

Statement

By

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To the United Nations

At the
Security Council

On

The situation in the Middle East,
Including the Palestinian question

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August, and to express my deep appreciation to your predecessor the Ambassador of China and his delegation for their stewardship and wisdom while conducting last month's work. I would also like to thank Mr. Michael Williams for his comprehensive briefing and express our regrets for his departure. We wish Mr. Williams all the best in his future endeavours and sincerely hope that he will continue his efforts to help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict which remains at the core of the increasingly complex Middle East crises.

Mr. Chairman,

Once again, we meet in this distinguished Council to revisit the situation in my part of the world where legitimate hopes for a just and durable peace are being crushed and shattered. Aware that peace requires bold steps and painful sacrifices, the Arab leaders who met in 2002 in Beirut adopted, as you know Mr. Chairman, a peace initiative based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and on the land-for-peace principle. In exchange for full Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in June 1967, and for Israel's acceptance of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state to be established in the West Bank and Gaza, along with the achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon pursuant to relevant U.N. resolutions, the Arab heads of State offered in this historic initiative:

- to consider the Arab-Israeli conflict as having ended,
- to enter into a peace agreement with Israel,
- to establish - in the context of such a comprehensive peace - normal relations with Israel,
- and, to ensure that security is provided for all the states in the region.

The 2007 Arab summit recently held in Riyadh not only renewed the Arab commitment to this peace strategy, but also chose to reinvigorate it through the formation of a follow-up committee entrusted with the task of engaging all concerned parties. Regrettably, however, this offer has still not been met in Israel by a partner capable of truly rising to the challenge of peace. Hence, the greater role of the International community not to let this opportunity for peace be missed.

In this regard, while welcoming the July 17 proposal of US President George Bush to hold an International meeting in the coming fall to address the Middle East conflict, we would like to emphasize that any unwarranted conditionality may jeopardize the desired outcome of such a laudable effort.

Mr. Chairman,

On the 24th of this month, this august body adopted unanimously resolution 1773 to extend the mandate of UNIFIL for one additional year. Although the renewal was meant to remain technical, the political message was no less clear: the international community reiterated its “strong commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the political

independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized borders and under the sole and exclusive authority of its government.” It also reaffirmed its “attachment to the full implementation of all provisions of resolution 1701 of August 2006.”

Similarly, my government remains entirely committed to the full implementation of resolution 1701 one year after its adoption. In relation to this issue, allow me, Mr. Chairman, to draw your attention to the following highly alarming facts:

- While my government welcomed the appointment by the Secretary General of a facilitator in the matter of the abducted Israeli soldiers, Israel continues to refuse to solve the longstanding issue of the Lebanese detainees who have been aging in Israeli prisons for decades. We call for and expect their immediate release.
- Israel continues its violation of Lebanese airspace in a blatant and flagrant violation of resolution 1701 and of Lebanese sovereignty. The Secretary General, in his latest interim report on the implementation of resolution 1701, observed that “these violations occur on an almost daily basis frequently numbering between 15 and 20 and have even reached 32 overflights in a single day.” These overflights, in the words of the Secretary General, “not only constitute repeated violations” of resolution 1701 and “of other relevant Security Council resolutions,” but “also undermine, he adds, the credibility of both UNIFIL and the LAF in the eyes of the local population, and negatively affect efforts to stabilize the situation on the ground.” After such clear words by his Excellency the Secretary General, I

feel no need at this time to add a single letter in rebuttal of any contrary fallacious arguments on the matter. Allow me, however, to call for an immediate halt to these violations and for the full respect of Lebanese sovereignty.

- The continued Israeli occupation of the Shebaa farms constitutes a violation of Security Council Resolution 425 which had in 1978 called upon Israel to “withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory”. While we praise the progress achieved by the senior cartographer appointed to determine the territorial definition of said farms, we believe that a political process must also start, based on my government’s proposal in its seven-point plan to put this area under the interim jurisdiction of the United Nations.

- During the Israeli aggression on Lebanon last summer, the Israeli army deliberately pounded southern Lebanon with millions of cluster bombs. The 2006 annual report of the United Nations Mine Action Service clearly specifies that over one million have not exploded and have thus become tantamount to anti-personnel land mines, easily capable of claiming more lives and victims. By the end of last June, more than 233 Lebanese civilians had fallen victims to Israeli cluster bombs, many of whom children.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel's decision to drop these cluster bombs, in the first place, constitutes a blatant violation of international humanitarian law, since such munitions are by nature nondiscriminatory and may cause unnecessary

suffering to the civilian population. Moreover, Israel's persistent refusal to give the United Nations the maps which indicate where it dropped the cluster bombs is an additional flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, since the remaining unexploded bomblets represent a continuous threat to the safety and security of the Lebanese civilian population.

Mr. Chairman,

My government is determined to clean Lebanon from Israel's cluster bombs and put an end to the sufferings they cause to my countrymen in Southern Lebanon. Moreover, on behalf of every Lebanese man and woman who was killed, maimed, disfigured or injured by a cluster bomb, on behalf of every Lebanese child who was playing outside his home and never came back, and on behalf of every Lebanese child who is threatened of not coming back home, my government pledges before you that it shall not spare any effort to reach an international ban on cluster bombs, so that these most ugly weapons become things of the past.

Mr. Chairman,

This pledge is not the only good news from Lebanon I wish to put before you today.

I would also like to assure you of the unwavering determination of my government and its army to put an end to the terrorist group Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr al-Bared camp and not to allow it to continue threatening the stability of my country. May I ask you as well to note that in the midst of this fight, my government took the initiative to address the humanitarian

situation of the Palestinian refugees who had to leave the camp and that it hopes that, with the aid of the international community, the reconstruction of the camp and the return of its inhabitants will not take long to materialize.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me also mention that in my country on August 5 by-elections in Beirut and the Matn district took place to replace two assassinated members of parliament. The good news here lies in the fact that despite the fierce political campaign that accompanied these by-elections and the tight race between the contending candidates, the process went smoothly and without one single serious act of violence being reported. Moreover, these by-elections represented the democratic answer to the terrorist killings, and the fact that the opposition candidate won one of the two contested seats is the latest witness to the vitality of Lebanon's democracy in our part of the world and a source of pride to my government.

We also hope that the upcoming presidential election will bear additional witness to my country's entrenched democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman