



Statement

by

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Permanent Representative of **Lebanon**

to the United Nations

at the **virtual** briefing

on the

**"Humanitarian Situation in Lebanon"**

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*Check against delivery*

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Dear President of the General Assembly Mr. Tijjani-Muhammad Bande, Secretary-General António Guterres, USG Mr. Mark Lowcock, Executive Director of WFP Mr. Beasley, dear Foreign Ministers, friends.

I would like to thank you on behalf of every Lebanese that lost a loved one, or lost a home for holding this meeting only one day after the conference hosted by the French president in support of my country and its people.

I am speaking to you (about) Beirut, a city in mourning today after the blast brought tears and destruction to every home in our country. The Beirut explosion was like 15 years of war in 15 seconds. These were our darkest 15 seconds. We have never seen this amount of human loss, physical damage, and shattered lives in such a short time.

Many speakers rightly said this explosion shocked the world. We in Lebanon are still living under this shock. My minister and colleagues have no offices anymore; the Foreign Ministry is destroyed. We work through cell phones. But, we are so touched and humbled by the amount of support and good will that the world has shown towards Lebanon.

To the entire world that is gathered today here at the United Nations, I want to bring you a greeting from the Lebanese people: Thank you. We are eternally grateful to you for standing with us at this difficult moment.

The human and physical toll is staggering for one explosion: 157 people dead, over 5000 injured, scores still missing, thousands of buildings were either destroyed or damaged, leading to 300,000 losing their homes and needing shelter. We have thousands of children without homes now. All of this came during a severe financial crisis that saw people lose their life -savings and security, and a 70% devaluation of the Lebanese pound.

The pandemic added to the misery of people and compounded their sense of loss and insecurity, their challenge was a matter of life of economic hardship, or death by a cruel virus. Then came the explosion. It shattered Beirut and with it what was left of the social and financial security. People are desperate now, angry and afraid. They are demanding and deserve justice, and rightly so. Their capital Beirut is destroyed yet again.

The port is in the heart of Beirut. The areas that were destroyed are the heart of the city, the business district of Beirut, the historic district, the tourist area, the shopping area, the nightlife and the magnet for young people. The heart of Beirut was obliterated. Tourism is a main source of our income, 90% of the hotels in the area are damaged. We do not have a financial assessment of the damage yet but it is in the billions of dollars for a country facing a financial crisis and is already heavily indebted. It is also the host for a massive influx of refugees and displaced persons.

I want to thank the Secretary-General Mr. Guterres for the United Nation's rapid response in Beirut. UN agencies are with us on the ground helping in lifting the burden and lifting people up. I want to thank all our Arab brothers who showed us that families stick together and lift each other up. I want to thank France and recall General De Gaulle's words and say that the Lebanese hearts this week were truly beating to the rhythm of France' heart as we saw how President Macron and the French people came to the rescue of Lebanon.

I want to also thank our neighbors and our friends from around the world, which stepped in from the first moment and started sending assistance. The planes landed with medical assistance before we even asked. I wish I had the time to mention all of you by name. I thank every one of you. You showed that solidarity and multilateralism are still our world's best chance at surviving together when we are threatened individually. Lebanon will never forget.

The Lebanese are resilient. Beirut, according to legend, was destroyed 7 times and it was rebuilt and rose from the ashes like a phoenix. We will rebuild and rise again but we cannot do it alone. The catastrophe is huge and the needs are too big to be handled by a country that is facing many daunting challenges at the same time. It is too early to assess the cost of the damage but since the whole city is affected and the disaster far exceeds Lebanon's capacity to cope with it alone, I will briefly discuss our priorities and needs.

Humanitarian needs:

The first priority is medical assistance in all its forms. A number of hospitals were destroyed and the remaining ones are overwhelmed. Surgical and medical equipment and supplies are badly needed, field hospitals, mobile medical units, medical professionals, and medication for injuries and acute and chronic conditions.

Food and nutrition assistance: The blast destroyed the wheat silos that contain most of Beirut's grain reserves and all warehouses with imported goods. There is a threat of a food security problem. To offset this threat we need foodstuffs such as wheat, flour, and canned foods of all kind. There is a need for urgent relief assistance to the hardest hit families, temporary shelters, hygiene kits, and educational material.

Construction material:

The blast destroyed large sections of Beirut port and its infrastructure. It caused extensive damage to the residential areas in the vicinity of the port, downtown Beirut, many historic neighborhoods, and government buildings were damaged, the Prime Minister's office, the Grand Serail, the Finance, Telecom, and the foreign ministries were damaged some extensively.

The Electricity Company of Lebanon was heavily damaged. According to the preliminary assessment done for the prime minister's office 39,000, to 40,000 buildings were affected and 200,000 housing units. There is a dire need to respond to the massive destruction of the infrastructure and housing buildings by providing all kinds of building material especially glass, wood, iron, electrical equipment, steel, and any building material.

Rebuilding Beirut Port:

Beirut Port suffered extensive damage and rebuilding it is a top priority for the economy and the country to recover quickly. There is a need for reconstruction equipment to make it operational as soon as possible. Any assistance in material, technical assistance or know how is highly appreciated.

Mr. Secretary-General, Friends,

I would like to ask you to remain with us for the whole journey and not only to help with the emergency stage of the catastrophe. I appeal to you to be with us in the second and most important stage, the rebuilding and rehabilitation stage. This is the difficult one because our tragedy happened at a time when this pandemic is affecting us and impacting the world economy. We are not asking for financial assistance, we want your support to rebuild together, and recover together.

We will do it, the Lebanese people have the resilience, the courage and the creativity to rebuild but they cannot do it alone. We need your support; we need you to be with us shoulder to shoulder as you are with us now to stand back on our feet.

Lebanon, one of the countries that met in San Francisco 75 years ago and founded the United Nations, promises you that it will rise again, will rebuild better, will continue to be a message of co-existence and tolerance, and will continue to uphold the United Nations' principles and values enshrined in its charter. But we have to do it together.

I thank you.