

Lyna Elias

A dedicated social leader who insists that social work should train the young in responsible citizenship and civic service.

The Lebanese war with its tragic sequels has induced a large number of Lebanese groups and, more particularly, women's organizations, to take part in a general movement to help the war victims, including the injured, the sick, the displaced, the disabled and the helpless widows and orphans. The Lebanese Red Cross Society, presided over by Mrs. Alexandra Issa El-Khoury, has doubled its activity. With its clinics, blood banks, anti-drug campaign and first aid courses, it has greatly contributed to general relief work. Many other welfare organizations shared in the campaign. The "Child Welfare Association", the YWCA, "The Union of Women of the South", are only some of the feminine organizations which participated in the general mobilization movement.

One of the successful projects stimulated by war conditions is the welfare project called "Help Lebanon", founded by Mrs. Lyna Elias, a dedicated volunteer social worker who, since the age of 14, was haunted by the desire to start a project of guidance and counselling for youth. Her university education in law and philosophy, which she continued after her marriage, served to develop her general knowledge and to prepare her for successful contact with the younger generation. For some time, she served as a member of various social organizations. In 1972 she founded "The Mission", a movement aiming at spiritual revival among the Lebanese youth for whom she published two works dealing with spiritual life and national consciousness.

"Help Lebanon", which she founded in 1979, aimed to recreate the human personality by using new guidelines in social activity. Training the individual in true citizenship, awakening in the new generation a sense of national responsibility, these are the ultimate goals she sought in her work. As an initial step, she started in 1979-1980, summer camps for displaced and refugee children, recruited, the first year, from one district of Lebanon and, the second year, from the various districts that suffered from war injuries. According to a report given in September 1980, seven groups of children, numbering 740, benefited from 21 days of healthy camp life in seven Lebanese mountain villages. The ages of these children ranged from 7 to 12. The camps were financed by private contributors and conducted by qualified leaders, who had received their training at the "Training Center in Active Educational Methods in Lebanon". The children had a chance to enjoy not only recreation and entertainment but also to make



new contacts and acquire better knowledge of their country. They were trained in useful manual skills and were able to produce many household articles and decorative objects which served to organize an exhibit, open to the public toward the end of September. Group life taught them to work together, to share in responsibility and to develop friendly relations with each other.

Civic education occupies a primary place in Mrs. Elias' program. In the summer camps, cleanliness is greatly emphasized and children are taught to behave like responsible citizens. With this objective in mind, she organized, during September 1980, two seminars for civic education which were open to teachers and university professors. The sessions were conducted by French specialists, who tried to initiate a program of civic training which would form a basis for generalized education in this field.

Within her civic welfare activities she includes her participation in the international anti-drug campaign, JAD (Junior Anti-Drug), and in some re-education programs. To widen her social horizon and learn new experiences, she took a trip to France and Switzerland where she gave lectures about her work and tried to acquaint her audience with the Lebanese problems.

In presenting her opinion regarding social work, she says: "It is not enough to have energy and good will. There is a certain technique which applies to every type of work and which should be applied by social workers. On the other hand, the public must be informed about the deep motives that lie behind civic behavior and how it relates to the political system adopted by the country. We should understand that civic responsibility, in its broader sense, like obeying the laws and paying taxes, and in its simpler aspects like keeping the streets clean and taking care of public property, is not a luxury nor a gratuitous act, but a duty and an indispensable element in the building of a nation."

(Information obtained from interviews and reports published by "Le Réveil", end of September 1980.)