



Office of the Special Coordinator  
for Lebanon

Bureau du Coordinateur Spécial  
pour le Liban

### **International Peace Day**

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Thirty-two years ago, the United Nations General Assembly decided that one day each year should be dedicated to peace. It would be a day on which combatants around the world were called upon to lay down their weapons and seek peaceful solutions to disputes. Today, 21 September, as every year, we observe this International Day of Peace as world leaders gather in New York for the opening of the General Assembly. This year Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged people around the world to reflect on the unconscionable toll – moral, physical, material – wrought by war, and the costs of it which are borne not only by people today but by future generations. With that in mind he selected as the day's theme this year "Sustainable Peace for a Sustainable Future".

In recent decades, no region of the world has suffered more from the consequences of conflict than the Middle East. The goal of a just and lasting peace in the region as whole seems as elusive now as ever, perhaps more so. The airwaves echo with threats of new conflict. Advances in terms of freedom, dignity and social justice – all factors in sustaining peace, as experience in other regions of the world has shown – have been made in different parts of the region. But in Syria terrible violence, which has claimed thousands of lives and displaced hundreds of thousands, has caused shocking suffering and destruction, and continues unabated.

Against that background you might be forgiven if your first reaction to a call to take time out to reflect on the benefits of peace was a cynical one. But that would be a mistake. None of us, and certainly not the United Nations, can afford to give up on the search for peace in this region. Continuing awareness of the costs of conflict – and the unsustainability of solutions imposed only by force - is essential to that. Here in Lebanon the enthusiastic response last weekend to Pope Benedict's visit and his message of peace and understanding, suggests that this is widely understood by the Lebanese of all faiths who turned out to welcome him.

This message is timely. As a result of the crisis in Syria, Lebanon now faces new challenges to its peace and stability. There have been instances of violence here, as well as shelling across the country's northern and eastern borders. But Lebanon has also shown remarkable resilience through the Syrian crisis. Crucially, its leaders have remained united in their determination to avoid the situation there generating instability in the country. Lebanon's security forces have responded robustly to challenges. And the Lebanese people have been generous in their welcome to Syrians seeking refuge in the country.

Lebanon also still lives with the consequences of other conflicts, and the spectre of war has never been fully dispelled. I am reminded daily as I meet people here in Beirut, or visit communities elsewhere in the country, of the tension this causes. A sustainable peace for a sustainable future means tackling the immediate causes of war. It also means strengthening the institutions of the state, and addressing social and economic challenges and issues of human rights.

In all of these fields the United Nations is an active partner of the government and of other stakeholders in Lebanon. Its unique commitment to peace and stability in this country is reflected in that engagement, as well as in the 12,000 UNIFIL troops deployed in the south. That commitment also informs the work of UN staff as they continue to strive for peace in the region more broadly.

Today's headlines again tell a grim story of violence in Syria and tension across the region. All the more reason perhaps to recall the principles underlying the International Day of Peace, and to recommit to the goal of a state built on strong institutions which will underpin peace and long term stability in Lebanon and be a powerful model for sustainable peace in the region as a whole. The United Nations will continue to be a strong partner for Lebanon in that endeavour.

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