

**United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon Sigrid Kaag
Transcript of Remarks at the Media Stakeout following Security Council
Briefing**

UNHQ

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Good Afternoon, as you know, along with USG (Herve) Ladsous, I just briefed the Security Council on the situation in Lebanon but particularly with regards to Security Council resolution 1701, but also the whole of Lebanon approach that we have adopted which really looks at peace and security, stability, stabilization, with particular regards to the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis and the expectations for and of the country.

When it comes to the specifics, on the Blue Line I've expressed, as well as USG Ladsous, an appreciation for the recent period of calm but have also underlined a continued concern that there is a volatile regional environment and the high level of rhetoric always enhances the risk of miscalculation which could trigger a conflict. Therefore, we've underlined the need for continued vigilance, caution and a lowering of tensions, a lowering of the rhetoric. And in that regard I briefed the Council on my discussions and visits in Tehran and Jerusalem, as well as high level meetings I've recently had with Hezbollah representatives in Beirut. The message from all sides remains one of deterrence but equally so our worry is that the risks will continue to grow and obviously the Secretary General's report is very clear on the details. Also with regards to violations and the continued tensions that may rise.

When it comes to the Lebanon/Syria border – and here I really reference the whole of Lebanon approach – there is an equal recognition of the risks to Lebanon's territorial integrity and strong appreciation for the role by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), acknowledgment for the leadership displayed by both Prime Minister Tammam Salam, Minister of Defense (Samir Mokbel) as well as (Lebanese Army Commander) General (Jean) Kahwagi in handling the complexity of the security crisis in the country as a whole but with particular regard for the eastern border.

We've also made use of this opportunity to underline one more time the critical importance of continued and accelerated support to the Lebanese Armed Forces. That they have the support they need at the right time, the right type of material and that further investment in implementation of the LAF's capability plan is needed if the country can sustain the complex threat it is facing. There's also a message, of course, I reiterated on behalf of the UN and the Secretary General, on the risk of

Lebanese elements, of their engagement in Syria and the need of adherence of the Lebanese to the policy of disassociation.

In this regard, we've also spoken of the risk of radicalization that we see emerging in country. It has affected and impacted the entire region, and Lebanon again is not immune from this. From our data we see that Lebanese citizens have also engaged in the conflict in Syria, and this is separate from Hezbollah's engagement. There is also a more fertile terrain for extremist groups or radical groups that can be within disenfranchised communities, availability of arms, unemployment, poverty, classical issues that remain under-addressed in a very volatile environment. So we talked with the Council of the need for their support to look at a more comprehensive approach on counter-terror and preventing radicalization, where of course the UN wants to be helpful to the Lebanese government and partners.

In this regard, of course, the fact that Lebanon hosts the largest per capital refugee population is significant. This is a huge burden. The government and Lebanese citizens have very ably responded and worked closely with the UN. It is however not sustainable. We're looking at infrastructure, we're looking at pressures on the economy, housing, education. And we have obviously asked the Council to look at ways in which the international community can do more, issues of burden sharing, predictable and sustained financing, even though we know that the international financial architecture at present is not equipped, is not helpful to middle income countries such as Lebanon. But the refugee population is likely to be there for quite some time. We know of 1.2 million registered refugees who need support, who need protection. Anecdotally we also know of an increase of negative coping mechanisms from sexual exploitation, child labor... The more the refugees are impoverished the more they are affected by a very limited funding climate. Despite tremendous international generosity, we have to look long term. And here the refugee crisis, the impact of the Syria crisis, militarily, security wise, risks of radicalization and protracted refugee presence in country impacts directly on Lebanon's ability to secure the country and protect its stability.

We also of course expressed concern for the living conditions of many of the refugees in Lebanon, also looking at the recent funding source threat, particularly to UNRWA, we look at the Palestine refugees, but also the funding cost that WFP has had to announce. This is obviously not the time where we want, as international community, to ask more of Lebanon whilst we need to provide greater assistance.

Now within this context we've also had a lengthy discussion about the need for the institutions of State, not just the LAF but also the government institutions to function

effectively and properly. And the presidential vacancy, of course, was high on the agenda of many Council members, and a collective concern has been expressed, similar to the ISG (International Support Group) statement in Beirut that this situation cannot continue as the longer the presidential vacancy continues there is an erosion of the institutions of state, decisions are not made and I am looking at some of my Lebanese colleague journalists here, they know that more than anyone as its reported. I believe that Lebanon sadly has now managed to beat its own record of 410 days without a president, it takes us back quite some time in history and Lebanese national leaders need to address this problem without further delay because the cost is to Lebanese citizens, the cost is to the viability of the country and there is a multitude of challenges it needs to address.

Last but not least, we've also underlined the need for the ISG and the Security Council to really actively provide political support, look at the issues and to be mindful of the fact that whilst Lebanon is not failing, Lebanon is doing remarkably well against the odds of the region, the country should not be forgotten because it is managing to somehow weather an impossible storm. We cannot take it for granted and I have asked the continued support of the Security Council politically, in security terms but also through their development cooperation with Lebanon for both the country, Lebanese vulnerable communities and Syrian refugees as well as Palestine refugees in Lebanon and those who have had to seek shelter from Syria. Thank you.

Question:-Thank you Ms Kaag for this briefing. You emphasized the need to maintain this policy of dissociation from the regional conflicts. However the realities on the ground, al Nusra Front and ISIS are in control of Aarsal, they also control the Syrian-occupied separation zone and the threat is not just fictitious, it is there, that they may infiltrate in, they have their supporters inside Lebanon. Do you think that this policy of dissociation is still valid after two years? Also, how can the Security Council influence those who are preventing the election of the President? We all know that they are regional powers they are not internal ones.

UN Special Coordinator Sigrid Kaag:-Yes the policy of dissociation is very valid, it has also been underlined in the Secretary General's report, Presidential statement of the Council, and the recent ISG. But I spoke also of the importance to support the Lebanese government, and the security apparatuses in dealing with the presence of extremist elements and in looking at issues of radicalization. When it comes to influencing, as you know we have had a number of envoys, international messages to call on Lebanese leaders. At the end of the day, Lebanon is a democracy, it is a responsibility of all of Lebanon's national leaders and parties to address this issue flexibly and urgently. Friends of Lebanon, I think, are all doing their best as well but

the choice is still in the hands of Lebanon itself that is why it is a democracy. Thank you

Question: Thank you very much Ms Kaag. You have talked about the issue of security and the 1.2 million plus Syrian refugees now in Lebanon and you have asked the Council to look at this and look at support. What was the reaction that you have got? Do you think that there is any feeling within the international community that this is something that should be addressed rather more urgently than perhaps in the future?

UN Special Coordinator Sigrid Kaag:-I would say yes. But of course this is a sense, on the one hand it is very important obviously for me and others to underline the seriousness of the situation and the expectations. I also spoke of burden-sharing, I referenced a recent statement by the High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres on the number of measures that should also be addressed and then again coming back to the point Lebanon per capital highest number of refugees, this is not a Lebanese problem, it is an international responsibility and if we want to shield Lebanon, also as a regional public good, as a tremendously innovative, vibrant country which can be a model also for the future when we are looking at the Middle East, we need to do more. So I think Council members took active note, also of the importance of looking at financing instruments. Now we are not naïve we don't think that a good discussion will lead to an automatic policy change but we have to keep pushing this and promoting this in all fora. I think We owe that to the Lebanese and in the meantime of course we also continue to ask attention to the protection needs, the rights of all vulnerable communities and in this case also it is UNHCR in country that is in close dialogue with the government to look at we could be done. There are areas where improvements are needed. And, for instance, one important point is to have children's school. This year with a lot of support and strong leadership from the Lebanese Ministry of Education, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR and donors, we managed to get more children in school but we only had 100,000 out of 400,000 children in school. The no-lost generation will be realized in a very sad manner. If we don't get them in school they will not be equipped, they will not be literate and they are vulnerable to radicalization, to exploitation. Thank you

Question: What steps have been taken since you were last here to get them to change this definition? And I also want to ask you about the torture the evidence of which came out in that prison. What steps have been taken by the government to try to get to the bottom of it and prevent it in the future?

UN Special Coordinator Sigrid Kaag: I will start with last question first. As you know we issued a statement commending the government for their immediate positive reaction to deal with it, to address the issue of impunity in Roumieh prison but we have also come back to work with them through a number of different UN agencies and I spoke about this as well in the Council to look at follow-up to the Commission against torture, the recommendations. So we want to provide technical advice, greater support, look at what can be done. And a number of them are fairly I would say standard ombudsperson, reporting, presence of tools, a lot of training and we are looking at that also with Member States. When it comes to the World Bank we have organized a high level discussion with the DAC (Development Assistance Committee) Chair Eric Solheim who came to Lebanon at our invitation with the Bank to have a national dialogue precisely on what the financing modalities could be. I know the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Helen Clark at the annual session of the Bank have also raised the issue. But we need to come back to it. I have also asked that this be looked in the margins of Addis. Lebanon is not alone and this is also an issue that I have raised in the Council. If we have to anticipate in the future other crises in middle-income countries where the means also are not unavailable in the long term, this is a responsibility we have collectively. But as we know policy change is slower than the reality gets the response. Thank you very much.
