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PRESS RELEASE**Start of Lebanon's National Dialogue**

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A conference on national dialogue began its work on March 2 in Beirut at the initiative of Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri . Its declared objective is to try and find solutions acceptable to all participants on the key problems of the national agenda. The leaders of the major political forces of Lebanon, representing its principal confessions, have gathered at a round table for the first time.

Moscow sincerely welcomes the initiative to launch a national dialogue. Firmly committed to Lebanon's political independence and stability, Russia invariably speaks in favor of solving all the problems facing the country by means of attaining national consensus around the main lines of Lebanese domestic and foreign policy. The Lebanese themselves must determine their country's future without foreign interference from whatever quarter it may come.

We hope that the round table participants will show responsibility for the country's destiny, and readiness for compromise to make coordinated decisions. We are certain that this will help build stronger civil peace and harmony in Lebanon, and reinforce its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Such a course of events will be a good mainstay for efforts toward easing tension in the region and ensuring its stability and prosperity.

March 3, 2006