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## Khalass stages sit-in at Parliament to protest deadlock

By Hassan Abdo

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BEIRUT: Khalass, a nonpartisan NGO, staged a sit-in in Downtown Beirut on Wednesday to demand that politicians carry out their responsibilities toward the Lebanese people.

Emerging from the cafes and alleyways that surround the Parliament building, a crowd of some 30 members approached the stairs leading to the Parliament and locked arms. They arrived unannounced, hiding their "KHALASS!" shirts and banners until the last moment.

"This is our Parliament," shouted Khalass member Gilbert Doumit. "The Parliament is our house as citizens and they cannot kick us out of it."

"We are here waiting for our [MPs] to come, he added."

Within moments of gathering, plain-clothed security officials, along with soldiers, arrived on the scene and began to break up the demonstration. As Khalass demonstrators stood silent, security personnel shouted orders to the media to leave the area.

When several members of Khalass attempted to share their purpose with the media, security officials removed all journalists from the area. The Khalass members, however, were allowed to remain in front of the Parliament.

Joelle Mousarregge spoke to The Daily Star by phone as she continued to demonstrate, arguing that "prevention of coverage indicates an attempt to deter civil rights and keep us quiet."

Doumit, who was also later reached by phone, said: "We are waiting for our parliamentarians to come ... to meet together and not leave until they themselves find a solution."

In a press release sent out to The Daily Star, Khalass declared that "it is our right, as Lebanese citizens, members of your constituency, key players in the economy, academia and civil society, to demand an immediate, sincere and constructive dialogue between all sides. If you believe that Lebanon, our country, is worth saving, then it is your responsibility to sit down together TODAY!"

When asked about the political situation Zeina, a member of Khalass, said: "Politics do not interest me. Civil peace and progress, these are the things that interest me. We want a solution."

"What are we waiting for?" Until the country is destroyed? Until we go into civil violence?" Doumit asked. "If we don't reach a solution in two days we will be living in a state that has no government ... We are going into complete chaos."

Although only a few turned out for the demonstration, Khalass feels it represents over 30,000 Lebanese both here and abroad who feel the same frustration and want the same solutions. According to Khalass' statement, positive objectives can only be reached by "constructive long-term solutions devised through local negotiations, not international interference."

"The enemy is civil war, not one another. It is your duty today to ensure that young people are not driven to emigration or violence. As leaders, it is your responsibility to weigh your words and actions carefully and work together in order to prevent partisan tension and ensure civil peace," the statement said.

"We believe that the greatness of his country is built on its diversity, freedom, creativity, interdependence, and citizenship. Let us work together today to save it," it added.

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