



Address

by

H.E. General Michel Aoun

President of the Republic of Lebanon

at the

Seventy-sixth session of the

United Nations General Assembly

New York, September 24, 2021

Check against delivery

*Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 531, New York, NY 10017*

Your Excellency, Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the General Assembly,
Your Excellency, Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate your Excellency on your election to preside over the seventy-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly, wishing you success in carrying out your duties, in light of the continuous global endeavors to recover from the repercussions of Covid-19. I would have preferred to congratulate you in person rather than through video-conference, which was imposed by the global health situation, for the second year in a row.

I wish to thank His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir for running well the affairs of last year's General Assembly, and to congratulate His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres on his reelection for a second term at the head of the international organization, thanking him on his efforts for Lebanon and his contribution to the organization of three conferences in support of the Lebanese people in the aftermath of the Beirut Port blast tragedy.

Our thanks also go to the Heads of States who participated in these conferences, to governmental and non-governmental organizations, and to all those who have contributed to this support. I wish to thank France in particular, whose President rushed to Lebanon personally to support it in its ordeal, and the friendly and brotherly States that contribute to promoting our armed forces which are fighting terrorism and cooperating with the Peacekeeping forces to preserve calm and stability on our Southern borders and to implement Resolution 1701.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty years ago, a few miles from the headquarters, the largest terrorist operation struck the heart of New York, causing thousands of victims and leaving deep marks in the world's conscience. It also had tremendous repercussions at a global scale, and entailed a war on terrorism that succeeded sometimes and failed sometimes.

In all cases, many peoples, especially in our region, have paid dearly for that war, in terms of death, destruction and displacement, and they are now pulling themselves together and trying to rise as New York had risen, because the will of life is more powerful than any terrorism, and it undoubtedly converges with the theme of the present session "*Building Resilience Through Hope*".

Esteemed audience,

As the Lebanese Government has been formed according to the constitutional mechanism after a political crisis that lasted more than a year, Lebanon has embarked on a new phase that would hopefully mark a promising step on the path of recovery. There is no doubt that major internal and international challenges await the new government to earn the confidence of both the people and the international community after having obtained that of the Lebanese Parliament.

Over the past two years, Lebanon has known its hardest times, whereas successive crises - some inherited and ramified and some urgent - exploded simultaneously, affecting all sectors.

Indeed, the financial and economic policies adopted for decades and built upon the profit-based pattern, in addition to corruption and waste that result from bad management and absence of accountability, pushed Lebanon into an unprecedented financial and monetary crisis which led to economic stagnation, a stifling livelihood crisis, and growing in unemployment, migration and poverty rates.

The Government has committed to carry out the pressing and required financial and economic reforms, to fight corruption and lay down a financial recovery plan in the context of continuing negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, accompanied by a plan to generalize the social safety net, a plan to reform and – where needed - restructure the banking system, and to carry on with the implementation of the electricity sector plan.

The kick-off was with the entry of the financial forensic audit of Lebanon's Central Bank's accounts into force after completing the necessary procedures, and this audit shall be applied to all public accounts; this very audit that I have committed before the people of Lebanon and the international community to execute in line with the principles of transparency and accountability.

And as we rely on the international community to finance vital projects in the public and private sectors to revitalize the economic cycle and create job opportunities, we also rely on it to help us recover the smuggled funds stemming from corruption crimes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The wars of the region around us have contributed to the exacerbation of our crises, especially the Syrian war which have weighed heavily on us, notably through the imposed siege that has deprived Lebanon of its vital extension, or the infiltration of terrorism into our territories, or the large numbers of Syrian displaced who streamed into Lebanon, exceeding today 1.5 million.

I have been vocal, at all fora and specifically that of the United Nations, in exposing the catastrophic outcomes of displacement on all economic, social, health and security aspects, and I appealed to the international community to help us secure the safe return of the displaced; but unfortunately, no one responded to our appeals, and assistance continued to be given to the Syrians in their place of residence in Lebanon rather than extending it to them in their country, and this encouraged them to stay where they are.

Today, as Lebanon is resisting to survive and go on, I repeat the plea: yes, the international community must help Lebanon shoulder the exhausting burden entailed by the displacement crisis; yet, it must first work for the safe return of the displaced to their country. Lebanon, which has laid a comprehensive plan for this return, affirms its position rejecting any form of integration of the displaced, as it reiterates its position rejecting any form of settlement of Palestinian refugees, based on the necessity to find a solution to the Palestinian issue in accordance with relevant international resolutions, specifically those guaranteeing the right of return.

On the other hand, the persistent Israeli threats remain the main concern of the Lebanese State, the last aspect of which was Israel's attempt to explore for oil and gas in the disputed area on the maritime borders. Lebanon condemns any attempt to transgress the boundaries of the Exclusive Economic Zone within which Lebanon holds on to its right to oil and gas resources, especially that exploration procurement has begun months ago, then was halted due to strains whose source is no longer a secret to anyone.

Lebanon demands the resumption of indirect negotiations for the demarcation of the Southern maritime borders according to international laws. It affirms that it shall not back off and shall not accept any compromise. The role of the international community is to stand by it.

Esteemed audience,

The Covid-19 pandemic has hit the world with its catastrophic consequences on health, economy, education and other sectors. In Lebanon, its repercussions were exponentially greater because they added up to its crises and they still do. Although the concerned authorities and health organs have dealt with this emergency situation with a professional and proactive approach that kept the infection figures within acceptable ranges, the repercussions have been very hard on an already shaky economy and on the health sector, in light of the growing shortage of drugs, medical supplies and fuel, in addition to the human drain of doctors and nurses due to migration for economic reasons.

As for the vaccination, Lebanon shall have the credit of being among the pioneering countries in this respect, as the rate of vaccination to date has reached 30%, and we are striving to surpass the 40% goal by the end of the year.

Amid these crises, the catastrophic Beirut Port blast came to aggravate the suffering. Today, more than a year later, our capital continues to be quiet and dark, as it remains a disaster-stricken city. We want the heart of our country to beat again, and we also want the Port of Beirut to return to being a pole of attraction.

We are grateful for all the humanitarian assistance that has been sent to our people. Today, the need remains pressing for reconstruction and development supplies and we welcome any international endeavor to rehabilitate and develop the port, till it is re-operated fully as per the applicable laws.

The international solidarity with our capital and our people is commendable. It has contributed indeed to healing some wounds, but the assistance that Beirut wants as well lies in what may be required by the probe in order to disclose the truth to serve justice. The comfort of the victims' parents and the healing of the wounded's pain can only be complete by serving justice.

The Lebanese justice is investigating the causes and circumstances of the explosion and the administrative liabilities; it has many defendants and arrested. The investigation, which remains confidential, still needs to unveil where the explosive materials came from, why they entered our port, which is really behind them, and if the satellites captured anything at the moment of the blast. We therefore repeat our request to the States, which possess information and data that help the investigation to share them as needed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The crises of the past two years in Lebanon and the world have delayed the procedures related to the creation of the "Academy for Human Encounters and Dialogue" which I had launched from the rostrum of the United Nations in 2017, and which earned the support of the General Assembly in 2019 as per Resolution 73/344. However, the course of events and the raging conflicts in the surroundings reaffirm the importance of this initiative and what is sought from it in terms of human and civilizational communication.

I'm pleased that a large piece of land very close to Beirut has been allocated to host the Academy, and the necessary studies have been prepared to initiate construction works. I call on all friendly and brotherly States to join those, which have already expressed their desire to sign the Academy establishment convention.

Esteemed audience,

The theme that you have picked for this session, "*Building Resilience Through Hope*", is not a mere literary title for the Lebanese people. It is rather a life experienced on a daily basis, for resilience is our life's journey, our hope has never faded nor has its light ever dimmed. And despite all the hardships, crises and tragedies that besiege us, our people are struggling for a better tomorrow.

As Lebanon tries tenaciously to work its way towards recovery, it relies on international solidarity to achieve its goals.

Thank you.