



Address

by

H.E. General Michel Aoun

President of the Republic of Lebanon

at the

Seventy-third session of the

United Nations General Assembly

New York, September 26, 2018

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***Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 531, New York, NY 10017***

Your Excellency Mrs. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the General Assembly,

Your Excellency the Secretary General of the United Nations Mr. Antonio Guterres,

Ladies and gentlemen the heads of States and Governments,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the onset, I would like to congratulate Your Excellency on chairing the seventy-third session of the United Nations General Assembly, wishing you success in this mission. I would also like to thank His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajcak for his efforts in the conduct of the previous session.

It gives me pleasure to also laud the efforts of His Excellency the UN Secretary General Mr. Guterres for his endeavors, in particular his reform project at the top of the international organization.

Madam President,

You proposed as a theme for the general debate: **“making the United Nations relevant to all people: global leadership and shared responsibilities for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies”**. It is indeed a commendable proposition because it means that the United Nations is aware that its present reality requires a serious improvement of the future role expected from it.

According to its objectives and founding principles, the United Nations must be the global conscience that preserves balance, prevents aggression, establishes justice and protects peace. Indeed, at many junctions, the Security Council failed to adopt fair, and sometimes defining, resolutions for some people, due to the right of veto, or because some States abstained from implementing resolutions that do not suit them, even if they were binding and immediate, without any accountability or sanction.

Let me give you a few examples from the very heart of our region’s suffering:

Security-Council Resolution 425 of 1978, which called Israel to withdraw its forces from all the Lebanese territories immediately, was only implemented 22 years later, under the pressure of the resistance of the Lebanese people.

In contrast, we see that the General Assembly’s Resolution 181 of 1947, stipulating the division of Palestine, took a binding character although it is not binding, and it was immediately executed while Resolution 194, also adopted by the General Assembly in 1948, calling for the return of the Palestinian Refugees to their home as soon as possible, remained as mere ink on paper for seventy years.

In this context, the right of veto or the right of objection, has undoubtedly many considerations and grounds at its origin, but its consequences affected adversely many countries and peoples, especially in our region, and deprived them from fundamental rights.

Therefore, for the United Nations to be “a global leadership and to be relevant to all people...”, there must be a reform project that sets out the enlargement of the Security Council, the increase of the number of Member States and the adoption of a more transparent, more democratic and more balanced system. On another hand, it is of paramount importance for the General Assembly to express better the effective orientation of the international community.

The United Nations is also invited to promote the protection of human rights in the world. Having made a remarkable contribution to the setup of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, and having committed itself expressly to them in the preamble of its Constitution, Lebanon affirms that it regards human rights as it does the freedom of the individual in society, and that any assault against human rights today, in any country, paves the way for tomorrow’s disputes.

It is worth noting in this respect that Lebanon is steadily moving forward in the promotion of human rights at both legislative and executive levels. Indeed, the Lebanese Parliament has already adopted the law on the establishment of the national commission for human rights, including a committee to investigate the use of torture and the mistreatment.

In a related context, we are on the verge of finalizing a national action plan pertaining to the execution of Security Council Resolution 1325 which called on the member States to set action plans to enable women to take part in decision-making processes, negotiations and countering conflicts. The Lebanese action plan has indeed introduced the four axes of this Resolution, and it included the guarantee of women participation in decision-making at all levels, as well as the activation of their role in conflict prevention, adopting the laws to ban discrimination against women, and to protect them from violence and abuse.

Madam President,

Honorable assembly,

In Lebanon, we are groping our way to rise from the consecutive crises that stroke us at various levels;

In security, Lebanon managed to consolidate its security and stability after having abolished the agglomerations of terrorists from its Eastern and Northern barrens, and after having dismantled their sleeper cells.

In politics, Lebanon held its parliamentary elections according to a law based on proportionality for the first time in its history, which led to a fairer representation of all the components of the

Lebanese society. Today, the formation of a government is under way, based on the outcome of the elections.

In economy, the guidelines of an economic recovery plan which take into account the resolutions of the CEDRE Conference, based on activating the productive sectors, modernizing the infrastructure, and bridging the gap between revenues and expenses in the budget.

Nevertheless, the neighborhood's crises still weigh heavily upon us with their consequences. With the break out of the events in Syria, the displacement waves fleeing the hell of war began to pour into Lebanon, which tried, to the greatest extent possible, to ensure the conditions of a dignified decent life for the displaced. Yet, their large numbers and their fallout on the Lebanese society from various perspectives, from a security perspective through the increase in regular crime rate to more than 30%, economically through the increase of the unemployment rate to 21%, demographically through the increase in population density from 400 to 600 people per square kilometer, in addition to our limited resources, and the scarce international assistance for Lebanon, which makes it impossible for us to keep shouldering this burden, especially that most of the Syrian territories have become safe. I therefore called for the safe return in my address from this very rostrum last year, and I differentiated between the safe return and the voluntary return; the Syrians who have taken refuge in Lebanon are not political refugees, except for a few; most of them were rather displaced due to the security situation in their country, or for economic motives, and these from the majority.

Let me present to you, Madam President and Honorable assembly, this Map issued on 2014 by the United Nations High Commission For Refugees (UNHCR), showing the evolution of the numbers of registered displaced from 25.000 in 2012 to more than a million in 2014, precisely over a span of two years barely, and their repartition on the Lebanese territories; and this is the best illustration of what I am trying to explain to you. (map enclosed)

Here, I would like to note that the United Nations has stopped counting the displaced in 2014. After that date, the Lebanese General Security continued its counts which showed that, since that date and on till the moment, the numbers have exceeded 1.5 million displaced.

Against this background, I reiterate the stance of my country which seeks to consolidate the right of dignified, safe and sustainable return of the displaced to their land, rejecting absolutely any project of settlement, whether for the displaced or the refugee. In this context, we wish to note our favorable welcome of any initiative which seeks to resolve the issue of the displacement, such as the Russian initiative.

Madam President,

Esteemed audience,

History has taught us that oppression induces explosion, and the absence of justice and the double-standards create a feeling of grudge, and fuel all the tendencies of extremism, and the violence and terrorism they entail.

Unfortunately, the international political approaches for the Middle East region still lack justice and use double standards, which makes our peoples question the concept of democracy in the States considered as pioneers in this respect. The Palestinian cause is the best reflection of this picture; for the absence of justice in addressing it triggered many wars in the Middle East and created a resistance that will only end by eliminating oppression and establishing justice..

The world has voted lately, at the Security Council and the General Assembly, against the proclamation of AL-Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of Israel. Despite the results of the two votes which reflected the will of the international community, some embassies were transferred to it. Then the law on the “Jewish nation-State of Israel” was adopted, this displacing law which relies on the rejection of the other, expressly undermines all the endeavors of peace and the two-State project.

And to complete the landscape, there came the decision to withhold the assistance for the UNRWA which by definition stands for the “United Nations Agency for the Relief and Work of the Refugees of Palestine in the Near East, in addition to ensuring assistance and protection for them pending a solution for their suffering”.

Has their suffering ceased so that UNRWA’s role comes to an end? Or does the neutralization of its role pave the way to taking the status of refugee away from them and integrating them in the host countries to wipe away the Palestinian identity and impose settlement?

Madam President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A people just found itself overnight who found themselves overnight with identity and with no nation, by the decision of those who were supposed to be the defender of weak countries.

Let each one of us imagine for a moment that an international resolution about which they have no say, rips their land and their identity off; and while they are trying to hold on to them, the strikes befall them from every side to make them give up... this is the case of the Palestinian people today, wandering stateless in the four corners of the world. Do we accept this situation for ourselves or our peoples? Does the world’s conscience accept this? Is this what is stipulated by the international laws and charters?? And what guarantees that small peoples, notably the Lebanese people, do not face the same fate?

Simultaneously, the Israeli violations of Resolutions 1701 persist, by land, sea and air, exceeding 100 violations a month, despite Lebanon’s total commitment to it.

Madam President,

Esteemed audience,

Our world suffers today from a crisis of extremism and fanaticism, manifesting itself in the rejection of the different “other”, the rejection of their culture, religion, color and civilization, the rejection of their very existence in absolute; this crisis is likely to aggravate, and no State is any longer safe from it, with all the devastating effects it has on the societies and States because it causes their implosion.

The United Nations, and before it the League of Nations, failed to prevent wars, establish peace and restore right, especially in our region, and one of the major reasons thereof is not forming a global culture for peace, based on the knowledge of the different “other” and the practice coexistence.

This is why the need is pressing for the dialogue of religions, cultures and races, and for building international cultural institutions specialized in spreading the culture of dialogue and peace.

With its plural society where Christians and Muslims live together, co-govern and share the administration, with the expertise of its citizens spread all over the globe, and with what it stands for as the essence of the civilizations and cultures it represents and which it embraced throughout the eras, Lebanon is considered exemplary to establish therein an international academy to disseminate these values, the “**Human Academy for Encounter and Dialogue**”.

From this podium, I launched last year an initiative to make Lebanon an international center for the dialogue of religions, cultures and races, and we aspire to see this initiative materialize today with a multilateral convention to establish the Academy in Lebanon, serving as an international project for permanent gathering and dialogue, and for the promotion of the spirit of coexistence, in line with the objectives of the United Nations and the adoption of preventive diplomacy to avoid conflicts.

Your Excellency,

Esteemed audience,

Humans are the enemies of what they ignore, and the road to salvation resides in convergence, dialogue, the rejection of the language of violence, the establishment of justice between the peoples, and it is the only path that brings back stability and security to our societies, and achieves the sustainable development that we aspire to.

Thank you.