



**Statement of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Lebanon
General Joseph Aoun**

**During the general debate of the 80th session of the United Nations of the
General Assembly**

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Madam President,

Mr. Secretary General,

fellow colleagues, heads of states and of delegations,

I stand before you today talking about peace, development and Human Rights, while some of my fellow citizens face death on daily basis, parts of my country remain under occupation and while my homeland, and my people live in persistent uncertainty.

This situation takes me back in time to some 77 years ago, to the drafting committee of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Amid a heated debate, the late great Eleanor Roosevelt stepped in, in support of one member's opinion so "that he isn't left alone" she said to the audience.

The dissenting member respectfully responded, "Honorable lady, my concern is not siding with the majority or the minority but aligning with the truth."

The author of these words was no other than Charles Malik, the Lebanese philosopher who contributed along other big minds of this world in giving humanity this eternal Declaration. He also had the honor of presiding over this distinguished assembly from 1958 to 1959 representing my country Lebanon.

Madam President,

Mr. Secretary General,

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Today, I recall this incident, first to express my profound sense of pride and my heightened sense of responsibility, as I address you for the first time in my capacity as President of Lebanon, on the 80th anniversary of this esteemed organization.

Second, because our session focuses on examining the inherent relation between three human virtues: peace, development and human rights.

From Lebanon's journey, as well as from lessons learned both regionally and internationally, we know that there can be no development without peace, no growth within chaos and no prosperity amid conflicts and wars. Peace is the essential foundation for development. Moreover, from these same experiences, we learn that just as there is no development without peace, there can be no peace without justice, and justice itself is impossible without human rights, above all, the fundamental right to live in dignity. Without dignity, peace becomes an illusion, a barren oppressive ground breeding poverty, violence, and ongoing bloodshed.

Since the founding of this honorable Assembly, which Lebanon was among the first signatories in 1945, its declaration stipulated the necessity "to save future generations from the woes of war" and "to live together in peace and harmony and use the international tool at our disposal to promote economic and social wellbeing for all peoples".

These virtuous principles remained for 80 years on the charts of our organization, while the blood of our people was spilled in our daily reality.

The reasons for this might be numerous. One can attribute them to human nature, or to the dynamics of international relations between countries, conflicts of interest, hegemony and the fierce race for absolute dominance in all fields.

But something else has stirred this tragedy, at least in the last 30 years and more specifically since we have started from this very tribune talking about a new world order. This root cause centers on the challenge of plurality within societies, manifesting as a crisis of identities and ethnicities, especially in the era of globalization. On one hand, people express a genuine need for cooperation and integration. On the other, this very impulse generates a fear that such openness might undermine one's national identity. Tragically, this duality has driven humanity back toward conflict.

Let us acknowledge here that religion is a primary factor in defining the identities of human groups. In the name of religion thousands have died, in its name many borders between countries have ignited into conflict and in its name still many countries have collapsed from within. Furthermore, religion continues to shape the world in profound ways, while Islamophobia and the fear of difference grow in the West. The East is still haunted by the memory of colonization and the remnants of religious wars. Despite remarkable scientific advances, the world finds itself trapped in a bygone era.

Madam President,

Mr. Secretary General,

Colleagues,

At the heart of this dilemma, is Lebanon's unique role and significance on the world stage.

Amidst the international clash of identities, Lebanon stands out as a nation where Christians and Muslims coexist under a Constitution that guarantees equitable representation to both communities, supported for by a framework of full citizenship for all individuals. This model, while subject to critique, offers a unique evolving approach. As the late Pope John Paul II observed, "Lebanon is more than a country, it is a message of freedom and plurality" and I reiterate this saying myself; Lebanon is a message of freedom and plurality to both East and West".

In a region where people kill and get killed over their religious belief, or even for displaying a symbol of faith, Lebanon stands out as a unique and irreplaceable model. In a weary world torn between those who want to impose religious attire and others intent on banning it, Lebanon offers an uplifting model essential to its region and to the world at large.

A model which made it possible for me, an Arab Lebanese to serve as the only Christian head of state from East Asia to the coasts of Europe.

My country, Lebanon, land of both human secularity and profound faith, existing without any coercive contract, ban or imposition of any kind, is indeed a model to be safeguarded by all those who believe in a better future for mankind. This prompts

two essential questions: why should the international community be concerned with preserving Lebanon, and how can this be achieved?

Indeed, there is a fundamental human duty in preserving Lebanon's, unique model of coexistence since, nowhere else can this experience be replicated.

If Christians in Lebanon were to disappear, the delicate balance would collapse and with-it justice. Similarly, any harm to the Muslim community in Lebanon would also destabilize the equation and undermine justice as well.

The fall of Lebanon, precipitated by the loss of any of its integral components, would foster the rise of extremism, violence, and bloodshed both in our region and in the world.

It is clear to me today that many of the underlying causes of the war on Lebanon, as well as the deeper, more insidious motivations behind it, have been aimed at dismantling Lebanon's unique model. These actions serve to justify an Orient fractured by conflicting identities and perpetual ethnic rivalries, destined to remain in a state of ongoing conflict.

While certain entities may benefit from this situation, it is ultimately in the interest of the world and of humanity to strive for international peace.

Hence, the success of the Lebanese experience will set a benchmark for any country. This model is today a vibrant, steadfast and energetic country determined to live resolutely refusing to succumb to adversity.

What it takes to save it, is simply a clear and firm stand, in words and in actions aimed at liberating all the Lebanese territory and securing the exclusive sovereignty of the Lebanese state, enforced solely by its legitimate and legal armed forces over its land.

This is the unanimous will of the Lebanese people since the declaration of November 27, 2024, which was adopted with the support of the United States and France and this very organization, as a mechanism to enforce the UN Security Council decision 1701.

I reaffirmed this commitment in my inaugural address following my election as president in January 2024, and it was also approved by the government in its ministerial statement of February 2024. Throughout our negotiations with President

Trump's envoy, Mr. Tom Barrack, we worked on drafting a paper to guarantee full stability on our land, to which we are still bound and still await commitment to it by the concerned parties on our borders as well.

Lebanon seeks only what is just and necessary for its preservation. Allow me to highlight, with a sense of national pride, the exceptional character of our country and its people. The Lebanese diaspora, whose members visit home each year in an amount equivalent to a third of the country's residents, underlines the unwavering connection between the Lebanese people and their homeland. This enduring bond serves as a testament that the Lebanese will never abandon their country.

There is hardly a major project in our region that does not bear the signature of a Lebanese, nor a cultural or artistic event that lacks a Lebanese imprint. In fact, it is almost certain that Lebanese contributions can be found in every significant endeavor.

Moreover, among the member states of this distinguished assembly, one could scarcely find a nation that does not have within its borders a member of the Lebanese diaspora who is engaged, productive, and creative. These individuals integrate harmoniously with their host societies, respecting their laws and customs, while remaining loyal to both their adopted countries and their homeland. The Lebanese presence around the world stands as an enduring symbol of creativity, loyalty, and constructive engagement.

We, ladies and gentlemen, are a country capable of embracing modernization, and we have started already implementing a gradual program of financial and economic recovery. Together with an independent financial audit, a fair restructuring of the banking sector and the modernization of the administration. We have also taken on the fight against corruption and organized crime, to rebuild the trust of the Lebanese people in their state and the world's confidence in Lebanon.

Simultaneously we have launched legislative and institutional reforms consecrating the independence of the regulatory bodies of the state's productive sectors and enhanced the independence of the judiciary and aligned international standards in the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing.

Our government has also recently joined the United Nation's Convention on Biological Diversity complying with a lifelong history of commitment to the principles of international legitimacy.

We are also set on advancing public freedom, fighting against hate speech and empowering men and women in decision making.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our country is dedicated to investing in quality education and is expanding this investment to encompass knowledge economy. Lebanon, strong with an invaluable human capital stands as an essential crossroads for global trade corridors.

While advancing on all these fronts, our country simultaneously shoulders numerous burdens. Most pressing among them are the persistent instabilities along our southern border. In response, we call for the immediate cessation of Israeli aggression, the full withdrawal of its occupying forces from all Lebanese territory, and the release of our hostages, that we shall not forget nor leave behind, and insist on the comprehensive implementation of United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1701.

This will be achieved with the help of the mandate given to United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) working in coordination with the Lebanese Army, over a transitional period, to impose peace and stability. In this context, allow me to extend my gratitude to the members of the Security Council who adopted the decision to renew the UNIFIL's mandate, to help us achieve lasting peace and stability.

However, the deep underlying causes of our crisis extend beyond our immediate borders. This is why our moral, human and political obligation is to put an immediate end to the devastation taking place in Gaza. We also urge the revival of a new political track, aimed at finding a just and permanent solution to the Palestinian issue, based on the decisions of the international community and the principle of a two-state solution, ensuring the right of both states to a secure and dignified

existence, as voted by your General Assembly with a majority of 142 states out of 164 states, in the New York Declaration.

The second major burden Lebanon is carrying now is the unprecedented displacement situation taking place on its soil, which measured by capita stands as the largest in history. Lebanon looks to the United Nations and its specialized agencies as well as to the Syrian authorities to address this critical issue. Through direct negotiations and with the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we aim to reach comprehensive understandings and agreements across different aspects of our bilateral relations. The goal being the dignified and safe return of the displaced Syrian citizens, as well as the restoration of the special relations between Lebanon and Syria in good neighborliness and close cooperation in various fields, overcoming the misunderstandings of the past.

The third burden crippling us today is the reconstruction of Lebanon following the Israeli aggression on our soil, especially with respect to the infrastructure necessary for the return of the Lebanese authority to the Lebanese border towns and to the rebuilding of homes and villages bulldozed and demolished by the aggression, for there will be no stability if it is not rebuilt and its beauty restored.

Furthermore, there is the issue of providing the necessary means to our legal armed forces so that they may take on task in defending and safekeeping our national integrity. We remain hopeful about the public initiatives to organize international conferences dedicated to that purpose.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Lebanon does not seek special privileges or favors. Instead, it calls upon the international community to act with responsibility, fairness, and equality, thereby enabling Lebanon to reclaim its role as a land of freedom and plurality. This very spirit underpinned the distinguished Assembly's decision, on August 16, 2019 to grant Lebanon's request to establish the Human Academy for Dialogue and Convergence within its borders, a decision that was, for a time, overshadowed by the many crises Lebanon has faced in recent years.

Today, Lebanon is intent on reviving this vital initiative. Our intention is both to reassure ourselves and to send a message to the world: Lebanon is returning to its

rightful place, both within the international community and among the nations gathered at the United Nations, a true platform for human values and the advancement of humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

in closing, I wish to reiterate the opening theme of my message. While I stand here advocating for peace my countrymen are being killed; the conflict is still very fierce between Lebanon being a land of life and joy and a platform that spreads both values to its region and the world, and Lebanon being a place of sorrow and wars spreading both woes to the region and the world.

We in Lebanon have opted for the first choice and shall abide by it.

I call upon you all, for the sake of peace in our region, and for the good of humanity, to stand with us. Do not forsake Lebanon.