

Briefing to the Security Council on the Sixteenth Semi-Annual Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004)

9 November 2012

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General has expressed on numerous occasions his concern that Lebanon was not immune from the turmoil in the region. He reported on worries of various parties about plots aimed at disrupting domestic stability, particularly in the context of the proliferation of weapons and growing tension and polarization in the country. Sadly, on 19 October, Lebanon was struck by a car bomb in the center of Beirut, killing and injuring many. This political assassination targeted Brigadier-General Wissam Al Hassan, the head of the intelligence bureau of the Internal Security Forces. The killing of such a key Sunni/14 March security figure has raised again the danger of sectarian strife and concerns of the conflict in Syria spreading further to Lebanon. This assassination took place after attempts earlier this year against Samir Geagea and Boutros Harb, two leading figures of the opposition.

It is worth recalling that Al- Hassan was responsible for the arrest on 9 August of former Minister and Member of Parliament Michel Samaha. He is being investigated for involvement in smuggling explosives from Syria, allegedly as part of a plot against targets in Lebanon, with the aim of provoking confessional strife. Syrian General Mamlouk and Colonel Adnan have also been identified as suspects in the same case. More recently, the Military Court has been examining evidence that an adviser to the Syrian President, Buthaina Shaaban, also was allegedly involved in the case.

Several Lebanese political figures, mostly from the 14 March alliance, have accused President Assad for instigating this latest assassination.

The impact of this assassination is likely to play out over a long period of time. It led immediately to the opposition calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Mikati's Government. There were clashes in the streets, particularly in the North of Lebanon. Some of these clashes turned violent and led to death and injury. As of today, the situation across the country appears to have returned to a fragile calm, with the intervention of the LAF. A handful of people continue to maintain a sit-in adjacent to the Prime Minister's office and in front of Mr. Mikati's private residence in Tripoli.

This tragic episode reflects the tense atmosphere that Lebanon has been witnessing for quite a while now, despite the efforts of the Lebanese authorities to ensure security and stability. President Sleiman has reached out to all parties in the country to contain tension.

Mr. President,

Over the last six months, the ongoing turmoil in the Syrian Arab Republic has further affected Lebanon, increasing political polarization and concern that the unrest in Syria could have

negative consequences for Lebanon's stability. Incidents of cross-border fire, incursions, abductions and arms trafficking across the Lebanese-Syrian border have increased significantly. Syrian army violations of Lebanon's sovereignty have intensified, including intermittent shelling from Syria. These incidents have caused death, injury and damage to property in Lebanon.

The crisis in Syria has posed new challenges to the security and authority of the Lebanese state. In particular, domestic tensions have significantly increased across Lebanon between groups with diverging positions vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis, leading to armed clashes that resulted in death and injury in the north of the country. In addition, Lebanon has continued to host a large number of Syrian nationals fleeing the violence in their country, as well as a few thousands Palestinian refugees who were based in Syria.

Despite internal and external pressures, President Sleiman and Prime Minister Mikati have tried to uphold a policy of dissociation from the Syrian crisis.

Nevertheless, Lebanon's stability and sovereignty have been severely challenged. In the context of recent events, we are deeply concerned by the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon, which emphasizes once again the urgent need to fully implement resolution 1559 and to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity'

Mr. President

During the period under review, I regret to report again that there has been no further tangible progress towards the implementation of the remaining provisions of resolution 1559 (2004). While we are conscious that these elements are the most difficult and sensitive to implement, and that the situation in the region has not been conducive to move forward, we reiterate that it is in the best interest of Lebanon' long-term stability to make progress towards the full implementation of the resolution. Much work lies ahead to that effect, in particular as regards the question of weapons outside government control.

Mr. President,

The delineation of the Syrian-Lebanese border, which was strongly encouraged by the Security Council in its resolution 1680 (2006), has not yet taken place. We regret the absence of progress on this matter. The complex security situation along the Syria-Lebanese border in the current circumstances further underlines the importance of delineating the border. Given that Syrian officials complain now of arms smuggling from Lebanon to Syrian opposition forces, we hope that Syria shares the urgency of a border delineation. While acknowledging the bilateral nature of border delineation, progress on this matter remains an obligation of the two countries under Security Council resolution 1680 (2006).

The allegations of arms trafficking across the Syrian-Lebanese border and the repeated violent incidents along the border are indicative of the urgent need to improve the management and control of Lebanon's land borders. This is also a necessity in order to avoid armed groups in Lebanon from expanding their weapons arsenal. Despite the commitment expressed by the Lebanese Government to adopt a comprehensive national strategy for border management, little

concrete progress has been accomplished on it so far. It remains also an obligation under Security Council resolutions that all states take the necessary measures in order to prevent the transfer of arms to groups outside the control of the Government of Lebanon.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General condemns the increasing number of incidents in which civilians have been killed, injured or put at risk on the Lebanese side of the border with the Syrian Arab Republic. We are also worried by sporadic reports of incidents involving armed elements of the Syrian opposition and the Lebanese Armed Forces in the border areas. We call upon all parties, in particular the Government of Syria, to cease all such actions, and to respect Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity in accordance with Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) and other relevant resolutions.

Mr. President,

The Government of Lebanon has reiterated to the United Nations its intention to extend the State's authority over all Lebanese territory as called for by the Taif Agreement and resolution 1559 (2004). The Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces have played a crucial role in implementing this commitment, in difficult security circumstances. However, the ability of the Lebanese State to fully exercise its authority over all of its territory remains curtailed and challenged as detailed in the report.

The recurrence of security incidents throughout Lebanon remains indeed of serious concern for the United Nations. They highlight the fragility of the domestic situation and the need for Lebanese security forces to remain vigilant to prevent the illegal use of weapons in the country and impose law and order. The United Nations has repeatedly cautioned that the widespread proliferation of weapons outside the control of the State combined with the continued existence of heavily armed militias are ominous for the security of Lebanese citizens. The Secretary-General condemns the possession and the use of illegal weapons wherever they occur in Lebanon, in particular in populated areas.

We welcome recent statements by President Sleiman deploring the proliferation of weapons in the country and its domestic use. We also commend the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces which have performed robustly in addressing several security challenges over the reporting period.

The Secretary-General is grateful to those Member States that are helping to equip and train the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces, and we urge the international community to continue this critically required support. This is essential to enable the Government of Lebanon to assume effectively its responsibilities under relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. President,

Diligent and patient work with the relevant parties has led to the implementation of several of the provisions of 1559 such as: Presidential and parliamentary elections place in a free and fair

manner; Syria's withdrawal of its troops and military assets from Lebanon in April 2005; and the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2009.

The main remaining provision of the resolution to be implemented, and which seriously challenges Lebanon's stability and political independence is the disarming and disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. It merely re-affirms a decision that all Lebanese committed themselves to in the Taif Accord in 1989. This agreement led to Lebanese militias - with the exception of Hizbullah - giving up their weapons. This agreement must be preserved and implemented by all in order to avoid the spectre of a renewed confrontation amongst the Lebanese.

Over the reporting period, there has been yet again no tangible progress towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.

The maintenance by Hizbullah of sizeable sophisticated military capabilities outside the control of the Government of Lebanon remains a matter of grave concern for Lebanon's stability. It also puts the country in violation of its obligations under resolution 1559 (2004) and constitutes a threat to regional peace and stability.

The leadership of Hizbullah acknowledges that it maintains a substantial military arsenal, claiming it serves defensive purposes against Israel. In public pronouncements, the leadership of Hizbullah stated that it has upgraded the strength of its capabilities and will seek to continue to do so. This is in blatant defiance of resolution 1559 (2004).

In recent months, there have been reports suggesting involvement by Hizbullah and other Lebanese political forces in support of the parties in the conflict in Syria. Member States have raised this matter with concern, particularly in the wake of recent reports on the killing of Hizbullah militants involved in the fighting against armed elements of the Syrian opposition. Such militant activities by Hizbullah in Syria contradict and undermine the dissociation policy of the Government of Lebanon, of which Hizbullah is a coalition member.

On 11 October, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah confirmed publicly that his party had launched an Iranian-built drone, assembled in Lebanon, to Israel for a reconnaissance mission. The Israeli Air Force shot it down on 6 October over southern Israel.

We urge Hizbullah not to engage in any militant activity inside or outside of Lebanon. As the Secretary-General said, the launch of a drone by Hizbullah to Israel is a reckless provocation that could lead to a dangerous escalation threatening Lebanon's stability.

We call yet again upon the leadership of Hizbullah to disarm and limit its activities to that of a Lebanese political party, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Agreement and Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). This requirement has become even more pressing as Parliamentary elections are due to take place in the spring of 2013. In a democratic State, it is a fundamental anomaly that a political party maintains its own militia.

As Lebanon lacks an indigenous arms manufacturing capability, we call upon the Government of Lebanon to take all the necessary measures to prohibit Hizbullah from acquiring weapons and

build para-military capacities outside the authority of the State in violation of resolution 1559 (2004) and in so far as resolution 1747 (2007) is concerned. As Hizbullah maintains close ties with a number of regional states, in particular with Iran, we call upon these States to encourage the transformation of the armed group into a solely political party and its disarmament.

Mr. President,

It is the Secretary-General's belief that the best way to address the disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon is through a Lebanese-led cross-party political process. However, this process cannot make enough headway until external actors cease their military support to Hizbullah, which in turn must be open to discussing in good faith the issue of its arsenal. We congratulate President Sleiman for reconvening the National Dialogue. We also commend Lebanese leaders from across the spectrum for their commitment to the Baabda Declaration of 11 June 2012. Given their divergent views on the Syrian crisis, it is vital that Lebanese leaders have committed not to permit the use of Lebanon as a buffer zone, base or channel for the passage of arms and armed personnel to Syria. This is an important achievement that Members of the Security Council and other Member States must help the Government of Lebanon to sustain.

At the last session of the National Dialogue on 20 September, President Sleiman presented his vision of a national defence strategy for the country. Lebanese leaders have now a basis on which to start serious discussions on a crucial matter for Lebanon's domestic peace. It is important for this process to gain further traction without further procrastination. We urge all political leaders to transcend sectarian and individual interests and genuinely promote the future and the interests of the State. Irrespective of the particular composition of the government, the authority of the Lebanese State can only be consolidated through progress on the issue of arms beyond its control. The end result of such a process must be that there are no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the Government of Lebanon consistent with the Taif Agreement and Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). The disbanding of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias is a necessary element to complete the consolidation of Lebanon as a sovereign and democratic State. We therefore call upon President Sleiman to ensure that the National Dialogue takes operational decisions in this regard without delay.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General deplores Israel's continued violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The continued occupation by the Israel Defense Forces of the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line stands in violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). We call 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

The Israel Defense Forces has continued its intrusions into Lebanese airspace, mainly by unmanned aerial vehicles, but also fighter jets. These overflights are violations of Lebanese sovereignty and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). We call upon Israel to and cease its overflights of Lebanese airspace that undermine the credibility of Lebanese security services, and generate anxiety among the civilian population. They also greatly increase the risk of unintended consequences in a region that is already seething with tension.

Mr. President,

With regard to the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon, the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has reiterated its firm position that all Palestinians in Lebanon must respect the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon and adhere to Lebanese law and security requirements.

We encourage the Government of Lebanon to finally implement decisions taken in the past by the National Dialogue, such as the dismantling of Palestinian military bases maintained by the PFLP-GC and Fatah al-Intifada outside the refugee camps. These bases, most of which straddle the border between Lebanon and Syria, challenge the country's ability to manage its land borders. Mindful that these two militias maintain close regional ties, we expect the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to act constructively in this process.

Mr. President,

The multiple challenges faced by Lebanon at present, largely as a result of the Syrian crisis, are real. We commend President Sleiman and Prime Minister Mikati for working with all parties to try to preserve Lebanon's security and stability in difficult circumstances; and for their efforts to attempt to disassociate Lebanon from events in Syria. However, recent events have tested this policy in ways that make it all the more important to strengthen consensus and genuine commitment behind it. This is particularly so in light of the increasing number of reports of activities in Syria by Hizbullah, a member of the governing coalition, which could further jeopardize the policy and ultimately Lebanon's stability

It is imperative not to let Lebanon be drawn into regional turmoil. Lebanon must not be used anymore as a battleground for actors seeking to advance their own interests at the country's expense or to destabilize the region. We believe that the country can come through this critical period safely if its leaders, both inside and outside the governing coalition, show a measure of unity and responsibility to move forward peacefully through the political process. This will also require that the international community give priority to protecting Lebanon from harm at this difficult time.

Mr President,

I am mindful that the Secretary-General and I have given you today a "not very rosy" description of the situation in Lebanon. But these are the facts. Nevertheless, I think that this session of the Security Council today is important in itself to show to the Lebanese people that we remain vigilant about the situation in their country, and to re-affirm our commitment to their sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity.

The Secretary-General and I remain firmly committed to the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004), which remain the best way to ensure Lebanon's long-term prosperity and stability as a democratic state. We therefore call on all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006).