
ACT for the Disappeared
Towards clarifying the fate of the missing

May 2019 – April 2020



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New Tactics in Human Rights

New Tactics in Human Rights, a program of the Center for Victims of Torture, emerged as a creator of tactics, a leader of coalitions, and as a center that advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position – one of healing and of reclaiming civic leadership. Since 1999, New Tactics has created unique resources – organized around the analysis of potential solutions rather than that of specific issues, geographic regions, or target groups – that allow activists to clearly recognize the unique elements of their situation, and to seek promising approaches that have worked elsewhere in order to apply them to new regions or issues. Since the program’s creation, human rights activists from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have participated in New Tactics in Human Rights activities, including regional workshops, an International Symposium, web-based discussions, publication development, and more. These activists encouraged New Tactics to provide more focused training and resources in the region. In 2009, New Tactics launched an initiative to support MENA human rights activists. With the generous support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), New Tactics has been able to provide training and mentoring in human rights-based advocacy using the Strategic Effectiveness Method for activists since 2016. The campaign featured here was developed as part of this NED-supported work. For more information:

- <https://www.newtactics.org>
- <https://www.cvt.org>

General Overview

Advocacy Goal

A Lebanese society in which all the families of the missing as a result of the civil war enjoy their right to equality by knowing the fate of those who went missing.

Human rights–based focus area¹

Non-discrimination, Accountability & Protection

UDHR article

Article 1. Right to Equality²

Geographic area

Local, within Beirut. However, the advocacy results will lead to a mapping of all of the gravesites in Lebanon.

Advocacy Components³

A challenge for many civil society organizations is distinguishing between being busy with activities and implementing tactical actions that strategically advance an advocacy effort. In order to help organizations better assess how to expend precious resources, this case study offers four action areas that are needed to conduct any advocacy campaign:

- Internal capacity building
- Research
- Mobilization
- Engaging decision-makers

Tactical Aims

New Tactics in Human Rights has defined four primary human rights-based tactical aims: prevention, intervention, restorative, and promotion. This case illustrates the following tactical aim:

- Intervention

Campaign implementation period

May 24, 2019 – April 1, 2020

Campaign Outcome Statement

As a result of the actions implemented by ACT, the campaign hoped that the authorities in Lebanon would protect potential gravesites from future destruction.

¹ Source: The information related to these four areas of rights are adapted from and found in Discover Human Rights: A Human Rights Approach to Social Justice Work, The Advocates for Human Rights. The New Tactics Method utilizes: safety and security; non-discrimination; participation; and protection–accountability.

NOTE: The rights listed in these four “categories” maybe placed in any area depending upon the context where the right is being violated.

For example, Article 23: Right to join trade unions might be placed in “Safety and Security” rather than “Participation” where organizing or joining a union is dangerous.

² Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – Article 1 (1): All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

³ The identification of the four action areas outlined in the Legacy Tool comes from the advocacy experience of Mr. Faisal Abu Sondos, former Executive Director of The Royal Conservation Society of Jordan (JREDS). Mr. Abu Sondos has been a New Tactics Method Trainer since 2010 and Lead Method Trainer since 2011. While using the New Tactics Strategic Effectiveness Method in his own organizations’ advocacy efforts and coaching other civil society organizations in using the Method he identified these four action areas to assess progress. The benefits and drawbacks regarding the use of technology in each of these advocacy action areas needs examination in relation to the appropriateness for the intended target groups and goals of an advocacy campaign.

Background

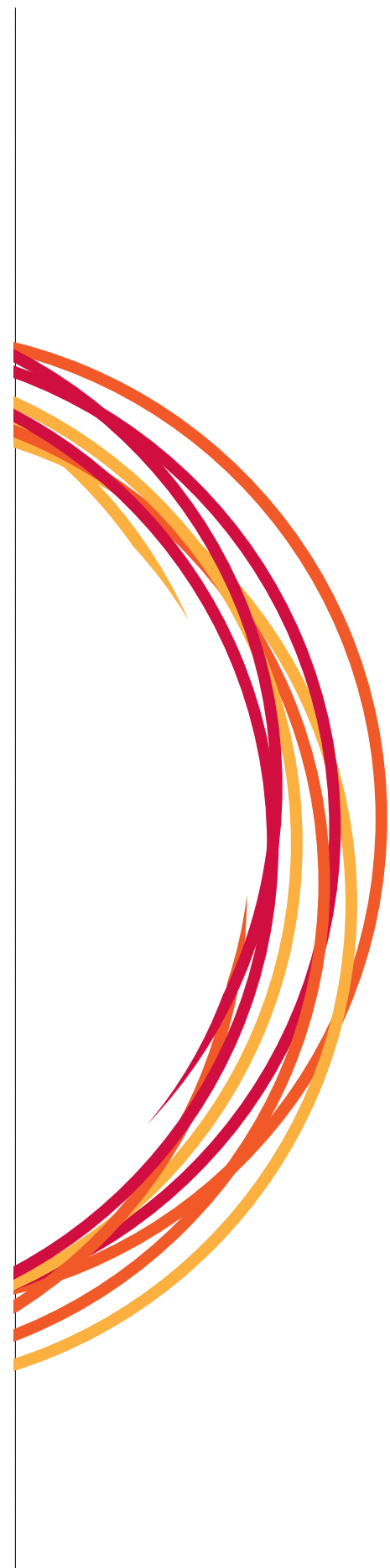
ACT for the Disappeared (ACT) is a Lebanese human rights association founded in 2010 by a group of women activists. ACT's mission is to provide answers for missing civil war victims' families through collecting and preserving information about the missing and to foster a sustainable reconciliation process.

According to ACT's research team, there are thousands missing individuals, mostly civilians, from all Lebanese communities and geographic areas. These individuals went missing in Lebanon during the 15 years of the civil war (1975-1990).

Today, more than 30 years after the end of the war, the relatives of the missing are still suffering. They are not able to mourn their loved ones until they know what happened to them. This suffering is a specific kind of loss termed ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss occurs when there has been no closure or clear understanding of what happened – it is a loss that is unable to be processed. This kind of loss leaves family members searching for answers, and thus complicates and delays the process of grieving, often resulting in unresolved grief. Families need answers about the fate of their missing relatives and retrieval of remains in order to be able to give them a dignified burial.

ACT has been implementing a documentation process since 2014 that includes collecting information from the families such as the date and context of the disappearance, as well as stories about the disappeared member if the family wishes to share them. Additional information could be compiled from credible sources from the news and press. These same sources are also used to collect information about grave sites. All gathered information is saved and audited securely with limited access for ACT staff only.

New Tactics has mentored many campaigns in the Middle East, but hadn't previously worked with a campaign that has such a strong emphasis on restorative rights for the missing and their families. Therefore, when this campaign was presented during the New Tactics Regional Training of Trainers in 2018 in Amman – Jordan, New Tactics was eager to support ACT.



"We are applying for a new source of funding to develop better projects in the future by using this campaign as a baseline for any projects to come."

ACT Staff

Success markers

Progressive success markers are identified so that the campaign team is able to know and demonstrate that they achieved the intended outcome. Success markers are specific and fixed standards of success for outcomes that can be compared with what actually happens after action is taken.



Enough Success Marker (a modest success that is realistic to achieve): ACT will produce a report based on the results of research conducted to be presented to the authorities in order to protect two selected gravesites in Beirut. (Achieved)



Enough Success Marker (a modest success that is realistic to achieve): ACT will produce awareness-raising materials to be presented to the authorities to highlight the importance of the issue in order to protect the two selected gravesites in Beirut. (Achieved)



Full Success Marker (a slightly more ambitious success that is realistic to achieve): The authorities will prevent the destruction of the two selected gravesites. (Not yet achieved)



Overflowing Success Marker (a much more ambitious success that could happen but would be very surprising if it did): The authorities will agree to amend Law 105 according to the recommendations presented by ACT in order to prevent the destruction of gravesites in Lebanon. (Not yet achieved)

ACT also has conducted a needs assessment with 150 family members in 2021 to understand their needs and expectations.

Achievements

Utilizing data

ACT was able to collect more data about gravesites by adding a field officer to their team. This has helped in conducting more interviews with the families of the missing, witnesses and former fighters. ACT now has information about 111 additional gravesites. The additional data collected made it possible to propose recommendations for best practices to the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons.

1. The additional data allowed the implementing team to conduct further analysis of the Law of the Missing (Article 15) and existing analysis of the law.
2. ACT held several meetings with actors working on the issue of the missing and disappeared in Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Iraq and Cyprus to enrich their research and understand the experiences of other countries related to gravesite protection.

The above activities have now made it possible for the team to successfully assess the official approval process required to assess, monitor, and protect gravesites in Lebanon and continue their research

on best practices around the world on how to protect gravesites.

Raising awareness of the issue:

ACT used three forms of awareness-raising to highlight the importance of the issue and gain support to achieve the goal of the campaign:

1. An animated film on the risks of destruction of gravesites. The film highlighted the need to protect the gravesites. The film was used to raise awareness among the municipalities (who grant construction permits), archaeologists, construction companies, the Engineers Syndicate, architects, and the general public. Below is a screenshot of the draft storyboard of the video.
2. An information leaflet that summarized the importance of the issue and how to take the necessary precautions in the event of remains being found during an excavation.
3. International meetings. ACT participated in 10 meetings to make connections with others doing similar work and gain ideas on addressing the issue.

There are two significant factors that contributed to the success of the campaign: the campaign theme and the capacity of the team.



- The campaign's theme advocates for the respect of human rights (right to dignity, protection from torture, right to know, etc....) and affects a large segment of Lebanese society, in particular, the families of the missing in Lebanon. A careful analysis of the campaign theme contributed to a better understanding of the problem and thus the work to present suitable solutions.
- The diversity of the team's expertise was critical to the success of the campaign's various activities. Although they are a small team, each one of its members is specialized. Team members contributed vast experience in research, documentation, field work, and most importantly, each added their enthusiasm and strong belief in restoring the rights of the missing and protecting the gravesites from destruction.

"Having the tactical tools gave us much more credibility in front of the national commission."

ACT Staff

Main campaign components

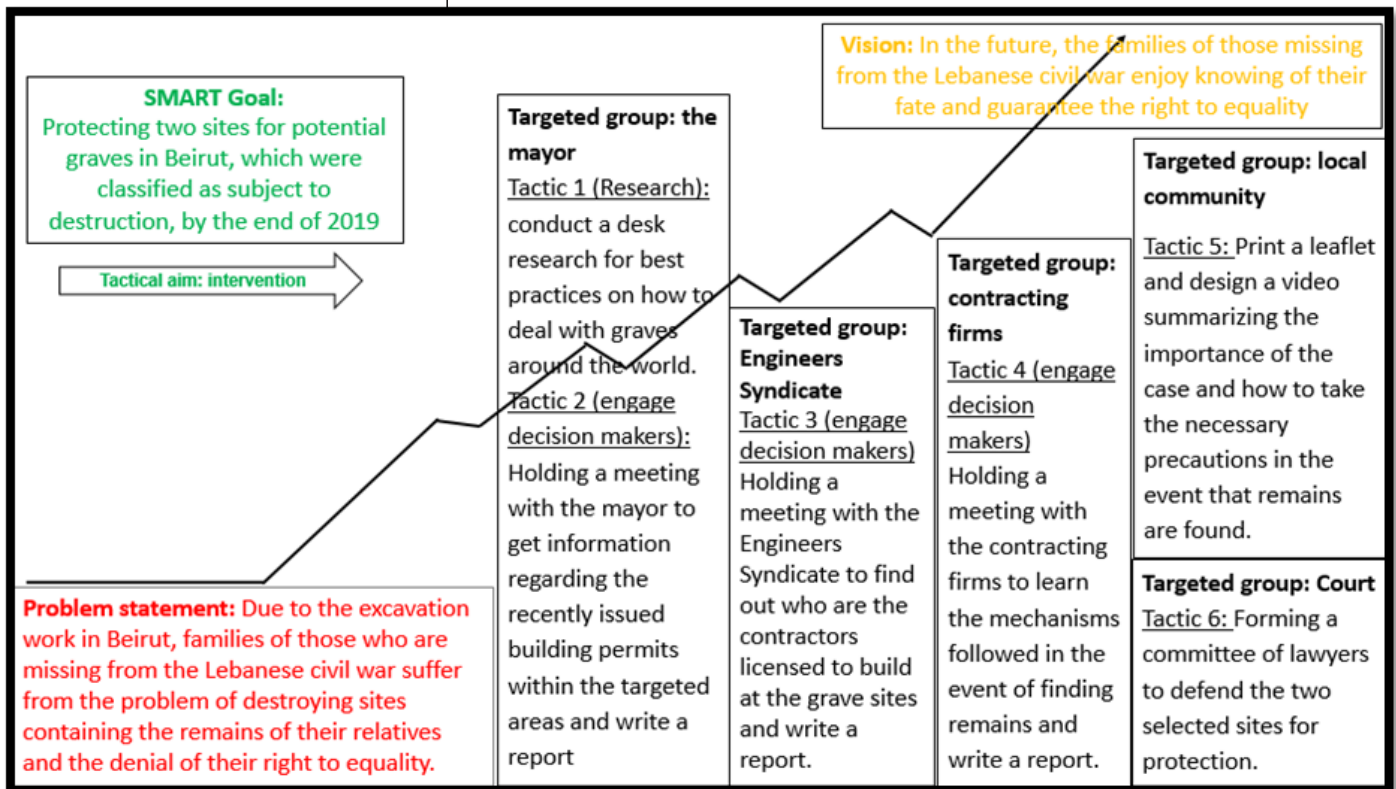
Advocacy action areas

Internal Capacity Building

This action area requires attention to an organization’s capacity to carry out advocacy including commitment, structure, mobilization, leadership and decision making.

ACT implemented their campaign using the New Tactics in Human Rights Strategic Effectiveness method, which provides a five-step incremental process for developing a strategic pathway (also called a journey of change) for the campaign. This strategic path helps to track campaign progress and observe its development, see the illustration below.

The method begins with group work to identify a clear and specific problem statement. This is an important foundational step for any campaign. ACT’s identified problem statement was: “Due to the excavation work



The writing in red is the problem is at the bottom of the mountain, where we are today and which addresses the right that is being violated. The vision is the writing in yellow which goes beyond the mountain as we seek a world where the violated right is one that is being realized. What is written in green, is the SMART goal which is what the campaign is trying to achieve through the implementation of all the six tactics listed in the black boxes on the same image.

in Beirut, families of those who are missing from the Lebanese civil war suffer from the problem of destroying sites containing the remains of their relatives and the denial of their right to equality.”

Having built the capacity of the core team to use the method during the early stages of the implementation process, the management team and the researcher were primarily responsible for conducting campaign activities. A field officer also joined the campaign to conduct all the field visits.

Research

This action area requires attention to gathering information, data, and analysis to develop recommendations for actions on an issue and regarding each of the other components (internal capacity building, mobilization and engagement of decision makers) before, during and after taking action on an issue.

Studying the problem in detail and defining it from a human rights perspective helped determine specific information and research needed to strengthen the campaign, such as visiting the sites to assess their condition and speaking with more witnesses and former fighters to gather more information about the sites. It also helped ACT to present an integrated picture of those involved and a unified identification of their demands to relevant allies and authorities. This process helped save time, effort and utilization of limited resources.

The research phase began with the collection and analysis of background information on cases of disappearances, gravesite locations, and risk of destruction to gravesites. Information gathered included locations, dates, descriptions of events, and identification of responsible armed groups. This information was gathered through active research from the families of the missing, newspapers, and credible open sources related to the war, including detention centers, check points, and firefighters who witnessed the events.

ACT also conducted research on best practices regarding the management of skeletal remains. These practices cover the discovery phase of the remains to the end of the identification process, including notification of the families, gravesite protection strategies. They also researched how to develop guidelines and recommendations for Lebanese authorities, related to the search process. ACT additionally shared their research with the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, of which ACT is a member, as part of a large-scale international mapping process.

To date, ACT has conducted 9 field visits in Beirut and Mount Lebanon to assess and evaluate potential gravesites in those areas. They have interviewed six local residents, former fighters, and witnesses from the war and collected new information related to checkpoints, detention centers, and events.

Mobilization

This action area requires attention to engaging and bringing together individuals, organizations and institutions in a collective effort on an issue.

The families of the missing are the main partners in this campaign. They not only provided all the needed information to ACT during the research phase, but ACT continues to keep the families up to date on project progress, conduct regular needs assessments, and provide psychological support. ACT conducted a needs assessment with 150 family members in 2021.

In addition to the families of the missing, ACT recognized the importance of meeting with archaeologists who have been working for the Directorate

“As a result of this campaign we have information about 103 gravesites that other organization do not have which encourages and comforts them to have partnership with ACT.”

ACT Staff

of General Antiquities (DGA) to understand their practice and procedures before a construction project launches. ACT also engaged with forensic experts, lawyers and judges to understand the practices related to respecting gravesites that are discovered in areas not covered by the archeological laws.

ACT held several meetings with actors working on the issue of the missing and disappeared in Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Iran and Cyprus to understand the experiences of these countries related to gravesite protection. These experiences introduced different strategies that could be adopted in Lebanon. For instance, in Guatemala land was purchased in order to protect a site where the families knew graves were located. The land now serves as a memorial for victims of the conflict called the Centre for the Historical Memory of Women. Another tactic is utilizing requests for immediate authorization from a judge or an attorney general's office to protect a site from construction.

In collaboration with other local and International civil society actors and UN agencies, ACT organized a meeting to discuss the legal analysis of Law 105. The meeting was attended by representatives of family associations, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United National Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), civil society organizations, and forensic experts. The participants discussed the recommendations outlined in ACT's reports and the priorities before Lebanon's National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared.

On August 30th, 2021 ACT launched a new online platform called [WAYNOUN](#), which is an interactive digital space designed to bring to the public objective and reliable information on missing and forcibly disappeared persons and engage the readers to contribute to the search process.

Engaging Decision Makers

This action area requires attention to understanding and applying power dynamics and decision-making processes to positively affect change on an issue.

Using the New Tactics [Tactical Mapping Tool \(TMT\)](#), which equips activists to collaboratively expand their understanding of relationships and develop strategic and effective action by diagramming the relationships that surround human rights abuses, the ACT team worked on identifying the list of stakeholders to meet with (e.g. construction companies, municipalities, architects, etc.). Unfortunately, since October 2019, Lebanon has been witnessing civil unrest with thousands taking the streets to protest against increasing taxes, government corruption, deteriorating economic situation, and the onset of the COVID pandemic. ACT has therefore postponed these meetings due to limited mobility and safety issues. These tactics are the only ones from the journey of change that have not been implemented.

Long-Term Impacts

The impact of advocacy on the organization

ACT is continuing to work on the issue of gravesite destruction as it is at the core of its mission. They are proceeding with this campaign, but there are currently external factors affecting their work, such as the dire economic situation in Lebanon. As a result of these economic challenges, advocating to protect gravesites has become a lower priority for many people in Lebanon. This campaign is being used as a roadmap for future projects and fundraising. ACT has continued to enter new cases of missing persons in their database, as well as identified and contacted additional families of the missing to interview.

ACT is preparing to publish “An Integral Approach to Peace Building and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support” that includes all the data gathered on cases of disappearances, the guidelines developed to search for missing persons in Lebanon, and the needs assessment for the families of the missing and their expectations from the search process. ACT is developing guidelines to be published in partnership with Lebanon’s National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared focusing on the risk of trauma that might happen as a result of publishing this information. ACT also intends to identify additional gravesites and conduct more field visits of gravesites in order to produce a documentary that lists gravesites in Lebanon that are in need of protection. This documentary project is funded by the British Academy and hosted by Brunel University London in the UK.

Contribution to regional organizations to address future challenges

The work of ACT is contributing to other important organizational efforts in the region. For example, ACT met with Syrian civil society organizations and victims’ groups to discuss data collection and data management as a way for them to benefit from ACT’s research and experience in this regard.

