



NEW TOLERANCE: A woman holds her child in downtown Beirut, Lebanon. Behind her, a church and a mosque stand side by side.
CHARLIE GHANEM/THE EPOCH TIMES

Woman Recalls Lebanon's Civil War

By CHARLIE GHANEM
Epoch Times staff

BEIRUT, Lebanon—Hundreds of thousands of civilians lost their lives in the Lebanese civil war, which began on April 13, 1975. Fatima remembers that day clearly. Now 57 years old, the Lebanese woman shared her story with The Epoch Times.

"I can never forget that date. I was with my fiancé visiting my aunt in the southern suburb of Beirut when we heard the gunfire. We didn't know what to think at that moment; we just hoped for a way to get to our homes safe. So we turned the television on and waited for a news flash."

Earlier that day during a church gathering in Beirut, four members of the Phalanges Maronite militia were murdered in a drive-by shooting. The Phalanges blamed the Palestinians for the attack.

Later that same day, the Phalanges retaliated by opening fire on a bus carrying armed Palestinians in the suburb of Ain El Remmeh, killing 27 people. The event was known as "The Bus Massacre of Ain El Remmeh," and marked the start of a civil war that lasted until 1990.

After the Israeli state was founded in 1948, thousands of displaced Palestinians ended up in refugee camps in neighboring Arab countries such as Lebanon. From the mid-1960s armed Palestinian groups working with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) began conducting raids from these countries into Israel. They established a presence in Lebanon in 1970 after being expelled from Jordan.

Battles between the Palestinians and Israelis were most significant in Lebanon. With the development of Palestinian militias, Lebanese lines were divided. Militias from all sects were formed,

each fighting on the side they saw fitting their agenda. Eventually Beirut was divided into East and West, with the East holding the Christian majority and the West with the Muslim majority.

Fatima lived between the two sides.

"I don't know how I got married in the late '70s, but I didn't have a wedding ceremony or a house. I lived with my husband between his parents' house in West Beirut and my parents' house on the East side, depending on the safety of the situation. Sometimes the roads were closed and I would be stuck somewhere while he was somewhere else," she explained.

Despite the difficulties, they managed to have three children between 1979 and 1983. Many people were afraid to leave their homes during the war. Militias made roadblocks to check IDs for religious affiliation. Their killings reached every sect and every region—they called it "ID-based slaughtering." Truces and ceasefires took place alongside assassinations, suicide bombings, and presidential elections that would sometimes last only a few days. "Beirut, once the destination of tourists from around the world, turned to ru-

ins," Fatima said.

During the Israeli invasion of West Beirut in 1982, Fatima and her family moved to her parents' house in Ashrafieh on the East side. "I was pregnant with my third child, Joseph. Luckily, I had saved enough money before I got married. I was able to support the family. No one could get a job back then."

After the invasion, Palestinian and Syrian troops were evacuated and civilians were settled into makeshift camps. The Lebanese militias were still fighting, however. Some were against Syria, and some against Israel. The latter continued its war against the Palestinian militias and committed two massacres, which were condemned worldwide. After international attention was brought to the situation, Ameen Gemayyel was elected President of Lebanon in September 1982.

More local military conflicts displaced many families again, including Fatima's. This time Fatima left for the West of the capital where she bought a house, leaving her mother and siblings in Eastern Beirut. Every weekend in the mid '80s she drove her car through roadblocks to smuggle bread, water, and gasoline for her family. "Beirut was in total destruction. Muslim militias fought each other, they fought against Chris-

tian militias, and the Christians also fought against each other."

The safest place for the family was her house in the south. As she drove there, civilian bodies and burned ambulances were scattered on the streets. She prayed to reach her home safely. "We lived there for four years in peace. After the situation calmed down in Beirut in early 1991, I started to visit my parents on the weekend and they did the same ... we moved back to East Beirut in 1995 and have been living here ever since," she said.

Fatima, now a widow, runs her own small business with her daughter. She lives next to her parents and hopes to join her sons and nephews in the West soon.

A common feeling there is that Lebanon has always been the battlefield for other countries. On the 34th annual memorial of the war, people gathered in front of the Ministry of Interior in Beirut, holding photos of what took place. They remember the war, remember the destruction, the victims, and the pain they suffered.

They condemned the sectarian system, and thanked Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud for enabling them to remove their religious affiliation from their personal records, thus lessening the sectarian pressure.

"What civil war?" Fatima said, giving her final remarks. "We never had a civil war. We have always lived together, Muslims and Christians looking after each other. I remember our good days when we did not even know the religion of our neighbors and friends. It was those big countries that fought their wars on our land. They gave us weapons and trained our youth to kill, they destroyed our land and planted hatred in our youths' hearts."

U.S. Says New Troops Push Taliban From Kabul

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SHANK, Afghanistan (Reuters)—An influx of new U.S. troops near Kabul this year is reclaiming the Afghan capital's outskirts from the Taliban, but violence would increase in the short-term, the U.S. commander in the area said.

The United States has rushed close to 3,000 troops to Logar and Maidan Wardak provinces to defend the capital's southern and western borders this year, the first phase of a planned increase that will almost double U.S. presence in the country.

For years the areas near Kabul were quiet, with little presence of either U.S. troops or their foes.

But Taliban fighters moved into the two provinces last year, bringing the Islamist militants to the capital's edges in substantial numbers for the first time since they were driven from Kabul in 2001.

Colonel David Haight, commander of the new brigade of U.S. troops in the two provinces, said his force's arrival since January had begun to turn the tide.

"I'm not ready to stick my saber into the ground and declare victory here yet on the security situation, but things are improving," he told Reuters late on Tuesday.

"We were 300 soldiers here before ... but they weren't able to project combat power out very much. With a magnitude of 10, we're now able to spread through the battle space and dominate the battle space," he said.

Haight's soldiers are part of a wave of 3,500 dispatched in January by outgoing President George W. Bush. Since then, new President Barack Obama has promised 21,000 more as Washington switches its focus from Iraq to Afghanistan.

North to South

The lack of foreign troops and Afghan government presence on Kabul's southern and western outskirts meant insurgents were able to "seep" in and find sanctuary in the two provinces, Haight said. The result was a spate of attacks last year.

In August, three female foreign aid workers and their Afghan driver were shot dead in their car as they were driving through Logar, the bloodiest single attack on foreign humanitarian aid workers in the country in years.

The new U.S. troops have been conducting operations in both provinces largely from north to south in an attempt to push militants away from the capital, Haight said. He rejected claims the insurgents were encroaching on the capital.

"The truth is, the Taliban doesn't have the technology, it doesn't have the amount of soldiers it needs, it doesn't have the capacity to really go into Kabul and take over Kabul. Not even close," Haight said.

One of the troops' main priorities has been to secure the two major highways that run south from Kabul through both provinces. Three forward operating bases and around half a dozen outposts have been erected on and around both routes.

Although security had already begun to improve in the area, Haight said he expected violence to increase in the short-term with more insurgents moving in during the warmer months, the traditional fighting season in Afghanistan.

"I believe that we're going to see enemy activity increase for a while. The enemy is going to make a play for this area because it's still important to him and he would like to have influence in this area," he said.

Darfur Rebels Sentenced to Death for Khartoum Attack

KHARTOUM (Reuters)—A Sudanese court sentenced 10 members of a Darfur rebel group to death on Wednesday for an unprecedented 2008 attack on the Sudanese capital.

The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebels were found guilty of involvement in the attack in May on the Khartoum suburb of Omdurman. Three others were acquitted and will be freed, the court said.

They were found guilty of 12 charges, including treason, violence against the state and illegal possession of weapons. The group has seven days to appeal the decision, but the sitting judge rejected requests for leniency from their lawyers.

After the ruling, the chief peace talks negotiator for JEM warned that the court's decision would "open a new gate of anarchy in this country" and further complicate the abortive talks held in Doha in the Gulf in February.

"We agreed in Doha that prisoners of war should be released as a measure of confidence-building, and this is clearly a violation of what we agreed," Ahmed Tugud told Reuters.

"This step will complicate the whole process, not only the talks, but also the security situation all over Sudan."

During the talks the government and JEM agreed to adopt

confidence-building measures including a prisoner swap. They said they would meet again to negotiate a more formal "framework agreement" before considering a ceasefire and full peace talks.

But JEM pulled out of future talks after the government expelled aid groups from Darfur following the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Sudan's President Omar Hassan al-Bashir.

The government's chief negotiator was not immediately available to comment.

More than 200 people were killed and hundreds injured when JEM launched the shock attack on Khartoum.

The rebels drove across hundreds of miles of desert and scrubland to reach the capital and were only repelled at a bridge a few kilometers away from the presidential palace.

Some 50 JEM members have previously been sentenced to death for the attacks, including JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim's half brother Abdel Aziz el-Nur Ashr. None have yet been executed.

The court was specially created to try JEM members involved in the attack.

On Monday, Sudanese authorities executed nine Darfuri men found guilty in the 2006 murder of a Sudanese newspaper editor.

New Law Cuts Swedish Downloads in Half

By HANS BENGTTSSON
Epoch Times Staff

STOCKHOLM, Sweden—Since a new law against file sharing went into effect in Sweden on April 1, downloads of music and films have been cut in half, according to Swedish news agency TT.

The law gives copyright holders

the right to receive information about file sharers from their Internet service providers.

Jon Lindén, marketing director for the company who conducted the survey, told TT that the decline in downloads can be viewed as a success for the controversial new law, but it may also be a mere short-term effect of large amounts of at-

tentation from the Swedish media.

One reason that downloads are dropping may be that many people have switched to streaming sources such as Youtube and Spotify.

"People are quite happy to use legal options, as long as they work properly," said Lindén. "However, the uploading of material hasn't decreased as much, and that was

actually the main target for the record and movie industries."

It is believed that those who upload material are more technically proficient, and therefore feel their identity is better protected.

"I also think there's a certain measure of anarchism and rebellion among this group," Lindén said.

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