



STATEMENT

BY

**H.E. GENERAL MICHEL SLEIMAN
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON**

**AT THE
64th SESSION
OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Mr. President,

First, I would like to congratulate you for your election as President of the 64th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations and to express my appreciation for the efforts of your predecessor, Father *Miguel d'Escoto Brochmann*.

I would also like to thank His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his Annual Report on the Work of the Organization and for the special attention he has granted to the causes of Lebanon and its people.

Mr. President,

While following up all the political, economic, social and legal issues listed on the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Lebanon looks forward with hope and confidence to being elected to the non-permanent seat of the United Nations Security Council for 2010-2011, and with the great support which we are hoping to get from brotherly and friendly countries.

Lebanon approaches this election with great confidence, for it is a founding member of this comprehensive international organization and has significantly contributed to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For thousands of years, its people have been a vital part of the dynamics of the civilization's formation and have invented elements of an advanced promoting communication, interaction, and dialogue among nations and their peoples; these were the same people who had set sail looking for new horizons of collaboration and communication and who have played a vital role in spreading the values of freedom and democracy, anchoring the concept of Arab nationalism, and establishing the pillars of the Arab world intellectual and literary Renaissance.

Today, and from this rostrum, Lebanon reaffirms its commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and to the resolutions of international legitimacy, and it reiterates its willingness to seriously and responsibly contribute to the deliberations and resolutions of the Security Council for the next two years, especially to those which aim at ensuring peace and security in the Middle East. Furthermore, Lebanon will give special consideration to the deliberations pertaining to the reforms of the United Nations and its organs enabling it to become more efficient when confronting the challenges of our modern world.

Therefore, it is no surprise that the Lebanese Constitution which goes back to 1926, that is two decades prior to the establishment of the United Nations, stipulates, "*There shall be absolute freedom of belief in Lebanon. The state shall respect all religions and creeds and guarantees, under its protection, the free exercise of all religious rites*" ...

The co-existence model that Lebanon embodies, which allows various confessional communities to actively participate in the political life, a participation framed in a context of democracy and freedom of thought and expression, goes against all currents of ethnic or religious cleansing and doctrines of the single thought theory.

That is why I called last year to make Lebanon an internationally recognized center for the dialogue of civilizations, cultures, and religions, which goes in line with its role as a bridge of communication between the East and the West and its message as a country on the territories of which eighteen different communities interact in a unique and outstanding manner.

Mr. President,

One of the first missions entrusted to the United Nations Security Council is to strive to preserve international peace and security. It is very unfortunate that our region, a region from which the three monotheistic religions have originated, is nowadays a place of tensions, a place of conflicts and wars, and that since the Nakba that befell Palestine in 1948 and displaced its people.

Any solution for the Middle East crisis should be founded on a pre-determined and integrated scheme, the basic elements of which have been mapped out in the resolutions of international legitimacy, in the Madrid Peace Conference, and in the Arab Peace Initiative. Yet, above all, such a solution requires the parties' genuine political will to commit themselves to peace and its obligations.

However, the Israeli side has not shown such a will, for the soundness and usefulness of a just peace are still under discussion on both its government and grass-roots levels. Furthermore, Israeli threats of attacks and wars persist as a means to impose control and hegemony, as well as to impose a fait accompli, should they not be as means of expansion, displacement, and further encroachment of the Palestinians' and Arabs' rights. Meanwhile, the Arab countries had put forward an integrated peace initiative that was unanimously adopted by the Summit of the Arab League in Beirut in 2002.

It is thus essential that the international community resorts to appropriate means of pressure to compel Israel to fulfill its international obligations towards the peace process within a specific and reasonable time frame in accordance with the declaration of the recent Arab League Summit held in Doha.

Or else, how are we to convince our peoples that the international community is capable of achieving a just and comprehensive peace and thus of putting an end to the various aspects of the Middle East conflict, including Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the establishment of a an independent and sovereign Palestinian State with Al-Quds as its capital, if it is not capable of forcing Israel to halt its settlement construction, to lift the unjust siege on Gaza, and to stop the judaization of Jerusalem?

In this context, it is important to note that people have the right to retrieve their occupied territories through all legitimate and available means, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and its relevant resolutions.

It is all too known how Lebanon was able to liberate most of its Israeli occupied territories in the spring of 2000 after Israel had, for over 22 years, refused to implement resolution 425, which called for its immediate and unconditional withdrawal from all Lebanese territories.

Mr. President,

Our meeting this year coincides with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). On this occasion, Lebanon would like to stress that the Palestinian refugees' solution is first and foremost a political solution; until a just and final solution for their tragedy has been reached, we fully support all efforts aiming at reinforcing the UNRWA's programs and capabilities, enabling

it to improve the living standards and human conditions of the refugees, in collaboration with the hosting countries.

As a matter of fact, a just and final solution for the Palestinian refugees cannot deny them their natural and legitimate Right of return to their lands and homes, nor could it be achieved excluding the hosting countries' participation or contradicting their sovereignty, special circumstances, and/or national interests. This is where Lebanon's rejection of any form of settlement of the Palestinian refugees on its territories stems from, for such a rejection guarantees the Palestinian refugees' Right of return and goes in accordance with Lebanon's Constitution and national pact. Let it be known that such a position will neither be compromised nor reversed. I seize this opportunity to express our gratitude to the countries that have shown support to the Lebanese position on this issue and willingness to defend it.

Mr. President,

Throughout last year, Lebanon has been able to maintain its internal stability, dismantle many Israeli spying networks and terrorist cells while striving to implement the United Nations Security Council resolution 1701 and reinforce its bilateral relations with brotherly and friendly countries. Furthermore, Lebanon was able to hold parliamentary elections, the transparency and integrity of which the world is witness, and the results of which all competing parties admitted. Lebanon has also been able to boost its credibility, avoid the aftermath of the global financial crisis, and raise its growth rate to almost 6% while attracting more tourism and investments and preparing to host the 6th Francophonie Games in a few days.

While parliamentary consultations are taking their full course in accordance with the Constitution provisions and with the requirements of forging a national consensus, we are looking forward to forming a national unity government very soon, a government that would reinstate the government dynamics and launch the political, administrative, and judicial reform process the Lebanese people aspire for, a process the fruits of which serve the people and not the authority which ensures its success and continuity.

In parallel, and on the third anniversary of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1701, Lebanon urges the international community to continue its quest to compel Israel to implement all the provisions of resolution 1701, namely to withdraw from all the Lebanese occupied territories including the Shebaa farms, the Kfarshuba hills, and the Northern part of the Ghajar village, to stop its daily violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and its persistent threats against Lebanon, its institutions and infrastructures...

In this context, Lebanon would like to commend the role of the UNIFIL forces in South Lebanon in accordance with the rules of engagement agreed upon and in full coordination with the Lebanese Army. In addition to that, Lebanon would like to reaffirm that it remains keen to preserve the safety of these forces and reiterate its appreciation for the efforts deployed by its commander and soldiers as well as for their sacrifices for the service of peace and stability.

On the other hand, Lebanon will pursue its international efforts to force Israel to pay due compensation for the full damage it caused through its repeated aggressions against Lebanon, including the damages caused by the oil slick resulting from the Israeli bombardment of the Jiyeh power plant in the summer of 2006.

The experiences of the 61 past years have confirmed a set of truths:

1. The Palestinian cause is at the heart of the Middle East crisis.
2. Israel's resorting to force to impose a fait accompli is futile and shall neither weaken the will nor the determination of the Arab people to retrieve their rights.
3. Partial and unilateral solutions could not achieve genuine peace, and unjust solutions are short-lived.

Since the middle of the last century, the world has witnessed political, intellectual and ideological shifts that have had a great impact on the nations' and peoples' situation and interaction, under a worrying accumulation of economic, social and environment predicaments.

No matter how local or regional some conflicts and crises had once been; in the current era of globalization, any crisis or conflict has spread to become global or acquire a global dimension. Such has been the case for the international phenomenon of terrorism, the global financial crisis, and the contagious diseases spreading across continents.

Mr. President,

From the old ages until the modern world, and just as in the fiercest epics, wars have not begot but tragic and painful events and costly and horrific experiences where blood and tears are shed with no spare, and disappointment and tragedies prevail.

Therefore, we hope that the United Nations, which has been originally established to prevent wars and resolve conflicts through peaceful means, persists in its endeavor to achieve righteousness and establish justice, and that through the active and unbiased international efforts.

Thank you, Mr. President.