

Briefing on the Twenty-first semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the  
implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

28 April 2015

Madame President, Good Afternoon Excellencies,

Thank you for this opportunity to address you once again in order to present the 21st semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). You will have all read the report, so rather than repeat those details here, I would like to highlight some areas where progress has been made, underline the main obstacles behind Lebanon's failure to implement the outstanding elements of resolution 1559 (2004) and propose a few ways forward. Today's briefing marks an important milestone for resolution 1559 (2004), it is exactly 10 years since the Syrians withdrew from Lebanon. Today's Lebanon is a changed place and the country's leaders have more freedom than ever before in taking independent sovereign decisions. It is important that they use this right.

There has not been a President in Lebanon for almost one full year and there seems little prospect on the horizon of one being elected anytime soon. This prolonged vacuum presents problems for those governing the country and puts further pressure on the institutions of State that continue to function. Prime Minister Tamam Salam and his government should be commended for their diligence and skill in addressing challenges that would normally be dealt with by a President. Their work has not been without problem or challenge - specifically in their various attempts to ensure the views of all Lebanese constituencies are taken into consideration.

I'm sure you would agree that the President of the Republic of Lebanon is a symbol of significant domestic and regional importance, particularly as minorities in the region are increasingly threatened. Lebanon's specific brand of democracy, unity and co-existence has helped sustain the country through these last, difficult, few years. It represents a very positive alternative to the violence, extremism and chaos that the region is witnessing. This is an important opportunity for the Lebanese to elect their President without the political interference of external parties.

To continue to leave the position vacant is nothing short of irresponsible. I find it difficult to understand the justifications that some use for their refusal to attend parliament, preventing others from voting as a result. This goes against Lebanon's constitutional process and robs the Lebanese of their democratic rights. The presidential election is a Lebanese process, but partisan politics should be put aside for the greater national good of stability and security in Lebanon. I know that the international community and this Security Council have repeatedly also voiced their concerns about this issue including most recently in a PRST on 19 March. I think it is now time to turn up the volume even more to ensure all Lebanese politicians hear loud and clear...these political games should stop...a President must be elected immediately.

Madame President,

You were briefed in March by ASG Mr. Mulet and UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Ms Kaag on the events of 18 and 28 January in the Golan and across the Blue Line. I will not go into the same detail again, suffice to say that the events were indeed a violation of resolutions 1559 and 1701, a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity that resulted in

the tragic death of a UN peacekeeper. It remains vital that all parties work together with UNIFIL and UNSCOL to ensure that no further escalation occurs. In this regard I am deeply concerned by statements from Hassan Nasrallah on 30 January in which he stated that, after these incidents the Islamic Resistance including Hizbullah “no longer care or recognise rules of engagement...it is our legal, ethical and international legal right to confront aggression irrespective of what it is and in what time or place”.

The war in Syria continues to impact Lebanon in numerous ways. The implication for Lebanon’s security and stability of the fighting across the border during this reporting period has been clear. There have been a number of attempted cross-border incursions by extremist groups such as Nusra Front and ISIL - on 1 December 2014 and 23 January near the town of Ras Baalbek. The Syrian government’s air-force has also persisted in conducting air-raids which violate Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity. Other forms of cross-border incidents have decreased compared to the previous reporting period, although shelling incidents and rocket attacks have continued. The reduction has been the result of improved border security, including the deployment of additional border regiments from the Lebanese Armed Forces, and the construction of Lebanese military infrastructure in the eastern border area.

The Lebanese Armed Forces have been successful in repelling attempted ground incursions by extremist groups. The deployment of new border regiments has clearly strengthened Lebanon’s eastern border security. These positive developments have contributed to the extension of State presence and authority, consistent with resolution 1559’s objective, in geographical areas that have historically had limited State presence. However, more needs to be done and despite this progress, concern about threats to security from possible ISIL or Nusra Front incursions, particularly in border communities persists. The last time I addressed you in October, I raised the issue of so called “self-defence” groups being established in these communities. These groups continue to exist and more groups are cropping up in locations far from the border with Syria. I am concerned that if left unchecked, what appear to be small groups now, risk developing into more long-term and sophisticated armed elements outside the control of the state. It is counter to the spirit of this resolution and serves as a very uncomfortable reminder of the continued problem of the proliferation of weapons outside the control of the State.

Madame President,

I welcome the International Community’s support of the Lebanese Armed Forces which has contributed significantly to boosting the Army’s capacity in tackling terrorism and border control capabilities. A number of countries have provided timely and targeted assistance enabling the army to react in a timely manner to various security challenges. The Army requires this support to continue. What is important is to give the Lebanese Army the necessary edge over hostile groups to effectively address the threat they represent. The first deliveries under the deal between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and France, will further add to the strengthening of the Lebanese Army. Other bilateral programmes including from the USA and UK have also strengthened the operational capacity of the Army. This Council’s continued support for the Lebanese Armed Forces is a vital component of Lebanon’s security.

Cooperation between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Lebanon’s other security agencies, such as the Internal Security Forces and General Security, have also contributed to a strengthening of Lebanon’s national security. Complex security operations have been

conducted during the last six months including in Tripoli, the Bekaa, Roumieh prison and most recently in the Southern suburbs of Beirut. *(Slide 6: of Roumieh prison)* The operation in Roumieh Prison was unprecedented, involving the confiscation of prohibited material including telecommunications equipment and computers, from the Islamist prisoner's wing. These have required careful cooperation and consultation between Lebanon's security institutions and the Army. The operations have led to the detention and trials of extremists and criminals from various Lebanese communities. The level of recent cooperation is a very positive development and could be further progressed by providing capacity building support to these other security institutions - in addition to the support already generously provided by member states to the Lebanese Army.

It is also positive that the implementation of such sensitive security operations were made possible through broad political consensus. Agreement between the various political groups in the country has underlined the priority placed on national security. I welcome the dialogue initiatives in the country, between the Future Movement and Hizbullah, and separately the Lebanese Forces and Free Patriotic Movement. As well as providing political cover for these security operations the dialogues have contributed to a lowering of tensions between the various Lebanese communities. However, although these initiatives have helped to bring about tangible results for the country, there is no substitute for National Dialogue. The absence of a President has meant that further discussion of issues of key importance to Lebanon such as the disarmament of armed groups has not been taken forward. This includes the further development of a national defence strategy which remains central to Lebanon's implementation of resolutions 1559 and 1701 .

There have been a number of fatalities from terrorist attacks in Lebanon including in the tragic twin suicide bomb attack on 10 January in the Jabel Mohsen area of Tripoli. 9 people died and over 30 were injured in the explosions. There were also fatalities caused by car bomb attacks close to the town of Aarsal on 3 and 8 December. In spite of these terrible events there were fewer terrorist attacks during this reporting than the last. The reduction is testimony to these combined efforts.

I welcome Prime Minister Salam's continued commitment to disassociating Lebanon from regional conflicts, as he restated at the Arab League Summit on 31 March. Lebanon's security, sovereignty and territorial integrity has been persistently jeopardised by the continued participation of Lebanese elements in the war in Syria. Of the armed Lebanese elements fighting in Syria, Hizbullah remains the group with the largest, most organised and advanced weapons. Hassan Nasrallah's recent statement regarding Lebanon's policy of disassociation on 6 April, in which he described the policy as "a big lie", is deeply worrying. If disassociation is no longer an objective which all Lebanese sides share, then the efforts of the Government and Armed Forces in protecting the country will be even more difficult.

But what's been gained with one hand, risks being quickly taken away by the other. The inflammatory rhetoric over the situation in Yemen has had an immediate impact in further polarizing political divisions in Lebanon. Nasrallah's virulent speeches on the situation in Yemen have prompted responses from other political groups in Lebanon. Political rhetoric has heightened and tensions between Hizbullah and Future Movement are palpable. Despite the commitment of both Saad Hariri and Hassan Nasrallah to continued dialogue, it is difficult to see how issues pertaining to Lebanon, will be somehow protected from such escalation. Lebanon has been dealing with the impact of the conflict in Syria for four years now and I'm deeply concerned that if Lebanese elements continue to associate themselves

with conflicts in other parts of the region, then the country's stability will be put at even greater risk. Lebanon's capacity to disassociate from regional conflicts, whether in Syria or Yemen, is a measure of its independence and sovereignty and it is therefore essential that the international community continues to support Lebanon in upholding and ensuring respect for this principle by all parties.

The violence and extremism, the regional chaos, makes the resilience of Lebanon both more difficult and at the same time even more of an achievement. But resilience – albeit positive – should not be mistaken for progress. In order to eradicate terrorism and violence in Lebanon, fundamental issues must be tackled. The State's authority should be extended throughout the country, borders delineated and demarcated, security strengthened and armed groups outside the control of the State disarmed. It remains important not to lose sight of these points and to remind Lebanon's leaders that the implementation of all aspects of resolution 1559 is indeed in the country's national interest.

In addition to the complicated security situation, Lebanon continues to contend with the largest per capita refugee population in the world. According to UNHCR, on 31 March this year there were 1,192,296 Syrian refugees registered in Lebanon. According to UNWRA, there are also 45,000 Palestine refugees from Syria now in Lebanon. If you look at this map, you'll see the extent of the impact of such large numbers of people, amounting to a quarter of the Lebanese population. There is neither an area nor a community unaffected. The joint launch with the United Nations of Lebanon's Crisis Response Plan, in which the Lebanese government set out a clear plan to assist refugees and host communities in accordance with human rights and humanitarian principles, was a very welcome development. Now that a Plan is in place, there is no time to waste for donors to invest in it and for the Lebanese authorities to implement it fully.

The attention of the international community was demonstrated at the Kuwait donor conference on 31 March. However, in both cases funding has fallen short of what is required. I hope that in its unique capacity, the members of this Council can encourage their governments and those governments of other member states to dig deeper in your pockets in order to relieve the plight of the refugees and the vulnerable communities that host them. In the case of Lebanon, the problem is not only an exceptional humanitarian challenge but also a threat to the country's stability and must therefore be addressed as such through adequate international donor assistance.

Madame President,

You have all been kept extremely busy with violent crises in the region from Syria to Iraq, to Yemen to Libya and within that context Lebanon may appear to be relatively trouble free for now. I have highlighted the limited progress made during the last six months, and at the same time underlined the reality that resilience does not mean progress. Lebanon's stability is deeply fragile and should not be taken for granted. The continued engagement of the international community remains fundamental if preventative diplomacy is to prevail. So far, prevention rather than cure has been effective as the international community has stood behind Lebanon and taken steps to prevent Lebanon's descent into violence and chaos witnessed elsewhere in the region, including by through the International Support Group for Lebanon.

Lebanese politicians need to continue hearing from you on issues such as the Presidency, support to the Army, the impact of conflict on its doorstep and pressing refugee issues. These messages would in my view be best delivered in person to the Lebanese Government and the country's leaders. I encourage you to seriously consider undertaking an official visit to Lebanon of Security Council members, in the same way that you have done to many other countries. This would serve a number of functions including demonstrating Council unity and support for Lebanon in an unprecedented manner. At the same time, the Council could make it very clear that Lebanese politicians must take certain steps including electing a President in order to protect Lebanon from regional turmoil, and to make progress on other outstanding issues including the implementation of resolution 1559.

I have been delighted in my last few briefings to be able to highlight the positive impact that this Council's unity has had on all of these matters. I believe that a visit to Beirut would clearly demonstrate, in a very practical way this continued unity - particularly at a time which is characterised by difficulty and political conflict on so many other issues.

Thank you.