



REBUILDING BEIRUT

Updates from FDCD's field team



Bernadette in her apartment overlooking Mar Mikhael and the Port of Beirut, September 2, 2020.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



I lost everything in one second. 11 years from my life! My house, my husband, my clinic, my work, my cars – everything! God just saved my two children. They are all I have right now, thanks God.

All you do, when you finish university, you love someone, you get married, you make a home...I lost all of this in one second! In one second! How can a brain understand or accept what happened? Every new day is a problem. You will live the explosion every day in your life after the 4th of August.



Bernadette is one of thousands of Lebanese parents left as the sole provider for their families following the explosion on August 4th. This is especially difficult for women, who are much less likely to be employed in Lebanon than men, as they assume the role of breadwinner in the midst of a diminishing job market.

At FDCD, we know that each person's situation is unique and complex, and we believe that people themselves are the best authorities on what they most need to get back on their feet. Our field coordinators work with beneficiaries to identify what they need most and figure out ways to get it to them, rather than deciding what kind of aid they need without feedback. Bernadette has to rebuild her life from almost nothing. While recovering and rebuilding all she lost will take years, FDCD helped kickstart the process by paying to repair her car, which Bernadette said was key to her getting back on her feet.

Thank you to our generous partners for their continued support!



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REBUILDING STEP BY STEP

On a typical weekday evening, before the explosion, you could find Bernadette, her husband Jacques, and their two young children in the kitchen preparing dinner together. Jacques would turn on some music, and the four of them would dance and sing in the kitchen. "We were a happy family. We never went to bed with any problems," Bernadette remembers.

August 4th seemed like another typical weekday, until around 6:05 when Bernadette's son called her into the living room to see the plume of smoke rising from the port of Beirut. From the kitchen, Jacques worried about the fire. At 6:08, Bernadette took out her phone to take a picture of the plume. Neither could have imagined what would happen next.

The explosion threw Bernadette across the room. Her children hid behind the couch (which itself had been pushed back several meters), covered with glass. Despite her fear, Bernadette knew she needed to stay calm. She decided she needed to get the children out of the apartment as soon as possible because she feared another explosion was coming. Jacques had been walking to the living room at moment of the explosion, but Bernadette thought he was in the kids' room, where he would be safe from the blast. She grabbed her children and ran downstairs, assuming that Jacques was close behind.

After several minutes, Jacques still had not appeared downstairs. Bernadette began to worry, feeling torn between returning to search for him and staying with her children. "[My children] were afraid. They said, 'please mommy, don't go back to our home, we don't want you to die. We don't want you to leave us alone.' My daughter was bleeding from her mouth."

Finally, some men went upstairs to look for Jacques. They carried him, unconscious, to nearby St. George's hospital, which had also been severely damaged in the explosion. Jacques was eventually transported to another hospital and immediately sent into surgery. When Bernadette arrived and tried to find him, a doctor informed her that he had died. Looking back on the chaos of those first few hours after the explosion, Bernadette takes consolation in knowing that she protected her children and did everything she could for her husband. "I thank God because I had the chance to take care of him the last hour of his life."

Bernadette remembers her husband first and foremost as a profoundly selfless and kind person. Jacques was an architect, and for years he worked in Iraq rebuilding hospitals without taking a salary for himself. After the Israeli bombings in July 2006, he rebuilt churches in the south of Lebanon, again without asking for compensation. "No one can believe that he is an architect who worked for free!" Bernadette explains. "If you ask the priest [at the rebuilt church], he'll tell you my husband was a saint."

Bernadette also remembers Jacques as an amazing father. "His son and daughter loved him so, so much...He helped me with everything. We were always together," she recalls. "He had an open mind, an open heart. A pure heart. He was an amazing dad. I'm so sad...[but] God gave me this amazing man for 11 years, so I'm grateful because I had the opportunity to know a man like him."

In the weeks following the explosion, Bernadette's life has turned upside down. Her responsibilities seem endless. She had to find a place for her family to stay and hire a carpenter to begin repairs in her destroyed apartment. She has to pay bills, deal with insurance indemnities, and arrange her husband's affairs. She is now the sole provider for her family, but she can't resume work because her clinic was destroyed in the explosion. Through it all, caring for her children continues to be her top priority. Even with the support of her family, Bernadette has been constantly on the go since August 4. "I haven't had any time to rest," she says. "I haven't even had time to cry for my husband."

With the support of FDCD, Bernadette could pay for repairs for her car. Now that she has a working car again, she can go to the grocery store on her own and drive her kids around. Having her car repaired is just one step in the long process of creating a new life for herself and her children. This process will be slow, but she is taking it step by step, one day at a time, she tells me. Shway shway – little by little they are beginning to put the pieces back together.

FIELD UPDATES

FDCD's team is continuing to assess houses and begin repairs to the houses already assessed. To date, 30 homes and family businesses have been repaired with assistance from FDCD.

FDCD recently began a partnership with the Lebanese Army's Emergency Response Unit to improve coordination of assistance efforts moving forward.

Psychosocial support sessions are ongoing! FDCD is offering FREE sessions with a mental health and psychosocial support consultant to anyone impacted by the Beirut explosion. Individual and group sessions available, both in-person and online. For more information, or to set up a session, email info@fdcd.org

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