



Office of the Special Coordinator
for Lebanon

Bureau du Coordinateur Spécial
pour le Liban

**United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams
Statement Following Meeting with Minister of Defence Elias Murr
Beirut, Lebanon**

Wednesday, 07 July 2010

Good Afternoon,

I just had a very good meeting with H.E. Defence Minister Elias Murr.

We reviewed the latest developments in Lebanon and especially the implementation of resolution 1701. A large part of our discussion today focused on the recent events in south Lebanon, particularly the incidents involving residents of some villages, and I emphasize some villages, in the area and UNIFIL patrols.

Minister Murr and I agreed that the excellent cooperation between UNIFIL and the LAF over the past four years has been the backbone of the stability that has prevailed in south Lebanon. This cooperation, we believe, must be maintained and enhanced.

UNIFIL's presence in south Lebanon and its freedom of movement are critical to support the LAF in the area and the implementation of 1701. This, in turn, serves the interests of Lebanon and the stability of the wider region.

I was very pleased today that Minister Murr again reiterated Lebanon's full commitment to resolution 1701 and to the very close cooperation between the LAF and UNIFIL and the United Nations generally.

Thank you.

Statement of Minister of Defense, Elias Murr

First the meeting was honest. We touched on all the details related to Resolution 1701 and of course the topic of today's meeting had to do with the incident that took place last week, which we jointly regretted that it happened.

What I want to reconfirm is that the commitment of the Lebanese Government to Resolution 1701 is a strong, firm and final commitment. All that was issued in one paper today that there would be a tripartite meeting tomorrow between UNIFIL and Hizbullah and UNIFIL(LAF), which would produce a joint working paper is not true. These meetings take place between UNIFIL and the LAF to coordinate the operations on the ground.

It is normal when there are operations or training exercises on the grounds or patrols that are carried out by any military force inside the villages that they may be incidents or problems sometimes. For example, the Lebanese Army last week in the north was stoned at an electric power station. The perpetrators were photographed and the military intelligence intervened at night to arrest the perpetrators because we do not want any problems between the LAF and the residents. This not applies to the north, to Beirut, the Bekaa and Mount Lebanon but also to the south and this is something in common with the United Nations to avoid any incidents with the residents.

What I would like to reconfirm is that as much as we are committed to UNIFIL's mission on the ground and as much as the UN is committed to it, we are also committed to have the LAF accompany this mission to avoid any problems. As you know, all the villages in all Lebanese areas have their own privacy, we have to respect this privacy -- I am talking about the privacy of the people in the villages, not the privacy of parties or politicians -- we have to be careful to that. That is why when UNIFIL is merely carrying out a training exercise or an operation and is accompanied by the LAF, in all the missions, we would avoid incidents similar to the ones that took place.

I agreed with Mr. Michael Williams on this issue in a clear and honest way. The LAF will accompany UNIFIL in all its missions. If there is a need for additional troops, we will send additional troops to accompany them in all the missions, we will not default in the numbers, irrespective of the need.

I hope this will not recur and it will not recur because neither from UNIFIL's side there are intentions to have such incidents nor from the residents of the south, whom I know and I hear from many of the residents of the south and from political representatives on how comfortable they are with UNIFIL's presence at the level of security stability but also for the economic situation. As you know, the economic situation is relaxed and recovered more than other areas because of the presence of those 12,000 troops who are present there in line with UNIFI's mission and are activating the economic cycle.

At the same time, UNIFIL's mission is the stability in the south and to assist the LAF, as Mr. Williams said in the paper he just read, to assist the LAF. Assisting the LAF means the LAF should be in all the missions. This is its land and the army defends it.

UNIFIL is a support to the LAF, a support to the Lebanese State. We are determined to have it present but Resolution 1701 is clear in its text, in its details and in how the mission should be implemented. We have to be careful. We have to remember that there is a new UNIFIL leadership for the past few months. The previous leadership had already developed sufficient experience on the ground to avoid such incidents. The new leadership is gaining the experience on the ground and after this incident "do not despise anything because it might be good for you." The Lebanese Army will be coordinating more with them on all the details and I expect this issue will be behind us in the coming 48 hours.

QUESTION: A French spokesperson at the French Mission to the UN said today Resolution 1701 allows UNIFIL the freedom of movement without the permission of the army. Do you consider the recent maneuvers that took place in the south, and which led to the incidents, do you consider it contradicts resolution 1701?

DEFENSE MINISTER MURR: The Freedom of Movement without the permission of the Army is one thing and the freedom of movement with the army and with the accompaniment of the army and to assist the army is something else. I don't think UNIFIL has an interest nor the Lebanese army of course has an interest because this is its land. This land is not open for everyone, including for UNIFIL. This is our land and we are responsible for it and for the residents of the south and for defending our land and UNFIL will assist us. That is why their freedom of movement is complete with the army, of course.

Thank you very much.

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