

Statement by H.E. Professor Hassan Diab
Prime Minister of Lebanon
On the occasion of the meeting
Of
the International Support Group for Lebanon

New York, September 23, 2020

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Lebanon grapples with unprecedented existential crises, I am heartened to observe that “The International Support Group for Lebanon” is sparing no effort to mobilize assistance to aid Lebanon’s sovereignty and recovery.

As we meet under the banner of Lebanon, let me share with you some of my thoughts about developments in Lebanon and the way forward.

Deteriorating living conditions have long aggravated the Lebanese citizens, knocked down the country’s foundations, and culminated in civil unrest in the country. It is in the wake of the citizens’ outrage that I, an apolitical academician, accepted on December 10, 2019 to assume the responsibilities of Premiership.

In many instances, my government was able to improve governance and tried “to break the hold of the elite capture of power” as stated in the “Beirut Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment” report released in August 2020. We succeeded in

many cases to satisfy the people's demands, which we had supported and endorsed, from the outset, in the Government's policy statement of February 11, 2020. We failed in others due to the tight grip of a political layer that resisted change at any cost to preserve its benefits and stature.

Nevertheless, the milestones achieved by my government can serve as a stepping stone for additional progress particularly the following achievements:

- 1- The Government's Financial Recovery plan and its decision to request an IMF program.
- 2- The appointment of four new Central Bank Vice-Governors as well as other senior officials including the Banking Control Commission.
- 3- The forensic audit of the Central Bank
- 4- Improving the borders' scanning system to fight trafficking.
- 5- The law enforcement decree on access to information.
- 6- The Anti-Corruption Strategy adopted by the Council of Ministers on May 12, 2020, "which has been well-received by the international development community in Lebanon" as highlighted by Mr. Arkan El Seblani, Chief Technical Advisor, UNDP Arab States on August 20, 2020.

In fact, the disaster, which has struck the core of Lebanon, unveiled the rampant and pervasive corruption in politics, in administration and the State, as I mentioned in my resignation speech on August 10, 2020.

My resignation on August 10, 2020 was meant to be a wake-up call for Lebanese politicians to stop the bickering that hindered comprehensive reforms, to end the downward spiral to self-destruction and to side with the people's unabated demands for real change, which require an inclusive government ready to embark on a long, arduous journey for salvation.

Excellencies and Friends,

The Port's cataclysmic explosion occurred as Lebanon was already confronting concurrent and dire socio-economic and financial conditions, some being endogenous to its system and to mismanagement, but others stemming from Lebanon's location in the Middle East, one of the most volatile geo-political regions. In this regard, I strongly believe that the primary responsibility for recovery rests on the Lebanese themselves and on implementing reforms through the State's three powers,

namely the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial powers, in a transparent manner. In contrast, the creation, of a growth-enabling climate and the maintenance of international peace and security in Lebanon, against the backdrop of the region's ongoing turmoil, is a shared responsibility.

To aggravate an already tough situation, approximately two million displaced Syrians and Palestinian refugees sought refuge on Lebanese territories at different times. Under the current strenuous circumstances, carrying this heavy burden of hospitality is unbearable, particularly that more than 55% of the Lebanese population is now trapped in poverty. More alarming though is the extreme poverty level likely to afflict over 45% of the population by year-end according to EU and UN findings.

To conclude, support of the International Community is instrumental to overcome Lebanon's challenges starting by the most pressing reconstruction of the port of Beirut and the city's devastated zones, including schools and hospitals. However, reshaping a better Lebanon is contingent upon our ability to regain trust and earn respect through credible accomplishments. This, in my view, requires instilling a culture of law, accountability, transparency, combating impunity and more

importantly the humility to acknowledge our weaknesses beside our strengths, and our shortcomings along with our merits.

I would like to thank “The International Support Group” for holding this periodic meeting to review Lebanon’s conditions. The ISG has been at the forefront of support to Lebanon whether to the country’s various civil institutions or to the Lebanese Armed Forces, the backbone of Lebanon, deployed side by side with UNIFIL to assist the Government of Lebanon in extending its authority in South Lebanon in accordance with resolution 1701.

I am equally gratified that the “International Conference on Assistance and Support to Beirut and the Lebanese People”, which met virtually on August 9 at the invitation of the President of the French Republic and the UN Secretary General, was a clear testament of solidarity with the Lebanese people in these horrendous times. Moreover, I wish to extend words of gratitude to the UN and its humanitarian partners in Lebanon for launching a flash appeal in response to the devastating port blast, as well to all the organizations, NGOs, civil society and, last but not least, my fellow Lebanese citizens who took to the streets, notwithstanding the risks, to help the disabled, the wounded, the

homeless and the bereaved. Hopefully we will soon move from emergency and relief assistance to recovery and reconstruction.

Excellencies and Friends,

Help us restore hope to rise again from the ashes.

Thank you.