

UNITED NATIONS



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Office of the Special Coordinator
for Lebanon

Bureau du Coordinateur Spécial
pour le Liban

**United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
Michael C. Williams**

REMARKS

UN Day Reception

Beirut, Lebanon

Monday, 25 October 2010

H.E. Minister Ali Chami, representing the President of the Republic of Lebanon Michel Sleiman

H.E. Dr. Michel Moussa, representing the Speaker of the House Nabih Berri

H.E. MP Dr. Ammar Hourri, representing Prime Minister Saad Hariri

Excellencies, Excellences, Hadarat El-Saada

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mesdames et Messieurs, Sayeedati wa Sadati

Good evening, Bonsoir, Massa El-Kheir

It is my great pleasure to welcome you back to this splendid garden, on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the United Nations and may I take this opportunity to thank Lady Cochrane for making it available.

The partnership between Lebanon and the United Nations is a solid and long-standing one. Lebanon was a founding member in 1945 and has hosted UN organizations for more than six decades. Today, Lebanon is home to ESCWA the UN's Regional Commission for Western Asia – and I am very pleased to welcome here tonight the new Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Rima Khalaf Hunaidi. The country is also host to a total of 24 different UN entities and of course to UNIFIL, one of our largest peace-keeping missions and I am also pleased to welcome the Force Commander General Asarta.

Since the beginning of this year, Lebanon has been a member of the United Nations Security Council, for only the second time in its history. This is a matter of great prestige, but membership also carries with it important responsibilities and opportunities. Lebanon is helping to shape some of the most important global decisions related to international peace and security. We should not forget that Lebanon is now taking part in critical decision-making related to the rest of the world, whether peace-keeping in Africa, or the UN's engagement in Nepal, or its activities in Haiti. I had the privilege in May of attending a Security Council session chaired by PM Hariri. Allow me in this context to salute Lebanon's able representative in New York, our good friend, Nawaf Salam.

The United Nations and Lebanon are similar in many ways. Both are complex constructs, with challenging degrees of diversity. Moving forward on important substantive issues can take a long time in both. Traffic is a nightmare in Beirut or Manhattan. And neither is necessarily known for the efficiency of its bureaucracy. But both are full of bright and entrepreneurial people who are, in many ways, exemplary. Above all they know how to survive in what is not always an easy environment!

Lebanon represents a unique example of coexistence and diversity. There may be difficulties, but Lebanon's pluralism and diversity have always been, and remain, its defining characteristic, both in its own neighbourhood and beyond. This is an enormous strength and we must seek to preserve it, especially at times when differences of opinion or interest threaten to weaken it, or undermine it. In recent months there has once again been concern, even fear, about where the country is headed and whether there is more unrest and instability ahead. The Lebanese people, their leaders, and their friends in the international community must all continue to work together to ensure that this does not happen. There are issues that divide here as in any society but many also that unite whether health, traffic management, waste disposal or education . This we must not forget.

The United Nations, for its part, is here in Lebanon to serve the people of this country, represented by their Government. The different parts of the UN entities are working together, as one UN, for one Lebanon.

Our mandates cover the entire spectrum of political, peacekeeping, socio-economic, humanitarian and human rights issues. We all operate on the principle that peace and security can only hold if accompanied by development and respect for human rights. But equally, any gains in economic development and human rights can be rapidly undone by internal or regional instability. Lebanon cannot afford to let that happen.

In the coming year, it will be even more important for the Government of Lebanon, Lebanese civil society, and the United Nations to work together closely. Last month at the General Assembly, governments from around the world marked the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Millennium Summit and considered ways to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015 -- less

than five years from now. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon strongly urged these Governments to take bold new steps, despite the financial crisis, to accelerate investments in global development.

Lebanon will need to do its part. Economically, Lebanon has performed well in the past five years and escaped the worst effects of the global financial crisis. It is now well-positioned to meet, over the next five years, the Millennium targets in the areas of health and education. But economic growth has not benefited all: it is regrettable that nearly 30 percent of Lebanese continue to subsist on a household income of less than \$4 a day. The Government of Lebanon has committed itself to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. To do so, it must have a renewed focus on the goals of social and economic development, in order to address the growing inequality and poverty in the country and ensure that opportunities are available to all the people of Lebanon. The UN, through its development agencies and its partners, will do everything it can to assist in this endeavour.

One of the strengths of Lebanon is its diversity, and the fact that it is home to so many different communities. This diversity also poses challenges. These must be carefully managed to maintain tolerance and ensure that the most vulnerable populations are cared for. Here

I should note that Palestinian refugees remain one of the most vulnerable groups in the country. Indeed, their poverty rates are much higher and their indicators for the Millennium Development Goals are lower, across the board. I welcome the important legislative steps taken by Lebanon's Government and Parliament to improve the employment conditions of Palestine refugees over the last year. The United Nations will continue to provide assistance to Palestinians and support the improvement of their living and working conditions until they can return to their homeland. But I also firmly hope that Lebanon, as a host country, working closely with the United Nations, can build on the current momentum to achieve tangible gains in the Palestinian community in the period ahead.

We are guests in your beautiful and unique country, but we share your hopes for peace, unity and prosperity in Lebanon. The United Nations will continue to support you as you work for the future of your country. Please join me in raising your glass to the United Nations in Lebanon, to Lebanon in the United Nations, and to our partnership. A votre Sante!