

Chairman's Summary of the Meeting of the "International Support Group for Lebanon"

Federal Foreign Office, Berlin, 28 October 2014

At the invitation of German Foreign Minister Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier a meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon was held in the presence of Prime Minister Tammam Salam preceding the ministerial "Conference on the Syrian refugee situation – supporting stability in the region", on 28 October 2014 in Berlin. Participants recalled their previous statements, including that issued after the last meeting of the Group which was convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 26 September 2014 in New York.

Participants recognized with respect and grave concern the tremendous burden Lebanon continues to bear in hosting nearly 1.2 million refugees from Syria registered or awaiting registration, equivalent to a 30 per cent increase in Lebanon's population, following the massive influx of Syrians into Lebanon since March 2011. They paid tribute to the response of its people and government. They recalled that mobilizing assistance to refugees and vulnerable communities affected by the crisis had been among the core objectives set at the inaugural meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon on 25 September 2013 (SG/2198), and that this requires a coordinated humanitarian and development response and greater burden-sharing.

Participants noted the recent decision of the Government of Lebanon concerning its Syrian refugee policy. They encouraged the Government and UNHCR, with other UN agencies and partners, to cooperate closely to promote the effective management of the refugee presence. Participants will strive to support efforts leading towards durable solutions, namely repatriation in safety, abiding by the principle of non-refoulement, and resettlement. They reaffirmed their commitment to efforts under the auspices of the UN to achieve a political solution to the conflict in Syria which will create the conditions for refugees to return in safety, while recognizing that conditions for safe return could precede such a solution. In the absence of these conditions, participants reaffirmed their support to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in his efforts to identify alternative options, including through increased resettlement, admission based on humanitarian needs, admission schemes based on private sponsorship, facilitation of family reunification or the use of programs such as student or employment visas to third countries. Participants welcomed efforts already undertaken by UN Member States in this regard and called for their enhancement.

Participants recalled that Lebanon has the highest per capita ratio of refugees worldwide, and that the pressure on Lebanese infrastructure and services is proportionately greater than in any other country. Reaffirming their call for expedited donor assistance, participants recognized the commitment of the Government of Lebanon to address the socio-economic impact of the Syrian crisis in an integrated Lebanon Crisis Response Plan to ensure that the needs of the vulnerable are adequately met, and stabilization requirements addressed. They welcomed the programs developed by the Lebanese government aimed at strengthening the public sector in response to the Syrian crisis, for example in the field of education. They acknowledged that competition over access to public services can exacerbate communal tensions and thus negatively affects stability. Participants called for the provision of support targeting the needs of refugees and Lebanese communities and affected Government programs, as will be outlined in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan and the Government's Roadmap for Stabilization and reflected in the "Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan" (3RP). They noted that a range of instruments has been developed to enable the provision of support based on the Government's stabilization priority projects, including the World Bank Multi-Donor Trust Fund.

They stressed the need for the Lebanese authorities to have in place arrangements to ensure speedy approval for international assistance programs and swift project implementation.

Participants recognized the security related implications of the crisis that threaten the safety of host communities and refugees alike and the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to mitigate them. They pledged to closely cooperate in countering all forms of extremism. They welcomed ongoing international assistance to address Lebanon's security concerns and underlined the continuing urgent need for international support to the Lebanese Army and the security forces, as elaborated at the last meeting of the International Support Group.

Participants again emphasized the crucial importance of national unity for stability and security and expressed support for the efforts of Prime Minister Salam and his Government in confronting the many challenges facing the country. They expressed deep concern however at the continued vacancy in the office of the President and its impact on the functioning of State institutions. They affirmed that, while the presidential election must remain a Lebanese process, free from foreign interference, it is vital that Lebanon's political leaders act to resolve the issue in the interest of all in Lebanon without further delay.