

Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams
Statements After Meetings in Tripoli
Friday, 23 January 2009

SCL Press Encounter Following Meeting with MP Mosbah El-Ahdab

Let me say I am delighted to be here in Tripoli. This is my first official visit to the city which is of course the second city of Lebanon. I think Tripoli has always played a very important role in the cultural, economic, political life of the country and I hope that it can play an even more critical role (inaudible) role in the future.

I have already had a series of very good meetings. I met yesterday in Beirut, by the way, with Minister Safadi and this morning I met with the Mayor, H.E. Rashid Jamali and now I met earlier with the Mufti. I am very pleased now to have met also with Mr. Mosbah El Ahdab. We had a very good discussion. I will continue now for the rest of the day meeting with other political figures to get a really full and comprehensive picture of the realities here in Tripoli.

I can see there are issues here and of course you had problems last year and there are problems going back many years. But I would hope to see in the future is that we can see a real coalition of forces -- local politicians, the national government, United Nations, European Union -- working together to try to harness the energies of the people of Tripoli of all faiths to see that Tripoli can go back to perhaps some of its old glories as an economic powerhouse in Lebanon. But we very much want to work with the people of Tripoli and with your leaders in seeing that 2009 is going to be a fine year for everybody.

Q: Tripoli has been suffering for a long time. Why now taking care of Tripoli?

MCW: Well, for me this is my first visit so give me a chance. I agree with you entirely. I actually came here many many years ago. I was a very young student from the UK before the civil war and I can have distant memories of Tripoli then. I think, to be frank, the people of Tripoli have suffered greatly. We can talk a long time about the causes of that but I think we have to put a lot of that behind us to go forward now. There are many responsibilities. There are the responsibilities of the people of Tripoli itself, of the national government, but also of the United Nations and I think also of the European Union. I think if we can harness these forces, then I think there can be a real future for Tripoli.

SCL During Meeting with former Prime Minister Najib Mikati

Let me say how very pleased I am to be in Tripoli today and to meet again with Najib Mikati. We met a few weeks ago I think in Beirut but it's even better to meet with him here in his hometown, in his constituency, in Tripoli.

I am here for a day, meeting with notables here in Tripoli to get a better understanding of the situation. I met with the Mayor Rashid Jamali, I met with the Mufti and now I am meeting with various political figures. It is a great pleasure to be here in Tripoli. I

can see it has unique challenges. It had some difficulties and problems. I think particularly the socio-economic situation. That is one of the things I will be discussing with Najib Mikati now.

We look forward in 2009 to Tripoli making progress. There is work to be done here, I think considerable work. This is Lebanon's second city and we want the vibrancy and economic performance of Tripoli to be enhanced, to play a role that it has historically done in Lebanon. So, it's great to be here. Thank you so much for receiving me in your hometown.

Q: (Arabic) You now have an idea about the reality in north Lebanon. Usually the United Nations envoys work in the political and humanitarian framework and even in the Palestinian framework. What can the UN offer to north Lebanon, particularly to Tripoli?

MCW: I would hope that we could offer a considerable role. To begin with, the UN is already involved here. The UN Development Programme has a number of projects in this region. And when I go back to Beirut, I will be talking further with my UNDP colleagues to see if there is more we can do. But of course the UN is also involved in Nahr El-Bared, in trying to assist the reconstruction of the Palestinian camp there. But I think the UN is one of several actors here. There is the local actors, there is the national actors, the government perhaps can look again at its role in Tripoli in the future. The UN has a role to play but also our partners in Europe, the European Union. President Sarkozy's initiative, the Mediterranean Union, perhaps also offers options for Tripoli. So these need to be brought together I think in a proactive coalition to tackle some of the issues here.

SCL Press Encounter After Meeting Former Prime Minister Omar Karameh

Let me say how pleased and delighted I've been to meet with Prime Minister Omar Karameh. We had a very good discussion about the situation here in Lebanon. We discussed also the outlook for the forthcoming parliamentary elections in June and also the regional picture throughout the Middle East.

The meeting I had with Prime Minister Karameh is one of a series of meetings I've had today here in Tripoli with political and religious and community leaders which have been very very important in giving me a picture of the social, economic and political realities here in Lebanon's second city.

It is very important I think for me, the UN Coordinator, and also for the international community to remember that Lebanon is not just Beirut. There is another Lebanon and particularly here in the country's second city. I am delighted to have been here today.

SCL Press Encounter After meeting MPs Samir El-Jisr and Bader Wannous

I was very pleased to meet with two representatives of the people of Tripoli, Mr. Samir El-Jisr and Mr. Bader Wannous. We had a very good discussion of the political and social situation here in Tripoli. We reflected on the violence of last year. We are very pleased and praised the reconciliation agreement in September which restored

calm to the city of Tripoli. And we are pleased now that the people of Tripoli, of whatever confession and faith, appear to be working together in a harmonious fashion and we think that's a very very important background for the parliamentary elections which will take place this year in Lebanon on June 7.

So I am very grateful to Mr. Samir El-Jisr and also to Mr. Bader Wannous for their assistance and guidance today. It's been a very fruitful day for me, meeting with many politicians and faith leaders and civil figures and I have a much better appreciation now of the realities here in Lebanon's second city. So I am very grateful to everybody.

Thank you so much.