What is the meaning of this? Not one of the leaders cared to check on the citizens! Shame! Where is their conscience?"

Where is their conscience? What happened to human dignity? To justice? Who is responsible for the misery of Beiruties?... so many questions we hope to find an answer to... one day!

Seta Hadesian

Secretary General Executive Assistant



ANOTHER THUNDEROUS AND VIOLENT TRUTH OF COLLECTIVE CULPABILITY

Born in Lebanon, I had lived the golden days of 60's and early 70's when the economic growth was at its peak. Labor and money were abundant, cultural life was full of artistic and rich performances, theatres were full, exhibitions of renowned artists made the pride of the Lebanese, restaurants packed with people, tables abundant with marvelous and delicious countless mezzes, attracting tourist from around the world. Women covered with veils seated next to women in mini jupes, the call of muezzin echoed by the chiming of the church bells, people in the streets, in the market, in the taxies, spoke Arabic, French, English or Armenian satisfying local and foreign clients! A city that did not sleep, Feyrouz and Oum Kalsoum's voices smoothly flowed in the air from taxies and shops, evoking love and memories in the air.

The nostalgia of the magic city of Shehrazade's thousand and one nights still pursues the Lebanese today.

Lebanon, the little dot on the world map, was a big reference to multiculturalism, a strong

message to negating faiths, of living together, the mysterious oriental with a western aura where all the colors of nature and fragrance of fruits and flowers created a harmonious symphony, of the enigmatic HOW of living together!

Suddenly, in 1975 cannons fired, ringing chimes and muezzins raised the alarm of a danger, the tanks in the streets lined marking the demarcation routes, Feyrouz and Oum Kalsoum silenced, and the harmonious, sweet sounding symphony turned into a loud noisy cacophony. Dissonance and discordance killed the artistic melody and the merit of the good old Lebanon!

Thousands ran away for safer shelters, thousands were killed, thousands traumatized, children orphaned, many in the streets and generations grew without childhood.... *Ya~ Beirut...* cried Magida Roumi, calling, Koumi, *Koumi min that el radmi...*(rise, rise, from the ashes), squashing tears and blood and exploding our hearts from pain.

Then on the exodus to new horizons for a better future and peaceful heavens never stopped and those who left never came back. While many believed in the future of Lebanon and started life again and again with a renewed Faith and Hope.

Alas! Now for almost half a century, Lebanon could not manage to stand tall and firm, nothing has changed, the unprecedented Blast on the 4th of August boomed all hopes for a new Lebanon. A massive and deadly explosion at the seaport, in a moment killed 200 persons, injured thousands and destroyed the city within 15 km diameter. Fire, destruction and chaos were the scene again. People deafened by the explosion, in fear and shivers, shuddering like birds not knowing what was happening, why was happening and where was happening, ran into the streets escaping not knowing where to. The injured and the dead covered with blood, dresses torn apart, were carried on shoulders of the passersby to the cars and hospitals. An apocalyptic scene Lebanese won't ever forgive their rulers and won't forget for decades to come.

Who is to blame? Who was accountable? Why did it happen? A deadly silence. The government all together maintain a sphinxlike silence. For today the state did not utter a word, did not care to investigate, all they did was to hide the traces, Motherland, disabled and impoverished with all the riches they possess.

Alas, the Lebanon we learned was, lived in and loved so much, does not exist anymore.

What a farce!

erase the fragments and leave no room for questions!

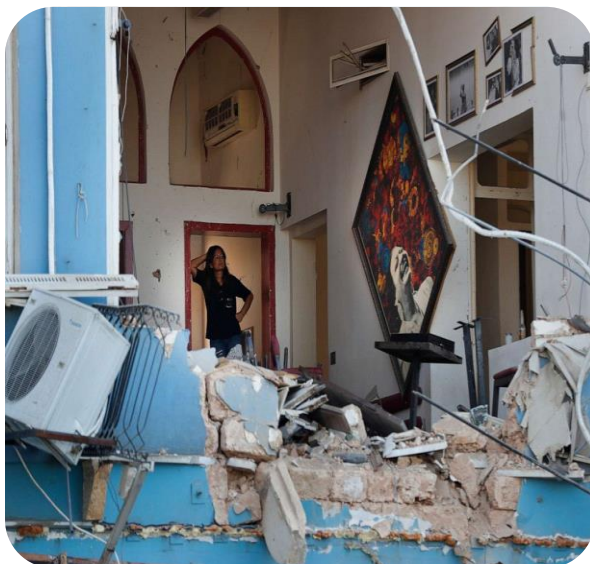
The blast divulged years of rooted corruption and mismanagement, a continuous and enhanced falsehood, fraudulence and dishonesty of the ruling magna. We cried out the crumbling of our hopes and dreams, the falsehood of a statehood, the corruption and dishonesty of the statesmen, disintegration of the institutions, collectively engaged in the annihilation of Lebanon.

But for whom the bell tolls?

No dialogue, no concessions, no consensus, no mercy, no shame, no principles, no integrity, an entire state, the whole system is collectively engaged in a race called Libanocide!

But where are we, the Lebanese?????

Sadly, there are no Lebanese, Lebanese are Maronites, Sunnis, Shiaas, Druzes, 16 kinds, and each want a Lebanon for themselves! Lebanese are without Lebanon, orphaned in their own



Hussein Malla /AP



Photo by Dia mourad

نتواصل
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