

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, 24 October 2011

H.E. Member of Parliament Michel Moussa,

representing

H.E. General Michel Sleiman, the President of the Republic,
H.E. Mr Nabih Berri, the Speaker of Parliament, and
H.E. Mr Najib Miqati, the Prime Minister,

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 this evening, on the occasion of the 66th anniversary of the United Nations, and 66 years of partnership between the UN and the people of Lebanon.

The partnership between Lebanon and the United Nations is a solid and long-standing one. Lebanon was a founding member of the United Nations in 1945 and has hosted UN organizations for more than six decades. Today, Lebanon is home to a total of 23 different UN entities, including ESCWA, the UN's Regional Commission for Western Asia, and UNIFIL, one of our largest peace-keeping missions – and I am pleased to also welcome my colleague, UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Asarta.

This year, there are over 14,000 UN personnel working in Lebanon. Of the UN's civilian staff, 70 percent are Lebanese citizens.

The relationship of cooperation that binds Lebanon and the UN together has both global and domestic aspects. Soon, Lebanon will have completed its two-year term as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council. This has been a matter of great prestige, influence and responsibility, and has coincided, this past year with unprecedented changes in the region.

Not many weeks ago in Beirut, Lebanon hosted the Second meeting of State Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. More than 1000 delegates attended the event from more than 120 countries. The event was an international success for Lebanon, and clearly demonstrates Lebanon's wish to promote humanitarian principles side by side with the United Nations.

At this evening's reception, we have prepared a photographic exhibition which portrays the many dimensions of the UN's collaboration with Lebanon over the decades. You will note photographs of Charles Malik, Lebanon's first envoy to the United Nations in the 1940s, and a contributor to the UN Charter and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Other photographs portray the missions of several Secretaries-General, from Dag Hammerskjold in the 1950s, to Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon in more recent years. Over the decades, they, and their senior envoys, have unstintingly pursued the cause of peace in Lebanon and in the region. The consolidation of earlier offices representing the Secretary-General in the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, in 2007, signals this country's place at the centre of the United Nations agenda.

You will note the prominence, in our exhibition, of uniformed peacekeepers: military men and women deployed to Lebanon from countries as diverse as Ireland, Serbia and Nepal. Some 300 UN peacekeepers have given their lives for the cause of peace in Lebanon, 10 percent of the total number of lives lost in all peacekeeping operations worldwide. Lebanon was one of the earliest partners of UN peacekeeping in the aftermath of the conclusion of a ceasefire agreement with Israel and the deployment of the military observers of the UN Truce Supervision Organisation from 1949 onwards. UNTSO remains active today, and its Observer Group Lebanon continues to support the peacekeepers of UNIFIL.

In addition, with the presence of UNIFIL on Lebanese soil since 1978, Lebanon has remained a key arena for UN peacekeeping around the world. Since its reinforcement in 2006, UNIFIL has remained the UN's third-largest peacekeeping operation globally. And the close cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces in the past five years has ensured an unprecedented period of stability in Southern Lebanon. There have been some disturbing attacks against UNIFIL in recent months, but we know that Lebanon's commitment to the peacekeeping mission remains unreserved.

Above all, this evening's exhibition portrays a partnership, one which has deepened and developed over time, between the United Nations and ordinary people: farmers, fishermen and shopkeepers, schoolchildren, men and women of different ages and backgrounds, many from Lebanon's poorest and most under-served areas. It is a fact that Lebanon, with an area of just over 10 thousand square kilometers, is among the smaller UN member states. Yet socially and economically, disparities between different parts of the country, and of society, are acute. Close to 30 percent of Lebanese subsist on little more than 4 dollars a day and 15 percent live in extreme poverty. One need only travel a few kilometers out of downtown Beirut to notice these differences. This year, Lebanon faces additional challenges, as its economy contracts in the context of the international financial crisis, rising food and energy costs, and events in Lebanon's immediate neighbourhood. UN Development agencies are working hand-in-hand with Lebanese communities, cooperatives and

municipalities to fight poverty and social disparities in Lebanon. But if we are to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, more must be done. New and more effective investments must be made in the in social sectors, and in support of economic growth. The UN will continue to work with the government and people of Lebanon towards achieving the MDGs.

The photographs, some of them black and white images of convoys and tents, also tell a story of the UN's humanitarian work in Lebanon. Indeed, alongside our commitment to long-term peace and development, the UN has, over the decades, worked with Lebanese authorities during moments of acute humanitarian crisis. The UN's first office in Lebanon was opened in 1948 to address the urgent humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees. In more recent times the Government of Lebanon and the UN, together with many NGO's partners, responded to the immediate and longer term recovery needs of over 1 million people affected by the 2006 conflict, and one year later, to the destruction of the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp. Today, the UN continues its efforts to return over 27,000 displaced refugees back to the original camp, and is now working with international and national partners to provide assistance to over 3,000 displaced Syrians in the North of Lebanon. Critically, we must not forget Lebanon's vulnerability to natural disasters. Given its location, Lebanon is perennially at risk of earthquakes and tsunamis. With climate change, it is increasingly at risk of ever-more intense droughts, floods and fires. Measures to

reduce these risks, and their effects on Lebanese people, would help to save lives, lessen the need for humanitarian aid, and reduce the costs of recovery.

Finally, this year's UN day celebration also marks the launch of a country-wide initiative for Human Rights Education. It is encouraging to see that, in recent days, the issue of Human Rights has returned to Lebanon's parliamentary forum, and that new legislation is being considered. Over the next months, experts and representatives of UN Agencies will be talking with students in schools and universities, with local civil groups, and with the media, about the considerable progress that Lebanon has made in meeting its international human rights commitments, and about the work that still need to be done.

This evening's exhibit illustrates how our UN 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 or natural disaster. Lebanon cannot afford to let that happen.

Dans l'année à venir, il sera encore plus important d'assurer une étroite collaboration entre le gouvernement et la société civile libanaises d'une part, et les Nations unies de l'autre, à travers toute cette gamme de secteurs et thématiques communes. Les

institutions des United Nations, ici-présentes ce soir continueront à prêter le soutien nécessaire a vos efforts de construire le futur de cet unique, promettant et fascinant pays.

Please join me in raising your glass to the United Nations in Lebanon, to Lebanon in the United Nations, and to our partnership. À votre santé!
