

**Briefing to the Security Council on the Eighteenth semi-annual report
of the Secretary-General on the implementation of
Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)**

– 24 October 2013 –

Mr. President,

I am pleased to present to the Security Council the 18th semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004). This is my sixth briefing in the context of the crisis in Syria since it started in the spring of 2011 and which continues to pose serious challenges for Lebanon.

The members of the Security Council are aware of the significance of the implementation of several provisions of resolution 1559 since its adoption in 2004, including the withdrawal of the Syrian troops in 2005; the conduct of free and fair elections; and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon. These are worth recalling as Lebanon today would be even more vulnerable to the turmoil next door had these steps not been achieved then.

Equally important, however, is the need to ensure that these accomplishments are not undermined in the absence of tangible progress in the implementation of the remaining provisions of resolution 1559. The Secretary-General and I are both disappointed at the lack of progress in this regard and concerned at the lack of prospects for new efforts in the current context.

Indeed, all indications are that Lebanon will continue to go through a difficult phase in the foreseeable future. When I last briefed the Council in May, the threats posed by the Syrian conflict to Lebanon's security and stability were already apparent for some time. The number of Syrian refugees hosted by Lebanon stood at 450,000 refugees, already causing enormous humanitarian, socio-economic and political challenges. Discussions over the formation of a new government had just started following the appointment of Prime Minister-designate Tamam Salam in April.

Six months later, the number of refugees from Syria registered or seeking assistance in Lebanon has more than doubled and is projected to surpass one million by the end of the year – or one quarter of Lebanon's population. No country could afford such a burden on its own. Politically, the stalemate that caused the resignation of Prime Minister Mikati's government appears to have deepened, leaving the country now in its seventh month without a new government. There is also no clear prospect of new discussion of the electoral arrangements since Parliamentary elections were postponed.

More worrying, however, is the increased exposure of Lebanon to the fighting in Syria and the resulting spill-over violence, despite the efforts to preserve and disassociate Lebanon from the conflict. Cross-border shelling and firing from Syria have continued to threaten Lebanese security and territorial integrity. As recently as this week, on 21 and 22

October, there were reports of no less than five rockets fired from the Syrian side of the border that landed on the outskirts of Hermel and another four rockets by Al Qaa. Earlier this month, on 14 October, at least 15 shells originating from Syria were reported to have hit several nearby northern Lebanese towns in Akkar.

And while the involvement of various Lebanese elements on both sides of the Syrian conflict has been an ongoing source of concern, the open acknowledgement by Hizbullah in May of its military engagement in Syria marked a turning point in the escalation of tensions in Lebanon. The consecutive terrorist bombings that struck in the Shia neighbourhood of Beirut on 15 August and against two Sunni mosques in Tripoli on 23 August were the deadliest such incidents since the killing of the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. Progress has been made in the investigations into the attacks, leading to several arrests. However, the bombings suggest a pattern that, if repeated, could be seriously destabilizing for Lebanon.

In Tripoli this past week, fresh intermittent clashes have continued for three days now between the Sunni area of Bab el Tebbaneh and the Alawite area of Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli. One fatality and up to 29 injuries were reported.

The news last week of the release of the nine remaining Lebanese Shia pilgrims detained in Syria since May 2012 and that of the two Turkish pilots abducted in Beirut in August is a welcome development. But it also reflects the complexity of the domestic and regional environment in which Lebanon is caught.

Against this backdrop, this Council has demonstrated consistent unity in support of Lebanon's stability, disassociation policy, and State institutions, including President Sleiman for his leadership and the Lebanese Armed Forces for their robust performance. The Secretary-General's initiative to convene the inaugural meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon on 25 September in the margin of the General Assembly offered a further opportunity to express the international community's commitment to Lebanon's stability and to promote dialogue for safeguarding Lebanon from the impact of the Syrian crisis. Such support and vigilance on the part of the Council and the international community will remain important to encourage Lebanon's continued resilience in the face of growing pressures.

In this context, our concern remains that the continued stagnation in the implementation of resolution 1559, combined with political tension in the country in the period leading to the presidential election by May 2014, could undermine the earlier progress in the implementation of the resolution and contribute to further deterioration in Lebanon's stability. Of particular concern is the risk that, absent agreement on a government, Lebanon could enter a period of further uncertainty without the capacity to effectively address the urgent humanitarian and security challenges at hand.

Mr. President,

The status of key outstanding provisions of resolution 1559 remains unchanged: as long as there is no progress on the disarmament and disbandment of armed militias in Lebanon and the delineation of the Lebanese-Syrian border, this Council's objectives of ensuring respect for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and State authority, will remain incomplete. The conflict in Syria should not be used as an excuse but rather should serve as an incentive for deploying new efforts in the long-term interest of Lebanon and the region.

Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias continue to operate in Lebanon outside of the control of the Government in serious violation of resolution 1559. The maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other Lebanese groups poses a serious on-going challenge to the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. Palestinian armed groups also continue to operate in the country, inside and outside the refugee camps. Furthermore, the recent acts of terrorism and the discovery of large quantities of explosives are particularly worrying in that they suggest infiltration or presence of extremist elements in Lebanon. On 14 October, a booby-trapped car was found in Al Maamoura area, in Beirut's southern suburb, which the Lebanese Armed Forces managed to dismantle.

Since the adoption of resolution 1559, we have repeatedly urged Lebanese leaders to meet their obligation to address the serious risks that militias pose to the stability of the country and the region. This requirement has become even more pressing as the political and electoral process in Lebanon has become more fluid. We reiterate our position that the maintenance by a political party of its own militia is incompatible with the democratic nature of the state. Of note in this regard is the deployment by the Lebanese Army and security forces around the southern suburbs of Beirut to assume security responsibility in place of Hizbullah in the aftermath of the devastating terror bombing there as well as in Tripoli.

Nonetheless, Hizbullah continues to acknowledge openly that it maintains and expands a substantial military capacity separate from that of the Lebanese State. It continues to claim that its arms serve as a deterrent against potential aggression from Israel. Meanwhile, Israeli officials have expressed concern at the alleged maintenance by Hizbullah of un-authorized weapons or armed personnel presence in civilian areas in the south of Lebanon.

The armed involvement of Hizbullah, and indeed the role of other Lebanese groups or individuals in the conflict in Syria, amounts to open defiance of Lebanon's policy of disassociation from regional conflicts, to which all the country's political parties have committed. The Secretary-General urges Hizbullah to dis-engage from any militant activity inside or outside of Lebanon, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Agreement and Security Council resolution 1559. He reiterates his call on Lebanon to take all the necessary measures to prohibit Hizbullah from acquiring weapons and building paramilitary capacities outside the authority of the State. We also call on those regional States with close ties to Hizbullah, in particular the Islamic Republic of Iran, to

encourage the armed group to transform into a solely political party and disarm in the best interest of Lebanon and regional peace and security.

It is regrettable that since the adoption of resolution 1559, no concrete steps have been taken to address the crucial issue of armed groups, including Hizbullah's maintenance of a military arsenal. Among Lebanese society, such arms continue to be seen as an implicit threat for use within Lebanon for political reasons and therefore as potentially destabilizing factors. The Secretary-General remains fully supportive of the National Dialogue as the best way to address the issue of arms. President Sleiman has repeatedly expressed his commitment to the resumption of the National Dialogue, including on the national defence strategy which he put forward and which remains an important initiative to build on. More than one year has now lapsed, however, since the National Dialogue was last convened in September 2012. It is crucial for the credibility of this process that all parties join in the resumption of the National Dialogue and recommit to their earlier decisions. The Syrian crisis should incite rather than deter Lebanese leaders to meet their responsibilities towards the disarmament and disbanding of all militias in the national interest.

Mr. President,

We also remain concerned at the lack of progress with regard to dismantling the military bases of PFLP-GC and Fatah al-Intifadah in Lebanon, despite the earlier decisions to that effect by the National Dialogue. Their presence mostly along the border with Syria continues to undermine Lebanese sovereignty and governmental authority, and makes control of the border more difficult. We renew our calls on the Lebanese authorities to take steps towards the dismantling of the PFLP-GC and Fatah al-Intifada military bases, and on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate with such efforts.

Meanwhile, the situation of Palestinian refugees in the camps in Lebanon is of even greater concern in light of the additional strains that the Syrian crisis has placed on the camps. We welcome the affirmation by President Abbas during his visit to Lebanon of the need for leaders in the Palestinian camps to maintain order and refrain from involvement in any tensions. Without prejudice to the eventual resolution of the Palestinian refugee question in the context of a comprehensive regional peace agreement, improving conditions in the camps remains a necessity, including through greater donor support to UNRWA.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General's report details a continuing pattern of incidents over the past six months that have further challenged domestic security, linked directly or indirectly to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. As noted earlier, the city of Tripoli, despite fresh attempts by the Lebanese authorities at developing security plans, remains a flashpoint of sectarian tensions against the backdrop of the Syrian conflict. Deadly incidents in other localities, including the armed clashes between Salafist and the Lebanese Armed Forces in Sidon on 23-24 June, are also indicative of the ongoing security threats in the country

and the proliferation of weapons held by non-state actors. Notwithstanding the broad political support for the Lebanese Armed Forces, they continue to be targeted. Recently on 22 October, unknown assailants opened fire on a LAF checkpoint in Al Sharawneh area in Baalbek. These incidents are a reminder both of the commendable efforts of the Lebanese Armed Forces in addressing security challenges under difficult circumstances and of the need for the Lebanese authorities to do more to impose law and order throughout the country.

The report also details on-going incidents across Lebanon's border with the Syrian Arab Republic, that point to continuing weapons trafficking and armed movement in both directions. Repeated cross-border incidents continue to put at risk both civilians and soldiers on the Lebanese side of the border owing to the actions of Syrian forces. We call upon all parties, in particular the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, to fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, in accordance with resolution 1559. In the past month, shelling and shooting from Syria on 28 September led to the injury of at least three Lebanese soldiers. President Sleiman condemned a missile attack by a Syrian helicopter on the border town of Aarsal on 7 October. On 2 and 3 October, mortar shells reportedly originating from Syria again landed on the outskirts of several towns in the northern Akkar region. On 2 October, several shells originating from Syria fell on the town of Machta Hammoud in Akkar northern Lebanon.

Despite increased deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the border remains difficult to control. In this connection, Israeli officials have stated that they would act to prevent advanced or chemical weapons systems from being transferred to Hizbullah from Syria. Representatives of Hizbullah, for their part, maintained their position that they had no intention of acquiring chemical weapons.

Of great concern is the continued involvement of Lebanese elements in the conflict in Syria, notably that of Hizbullah members, and the threats by external actors to bring their fight to Lebanon in response. This poses very real risks to national security and stability. Two days ago, on 22 October, President Sleiman defended and reaffirmed Lebanon's disassociation policy pursuant to the Baabda Declaration. This followed an interview the day before by Bashar al-Assad in which the latter commented on the situation across the Lebanese-Syrian border. We commend the wise and courageous efforts of President Sleiman to uphold Lebanon's policy of disassociation, which remains essential to preserving Lebanon from any further impact of the conflict in Syria. The Secretary-General also calls upon all Lebanese political leaders to ensure full respect for such policy so that Lebanon remains neutral in regards to external conflicts, consistent with their commitment in the Baabda Declaration.

Mr. President,

The conflict in Syria is showing the obvious impact that the lack of progress regarding border delineation has on border control and security for Lebanon. We have continued to call upon Syria and Lebanon to achieve the full delineation of their common border. In its resolution 1680 (2006), the Security Council strongly encouraged the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to respond positively to the request by the Government of Lebanon

to delineate their common border. However, no further steps have been taken by either side. We remain convinced that integrated border management would be of mutual interest and benefit to both Lebanon and Syria as it would improve control of their common border and help to prevent the illegal transfers of arms in both directions.

Mr. President,

The situation in UNIFIL's area of operations generally remained stable during the reporting period and calm prevailed along the Blue Line. It is essential that any incidents, as reported by the Secretary-General pending investigations, remain isolated and be fully addressed through established mechanisms. Meanwhile, we deplore Israel's continued violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call again upon Israel to adhere to its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions and withdraw its forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line. We also reiterate our call upon Israel to cease overflights of Lebanese airspace, which continue to raise tension and increase the risk of unintended conflict.

Mr. President,

Three years into the Syrian crisis, Lebanon continues to show resilience in the face of multiple challenges at the security, humanitarian and socio-economic levels. The Secretary-General is encouraged that the International Support Group for Lebanon reaffirmed international unity in support of Lebanon's stability, which lies at the heart of resolution 1559 and other relevant resolutions. We welcome the calls made on the need for strong, coordinated international support for Lebanon to help it continue to withstand the multiple current challenges to its security and stability.

The question is how much longer can Lebanon sustain the pressure without all Lebanese parties joining in the national interest to effectively preserve the country's stability with regional and international support. The deepening of sectarian and political tensions in Lebanon and the continued impact of the Syrian crisis on the security and political dynamics in the country remain sources of great concern to the United Nations. The magnitude of the challenges facing Lebanon is fast outpacing the State's capacity to address them. Political polarization and lack of agreement on a new Government risk making Lebanon even more vulnerable. On Tuesday, President Sleiman again called for dialogue among the political leaders to save Lebanon from the dangers sweeping across the region. He also called for next year's presidential elections to be held on time.

Seven months after the resignation of Prime Minister Mikati, it is imperative that all parties in Lebanon come to agreement on the formation of an empowered and capable government. At a time when the international community is mobilizing support for Lebanon, it is critical that Lebanon's leaders respond accordingly by ensuring that the international community has an effective partner in addressing the challenges facing the country. The formation of a government is a key test of this, especially given the need to avoid the risk of a political vacuum as the timeframe for the presidential election approaches. The Security Council itself has spoken of the importance of swift progress in this regard. For the sake of both the democratic process and of stability, Lebanon's

political parties must show a sense of urgency, pragmatism and flexibility in order to make this possible.

It will also be a test for the future implementation of resolution 1559 and other relevant resolutions, to which the United Nations remain firmly committed during a particularly difficult and challenging time in Lebanon. We will continue our efforts with the Government of Lebanon and all parties concerned in meeting their international obligations.

Thank you Mr. President