

Our struggle is not for Lebanon's polity or economy, it is for the human being -- for social justice.

Monseigneur Grégoire Haddad
Ottawa, 27 September 1990

I BACKGROUND TO THE WAR

On 12 April 1991, President Elias Hrawi proclaimed the "first year of peace" in Lebanon, marking what was hoped to be the end of a war that has ravaged the country since 1975. Recent developments suggest that stability may be returning to most of the country, although the situation in South Lebanon is still critical. The consequences of the war have been devastating. Gross indicators of the human, social, and economic destruction include: over 150,000 dead, 700,000 wounded, 40,000 handicapped, one-third of the population displaced from their homes, disruption of livelihoods, accelerating rates of emigration, destruction of educational and medical facilities as well as industrial enterprises, severe impairment of basic services, billions of dollars in property loss, and a shattering of the once "miraculous" Lebanese economy.¹

Lebanon's violent eruption involved a highly complex interplay of domestic, regional and international factors. Attempts to explain the conflict often invoke simplifications that obscure understanding of the underlying issues. Workshop participants were especially dismayed at the lack of sophisticated analysis by the international media.

Television images that focussed on "newsworthy" levels of destruction portrayed an entire society engaged in its own unravelling. This focus, however, ignored the vast majority of Lebanese -- the unarmed civilians who did not partake in the violence, but who were its silenced victims. The steadfast resistance of Lebanese civilians against the domination of their society and state by armed groupings was rarely reported.

¹ Many of the socioeconomic statistics cited in this report are estimates, some of which conflict. These disparities are the result of the immense methodological difficulties in completing "scientific" studies in a war zone. All dollar amounts, except those relating specifically to Canada, are quoted in US currency.