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**H.E. Mr. Gebran BASSIL**  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants**  
**Speech delivered on 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Independence**  
**Bustros Palace, 24 November 2015**

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Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

How cherished it is to enjoy independence, we who fought to achieve it in times of empire, mandate and custodianship.

How cherished it is to achieve independence, we who have been entrusted with the message of humanity, from Lebanon to the entire world.

How cherished it is to preserve our independence, we who are in love with Lebanon, its land, entity and pact.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the establishment of the State of Greater Lebanon in 1920, through independence in 1943 to this day, the contemporary history of Lebanon witnessed fateful crises. Nevertheless, the unprecedented challenges we are facing today as we celebrate the seventy-second anniversary of our independence place us in an equation that threatens international peace and security

Today, we commemorate an independence replete with the blood of innocent souls who have fallen victim to a globalized terrorism that does not distinguish between the southern suburb of Beirut and the northern suburb of Paris. We will only celebrate independence when terrorism is torn out by the ideological roots and its expansion is prevented.

We recall Independence because the takfiri terrorism of Daech was unable to defeat us, just like the state terrorism of the racist Israel was unable to vanquish us. We resisted both but we will only celebrate independence when we thoroughly beat these two brands of terrorism.

Today, we recall independence in a country that has consented, by virtue of humanity, to host two million displaced and refugees, but we will only celebrate independence when our people is left deeply-rooted in its land and its authentic identity prevented from being dissolved and drowned in a sea of massive displacement.

We will celebrate our independence when freedom becomes the pillar of our political system, our economic life, and our way of life and traditions. We will celebrate our independence when we choose resorting to the people as the foundation of the republic and when we resent foreign interventions and their temporary arrangements that exacerbate rather than resolve problems.

We will celebrate independence when our minds and thoughts are liberated of all external or internal restrictions that chain our national interest.

We will celebrate independence when our political, economic and financial decisions are freed. By then, we will allow ourselves, without others' permission, to extract our oil and gas resources in the sea and land of Lebanon, away from corruption.

We will allow ourselves to put to good use our water resources, so that our people and neighbors can benefit from them.

We will allow ourselves to mutually benefit from the enriching presence of our people, all over the world, so all Lebanese can retrieve their citizenship and so we can retrieve with them our collective identity.

To serve this purpose, we will allow the voice of our people to be freed from the shackles of arranged elections, so as to enjoy a modern electoral law, based on equal representation, of all Lebanese and granting them a complete citizenship.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In spite of dissociating Lebanon from the crises in the region, particularly in Syria, we cannot be immune to their consequences and oblivious to their negative repercussions, particularly the expansion of terrorism and the worsening of the displacement tragedy. In this sense, Lebanon is taking part in the international efforts aimed at reaching a peaceful solution in Syria that preserves its unity and pluralism.

We were the first to call for a unified international alliance to confront globalized terrorism. We joined the coalition against Daech, and demanded not to exclude anyone. Since individual efforts were not successful in extracting this cancer, we called for a coalition of the two coalitions. Will we have to wait for more suburbs and innocent lives to be targeted and for dirty bombs to be produced in order to unite internationally, in word and action, to target all terrorists?

However, the military strikes, alone, will not be able to eradicate the terrorist germs that feed on some people's paunches, and ravage the minds of some others. It is imperative to dismantle the terrorist financing networks that are protected by groups and countries driven by their own interests. It is essential as well to fight the obsolete takfiri ideology with the rhetoric of logic and enlightenment. It is also necessary to follow up the judicial efforts to prosecute Daech and its epigones for their war crimes and crimes against humanity. On this occasion, we would like to pay tribute to the Lebanese armed forces, who face on a daily basis terrorist organizations that are holding a group of the finest members of our troops in the Aarsal hills.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We were the first as well to warn of the danger of the massive displacement from Syria, driven by our duty to protect our society and our social fabric, and in anticipation of a demographic transformation that will irreversibly change the face of the region, and of a rise of racist movements as a western reaction that will only generate more fanaticism, violence and terrorism.

We warned of the danger of allowing the unallowable to happen, either by way of demographically drowning Lebanon or by emptying the region from its authentic social components, not to mention the risk posed by the infiltration of terrorists in the convoys of the displaced, the migrants and the refugees. We warned that displacement is a snowball that will keep on growing in size until it finds



its way to the warmth of other countries, where it will melt away, sweeping communities and causing nations to forget the most basic humanitarian rules.

We have always honored our humanitarian obligations. Still, we have been subjected to international pressure, to maintain our open border policy, when we wanted to take things in hand.

The control we exert along our borders is questioned whereas delegations and foreign embassies scrutinize for months on end each file before resettlement. The support granted to the displaced is being channeled through international bodies whereas one fifth of the government's expenditure goes to the displaced -without revenues or direct aid.

Definitions of displacement and migration, that our constitution does not accept, are being imposed on us, whereas one third of Lebanon's residents is made up of displaced, half of the newborns on our territory are foreigners, and the number of foreign students in our schools and universities is double the number of Lebanese!

The support we are receiving, though commendable, does not live up to the responsibility of the international community in sharing the burden and the numbers, and in providing direct support to the Lebanese government according to a comprehensive development approach.

However, Lebanon has succeeded in including the safe return of displaced Syrians to their country as an item in the international road map in Vienna, based on our conviction that the return of the displaced is conducive to the political solution track, and can precede the achievement of a final solution determined by the Syrians alone.

### **Lebanon's international achievements**

We have succeeded, in confronting the Israeli enmity, in passing a United Nations General Assembly resolution that imposes on Israel to pay Lebanon 854 million USD in compensation for polluting the Lebanese shore in 2006.

We have succeeded in joining the Economic and Social Council, in the context of the economic diplomacy that we see as a pillar of our international policy. We have also succeeded in winning a seat on the Executive Council of the UNESCO, as a result of pursuing an active cultural diplomacy that carries the message of openness and humanity and constitutes a model of parity in diversity.

We will continue our efforts to preserve diversity in the Middle East and to protect the rights of groups oppressed on ethnic or sectarian basis. We will seek to obtain a resolution on this matter within the Human Rights Council in Geneva

### **Lebanon's internal achievements**

We have succeeded when the Lebanese parliament passed the restoration of Lebanese citizenship law, which is a big step, albeit late, in restoring the rights to their Lebanese owners. We struggled until descendants of Lebanese origin were able to exercise their Libaninity, and to feel that their homeland has for them more than seasonal slogans. It has concrete deeds.

The Lebanese diaspora is Lebanon's hidden source of power that nurtures it and provides it with the strength to continue and to shine in the world. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants is organizing, on the 5th, 6th and 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2016, for the third consecutive year, the Lebanese

Diaspora Energy conference in its new version, which will be an additional opportunity to meet and interact among the Lebanese, residents and expatriates, and among the expatriates themselves, to provide a renewed opportunity for the Lebanese in the world to enter emerging economies and to complete several projects already on track (in various fields: investment, language, culture, communication and tourism).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Lebanon has proven its resilience and its capacity to resist over the past years. This ministry has continued to ensure the proper functioning of the diplomatic service. It has successfully adopted a national unifying discourse that rises above the internal differences and frictions, giving priority to the Lebanese interests over factional and sectarian ones. It has sought to fulfil its duties and obligations related to your missions. Still, we aim to achieve more.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We aspire to a strong Lebanon, with legitimate institutions expressive of the will of our people, and based on the principles of partnership and real parity that preserve the values of this country, its uniqueness and its message among nations.

We aspire to a strong Lebanon that stands as a fortified bastion warding off the existential threats in the region and that serves as a catalyst that helps achieve solutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this occasion, I would like to praise the constant cohesion of the Lebanese people who live in Lebanon, as I would like to congratulate the ones living abroad for the adoption of the restoration of the citizenship law. I promise to continue exercising our independence through an independent foreign policy, and to always strive for Lebanon to play its role as a laboratory for coexistence and a model of parity in governance, so that it carries its humanistic mission driven by the will of its people and inspired by its pact.

Lebanon was born to stay.

Long live Lebanon, a free sovereign and independent country.