

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

Office of the Special Coordinator
for Lebanon

Bureau du Coordinateur Spécial
pour le Liban

United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon

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Founders Day Ceremony

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*COMMON FOUNDATIONS, SHARED ASPIRATIONS:
THE UNITED NATIONS AND LEBANON*

Dr. Dorman,

AUB trustees,

faculty and students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind words of introduction and your invitation, Dr. Dorman, to address the American University of Beirut on this auspicious day when you celebrate the university's establishment 144 years ago.

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This is a very special occasion for me. More years ago than I care to remember, as a young undergraduate student, I came to AUB for the first time. I remember vividly walking onto the campus and being struck by its majesty and beauty. I still am today. Lebanon fascinated me so much in those days that I intended to go on and write my PhD thesis on the country. Alas, the situation in the country as it unfolded in the late 1970s, made a return for field research impossible. And so I ended up studying Indonesia instead. But Lebanon has always retained a special place in my heart. I was therefore particularly gratified when, a little over two years ago, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon asked me to serve as his representative here.

I am honoured to be with you today. Much as we often say about the United Nations, if AUB did not exist already, it would need to be invented. You are all aware of the words of founding President Daniel Bliss on the day that the cornerstone of College Hall was laid on December 7, 1871. Defining the principles of this institution, Bliss declared,

This college is for all conditions and classes of men without regard to color, nationality, race or religion. A man, white, black, or yellow, Christian, Jew, Mohammedan or heathen, may enter and enjoy all the advantages of this institution for three, four or eight years; and go out believing in one God, in many gods, or in no God. But it will be impossible for anyone to continue with us long without knowing what we believe to be the truth and our reasons for that belief.

What an extraordinary statement for its time!

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AUB has long been and remains an important centre not only of study and debate, but also of dialogue and co-existence not only for Lebanon but the entire Middle East. It provides an island -- an almost sacred space -- within Lebanon for interaction and engagement between students of different backgrounds and origins, of different confessions and nationalities. In this sense, I believe AUB captures, I believe, and embodies the very spirit of the United Nations, or perhaps I should say the UN captures the spirit of AUB. Indeed, Daniel Bliss' words express the essential values of equality, tolerance, and co-existence, that foreshadow and inform those of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Four days from now, we will celebrate the 62nd anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human rights. It remains the fundamental normative foundation of the United Nations. As the first global expression of rights to which all human beings are entitled, it has lost none of its relevance today.

It is perhaps no coincidence that those words were drafted in considerable part by a graduate of AUB; that no fewer than nineteen AUB alumni were delegates at the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945; and that three former AUB students were among the first signatories to the UN Charter on behalf of their respective governments. Perhaps no other leading academic institution could claim to have played such a central role in the creation of the United Nations.

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Lebanon's representative at the San Francisco conference, Charles Malek, had graduated from AUB with a degree in mathematics and physics before embarking on studies in philosophy in Germany and the United States. In 1945, he became Lebanon's Ambassador to the United States and the United Nations (in an age when it was still possible to hold both those posts at the same time!) before moving on to successive positions at the United Nations in a remarkable career. In 1947, for example, he served as rapporteur of the Human Rights Commission. He would later become its President, succeeding the legendary Eleanor Roosevelt. In 1948, he was President of the Economic and Social Council. And in that very year, he helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1953, he was to serve as Lebanon's Ambassador on the Security Council, which he presided over in January 1954. Returning to Lebanon the following year, Malek served as Foreign Minister and Minister of Education. He came back to New York three years later as President of the General Assembly. I can think of few other individuals who have presided over so many central organs of the Organisation, or held as many key positions! But he never forgot AUB, and would eventually return here to his chair in philosophy in the 1960s.

Charles Malek personifies the close connections between Lebanon and the United Nations and what I believe are their common philosophical foundations. This connection also involves AUB to a very considerable extent. Your essay competition this year focused on how AUB related to its neighbourhood, how it shapes and is shaped by its surroundings. In much the same way, the United Nations and Lebanon have informed and defined each other for over six decades now.

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In the words of Stephen Schlesinger's history of the early years of the UN, Lebanon was present at the "Act of Creation" as Lebanon was one of the 51 founding members. Through Charles Malek's work, your country played an even greater role in defining the institutional and normative foundations for the UN system. But Lebanon's presence in a troubled region meant that it has also hosted UN organisations from those early years. In 1948, Beirut became home to the first office of UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund, opened in order to lend assistance to the thousands of refugees displaced from Palestine. In 1950, UNRWA, the UN Relief Agency for Palestinians, began operating in Lebanon, while UNESCO established a regional office. Today, Beirut is home to the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, headed by an AUB graduate and trustee, Dr. Rima Khalaf. And, of course, Lebanon hosts UNIFIL, the United Nations' third-largest peace-keeping mission.

The UN continues to be shaped and defined by Lebanon in other ways. Currently Lebanon is serving a two-year term as a member of the Security Council, for the first time in half a century since the days of Charles Malek. This is a matter of considerable prestige, but also a role that brings enormous influence and opportunity. The Security Council addresses the most important global issues related to international peace and security, reverberating far beyond the Middle East. Whether peace-keeping in Africa, humanitarian activities in Haiti, or engagement with thematic issues of international peace and security, Lebanon is now helping to shape these decisions. I was privileged in May to attend a session of the Security Council chaired by Prime Minister Saad Hariri.

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Three weeks ago, when I briefed the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 1701 on November 18, it was a pleasure to see my friend, Nawaf Salam, serving his country in such able manner. He is, of course, a former chair of the political studies and public administration department here at AUB.

Of course, at the most difficult junctures in its history, Lebanon has been the subject of the Security Council's agenda. This has reflected international concern over the wars and conflicts that have sadly afflicted your country and the region. Several resolutions of the Council have been adopted which have been essential in assisting Lebanon to restore its sovereignty, stability and political independence.

Many of my own efforts as Special Coordinator are dedicated to Security Council resolution 1701. This brought an end to the tragic war in the summer of 2006 that cost more than 1,000 Lebanese lives and wreaked renewed destruction and suffering. The presence now of more than 12,000 UNIFIL troops deployed throughout south Lebanon bears testimony to the commitment of the UN and the international community.

We have made headway since 2006. Resolution 1701 has put in place arrangements that have ensured the longest period of stability in south Lebanon for many years, if not for decades. The Lebanese Armed Forces deployed in the area for the first time in decades. We have achieved the exchange of Lebanese prisoners and of the remains of the Israeli soldiers abducted at the beginning of the war in 2006. And finally, with considerable delay that allowed far too many casualties in Lebanon, we received the

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strike data from Israel that is helping clear cluster munitions polluting Lebanese territory. I am also hopeful that we can achieve, in the coming period, the long-overdue withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar. This would be another important step forward, even though we still have to resolve the permanent status of that village.

But as illustrated by the fatal exchange of fire across the Blue Line at al-Adaysseh on August 3, the cessation of hostilities between Lebanon and Israel remains fragile. Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty continue on almost a daily basis, above all in the form of over-flights by military aircraft. There are also allegations of the continued transfer and proliferation of arms beyond the control of the state in Lebanon. These are issues of concern to the international community, which places great emphasis on matters of peace and security in Lebanon.

Yet it is equally important to recall that the UN's presence and engagement here goes far beyond Resolution 1701. Alongside UNIFIL, there are now 24 UN agencies and programmes, which invest more than \$250 million annually in their activities in Lebanon. The work of these agencies is complimentary. We recognise that peace and stability cannot hold unless there are parallel steps towards sustainable development and respect for human rights. Building on the UN's experience around the world, we are acutely conscious of the fact that conflict – whether domestic or regional – is fuelled by insufficient and unequal development, by disparities and grievances, and by an absence of of functioning state institutions.

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Ultimately, the concept of peace and stability remains just that – an idea – unless it brings tangible improvements to people’s daily lives. In turn, we also recognise that sustained and sustainable development, for the benefit of all, is only possible if issues of conflict – whether between communities or countries – are addressed and settled in a fair and equitable manner.

Against this background, the United Nations in Lebanon follows a clear and coherent logic that goes beyond the concerns with which we are most visibly identified. As in any endeavour, the less visible work is often the most successful part of engagement. Beyond the effort to pursue Security Council resolutions, UN agencies carry out programmes in fields as varied as child vaccination, de-mining, technical support for elections, assistance for refugees, support for small businesses, and reform of the criminal justice system. We also seek to promote education for all, develop food safety policies and engage in other initiatives to advocate socio-economic development.

As such, the entire UN family works together, as “one UN for one Lebanon,” with mandates covering the spectrum of political, peacekeeping, socio-economic, and humanitarian issues. My own mandate as the UN Secretary-General’s representative and as Special Coordinator for Lebanon exemplifies this, not only my work to further the implementation of resolution 1701, but also to coordinate the engagement of the United Nations as a whole in support of Lebanon and its people. It also covers what we term the

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Good Offices of the Secretary-General, in the endeavour to consolidate stability and security within Lebanon.

These roles can be challenging but they are closely and logically connected. Regional stability, the underlying objective of resolution 1701, requires a stronger state and domestic stability inside Lebanon itself. This, in turn, requires equitable development. Our work as “one UN” is therefore of considerable importance. It has both institutional and geographical dimensions.

Institutionally, Lebanon continues to confront many challenges, especially in the current political climate when institutions such as the Council of Ministers, the National Dialogue, and Parliament itself are sorely tested. Fundamental aspects of Lebanon’s political and economic order remain under debate. Yet Lebanon can only prosper if it succeeds in building a stronger state that caters equally and equitably to the needs of all citizens, regardless of confession or political orientation.

Fostering greater unity and a stronger state has also an important geographical dimension. Lebanon is a small country, half the size of the American state of New Jersey or my native Wales. It is not a poor country, as your abundant bank reserves demonstrate. Annual growth has exceeded 7% since 2006. Strikingly, the economy has withstood the effects of the global financial crisis that has affected so many others. Lebanon’s entrepreneurs are world-renowned and the country enjoys strong foundations for sustained prosperity and stability.

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But Lebanon continues to struggle with inequality, and it is one of the key missions here of the United Nations to help redress the existing imbalances. After more than two years in this country, I am still struck by disparities, social and economic, that exist beyond Beirut. Whether in Tripoli and the Akkar, the Beqaa Valley and south Lebanon, or in Palestinian refugee camps across the country. Poverty rates are still too high and nearly 30 percent of Lebanese continue to subsist on a household income of less than \$4 a day. Among Palestinians, poverty engulfs as many as two-thirds of the refugees. The weakness of the Lebanese state continues to leave a vacuum that is filled by non-state actors that provide services, welfare, justice and security.

UN activities in Lebanon are naturally embedded in our wider regional engagement. Beyond the borders of Lebanon, the UN aims to support the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace for all people(s) in the Middle East in accordance with resolutions of the Security Council. In this context, we also seek a just and fair solution to the Palestinian refugee question through a comprehensive peace agreement. At the same time, we have to work to improve the living conditions of Palestinian refugees within Lebanon. In that regard, I welcome the important progress made this year when Lebanon's parliament took steps to improve the employment conditions of Palestine refugees. The United Nations will certainly continue to work to provide assistance to Palestinians and to support the improvement of their living and working conditions until they can return to their homeland. But I also hope that Lebanon will continue to work with us to make further progress on these objectives.

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The United Nations, on its own, cannot bring about a comprehensive peace in the region. Others – not least the parties in conflict – need to do their part. Nor can we work alone to bring greater socio-economic development and equitable prosperity to all in Lebanon.

The UN Charter opens resoundingly with the words, “We, the Peoples.” “We the People” and not “We the States.” We are nothing without the people that ultimately make up the United Nations. In order to achieve our goals, we must work together, with the UN acting in support of the peoples and the governments of the world to achieve our shared aspirations for a better future.

It is important for me to make my remarks in this Augustine setting, I think. Lebanon’s future rests critically on the ability of the youth of the country to come together and work for a shared future. This year is the International Year of Youth. It draws attention to those who, in Lebanon, as elsewhere around the world, hold the key to a brighter, more prosperous and more peaceful future: the young people in our societies. This theme is of particular relevance to Lebanon since over a quarter of the Lebanese population is estimated to be below the age of 15. It is also of particular relevance to AUB and echoes your very motto, “That they may have life and have it more abundantly.”

It is young men and women who are the human capital of Lebanon. In order for them to have and enjoy life, abundantly, we must find ways to absorb them into the

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labour market. We must also find ways to keep Lebanon's best and brightest from leaving, as they often do, to seek opportunities elsewhere. In a country that still suffers from division, the young people offer the best prospect for overcoming the legacies of the past and for building a new and more stable Lebanon.

We live in difficult times, but outsiders, I believe, can play a critical role in safeguarding the country's stability. Outsiders – whether regional actors or the UN – can play a supporting part in managing and helping Lebanon's affairs. It is the Lebanese who will have to come together, however, and build their own future. And in that regard, it is only continued dialogue and work through the institutions of the state that can successfully address challenges, difficult and sensitive, to the stability and unity of the country.

There is no doubt in my mind that Lebanon has the necessary elements to meet these challenges. Your society is uniquely rich and diverse. Its pluralism and diversity are also its defining characteristic and strength. All of you here at AUB, teachers, administrators and students, play a critical role in this regard. You are the building blocks for the Lebanon of tomorrow. And we need more Lebanese in the vein of Charles Malek and the many other great Lebanese and non-Lebanese who passed through this wonderful institution. I need not tell you how many of your Prime Ministers, including the current incumbent one and his two immediate predecessors, are AUB alumni. The same goes for many of your current and former Ministers as well as other leading public figures in the country and in the region.

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AUB represents the spirit of diversity, co-existence and tolerance that are fundamental for Lebanon to succeed. In that sense, I would like to salute the founders of AUB and those who have followed in their path for the important and lasting contribution they have made to this country and the region. May you continue to prosper and develop, and may AUB continue to provide an exemplary model of diversity, dialogue and debate that strengthens not only this country but the region.

Thank you very much.

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