



Embassy of Lebanon
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**Hearing at the State, Foreign Operations
and Related Programs Subcommittee on
Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon**

**Statement of the Ambassador of Lebanon
to the United States of America
Antoine Chedid**

**Senate Dirksen Building
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Thank you Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Graham and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity you afforded me to come in front of you to give you an update on the tragic situation in Lebanon caused by the huge number of Syrian refugees who entered my country and its impact and repercussion on every level of the Lebanese society and State.

First, I would like to briefly inform you on the good relations between the United States and Lebanon. Based on a great degree of shared values and on a long history of cooperation and friendship, the relationship between the United States and Lebanon has been close and warm. The Americans of Lebanese descent have contributed immensely in strengthening these ties by actively participating in all aspects of the American life promoting the mutual interests of our two

great nations. The almost continuous presence in successive Congresses of number of US Senators and Congressmen of Lebanese descent on both sides of the isles is a clear example of this interaction. As a matter of fact, the American Lebanese caucus in this Congress has been instrumental in this regard.

Lebanon and its brave army who achieved marvelous heroism in facing terrorism share your same and civic values based on fighting this terrorism, rejecting fanaticism and sectarianism and protecting democracy, human rights, freedom of expression and public liberties. I would like to express the appreciation of the President and the Government of Lebanon for the valuable United States' assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces as well for your economic assistance through US AID.

It is indeed an honor to share the stage this morning with remarkable and knowledgeable officials like my colleague, the Jordanian Ambassador, Ms. Alia Bouran and Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, Anne Richard and the representatives of UNHCR who are exerting tireless efforts to assist Lebanon in such difficult circumstances, Mr. Andrew Harper and Mr. Ewen MacLeod.

My talk this morning **is a very painful cry on behalf of Lebanon and the Lebanese people** to be heard in this International Capital of Washington specifically by the American Congress and by your esteemed Committee. **It is indeed a cry of pain.**

Day by day, the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon increases. The latest figures demonstrate that there are now 833,500 Syrians in Lebanon registered or awaiting registration with UNHCR. It is worth noting that one morning, the UNHCR had 763,000 refugees only, that same afternoon of that same day, the number had changed to 769,000 as it increased by 6,000 during one single day. This massive increase does not relate the whole story, if we add the illegal refugees and those who are not registered, the number is 1.3 million which is around 30% of the Lebanese population, equivalent to having 25 million refugees enter Germany in one year or 93.5 million refugees entering the US in the same period. They have increased Lebanon's population by a third.

The impact on the country so far is deep and threatens to unravel the country economically, politically, and socially. The World Bank's impact assessment estimates the total economic loss to the country to be around 7.5 billion dollars for the period extending from 2012 to 2014, unemployment is likely to reach 20% as 324,000 Lebanese plunge to unemployment, exports have plummeted and the 20% growth rate in 2010 has turned into a -1% decline in 2012, tourism tells the same story with the increase of 20% in October 2010 also turned into a disastrous -30% decline in October 2012.

The impact on the budget has been severe, direct budgetary support needed to maintain the same level of government services is 2.5 billion dollars, the direct impact on budget revenues is a decline of 1.5 billion \$.

In addition to government needs and the needs of the local community, there is also humanitarian needs related to the crisis, this was

estimated at 1.7 billion for 2013, only 32 % of which has been funded so far. The price of shouldering the Syrian crisis is proving too much to bear for Lebanon.

In addition, the Syrian presence is causing severe stress on the local communities as competition for resources increases. The Syrians are now present in over 1650 localities (all of Lebanon) and their presence is causing increased tension. This has led to additional hostility towards the Syrians and has increased racist sentiments towards them.

The response of the international community has so far enabled Lebanon to barely survive the impact of the crisis but it still falls short of the needs. In over two years of planning and talks about support to the host communities, nothing of significance has materialized so far, not one hospital, not one school. This cannot continue with the Lebanese local population under threat, with the economic pillars of the economy shaken, and with the political fall outs of the crisis continuing to destabilize the country. The price of shouldering the Syrian crisis is proving too much to bear.

We call on the international community to increase its assistance to Lebanon, to the local communities and to do so quickly, we call for our friends to open their borders and share the human burden with Lebanon, we call on the international community to find a political solution to the crisis.

Despite all that, Lebanon has remained faithful to its international and human commitment not to close its border in the face of anyone

seeking refuge from violence. Again I repeat: this aggravating burden represents now a real existential crisis, in view of the security and socio-economic repercussions of such a sudden overpopulation.

The spillover areas according to the World Bank recent report are:

- Humanitarian nature related to the influx of refugees.
- It affects our economy and trade and our public finances.
- The health, education and social safety, increase in demand in all these areas, especially in education.
- It increased the already existing poverty.
- The Labor market which result in further unemployment.
- Our infrastructure is extremely suffering in water supply, electricity, sanitation, traffic, road accidents, waste management.
- Furthermore, the Syrian conflict has challenged the already delicate social and inter-communal balance in Lebanon.

The State's budget is now in need of an exceptional financial shoring up process to cover these expenses, aside from the direct assistance coming in to the Refugees through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the specialized civil and international organizations. In this regard, I would like to thank the American Congress and Administration for its valuable assistance. The funding the esteemed US Congress provided so far was and still essential as it saved lives and helped so many people and we thank you for it. The American assistance is the highest single one offered by any country as it reached so far 254 million dollars.

Many international conferences for donors were held. The meetings of the host countries' representatives held in Geneva and the broader international conference which took place on the 30th of September under the theme "Solidarity and Burden-sharing with countries hosting Syrian Refugees" under the auspices of UNHCR, are but an introduction to widening the scope of participation and intensify the search for comprehensive solutions that would tackle this escalating crisis. I mention also the meeting of the Donors countries which took place at the World Bank on October 12th. These important conferences followed the successful meeting of the international support group for Lebanon in New York at the UN Headquarters which was presided by Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and the President of Lebanon, General Michel Sleiman and was very highly attended by the UN and the P5, the European Union, Arab League, World Bank, UNHCR and other agencies. The American Administration was represented at a very high level by Secretary of State The Honorable John Kerry personally.

Based on the common responsibility of the International community as a whole, the Lebanese need the care and support of brotherly and friendly countries, in order to face the negative repercussions of this huge **external conflict which is not of their own making**, but which threaten their security and stability and that of the region, and prejudice their socio-economic situation.

Not only do they look up to that assistance out of brotherly and friendly solidarity, but also based on the common responsibility of the international community as a whole, regarding the problems which pose a threat to regional and global security in general.

As you know, Lebanon is a small country the size of the state of Connecticut living within a delicate and boiling geographical area with limited resources and capabilities and sensitive balances. As it is not possible to impose on nations – and individuals – the “impossible” and what they are not able to do, it is important for me to reiterate from this very esteemed podium, the call of Lebanon to increase the assistance to ease this escalating burden mainly axed around the following points:

- To provide sufficient funds, human and financial resources, in order to put frames and regulations for the presence of the incoming Syrian refugees, meet their basic humanitarian and livelihood needs, noting that pledges undertaken at the meeting of the Donor States and Organizations which was thankfully hosted by the State of Kuwait on the 30th of January 2013 were fulfilled only partially.
- To consolidate frameworks and spaces to lodge Syrian Refugees on Syrian territories, in safe zones outside the reach of the ongoing conflict, knowing that the area of Syria is eighteen times that of Lebanon.
- To agree on holding an international conference on the issue of Syrian Refugees which does not merely call for financial assistance, but rather begins to search for ways to share the burdens and numbers among States, based on common responsibility and in light of historical precedents.
- To provide support from all the concerned and capable States for the works of the “International Support Group for Lebanon”,

which has placed the issue of the Refugees at the top of its priority list.

- Currently almost 833,500 Syrian displaced are officially registered and hosted in Lebanon with alarming percentages indicating that almost 65% of these displaced and assisted are women and children.
- However, in view of the escalation of the fighting and the additional deterioration of the situation in Syria, an additional number of families is unfortunately expected to flee and already the Lebanese town of Aarsal in Eastern Lebanon received lately some twenty thousand refugees due to the Kalamoun battle on the Eastern Lebanese Syrian borders, adding more to the suffering of those already present and on the hosting communities which would definitely stretch the capacities of all concerned to its utmost limits. I should definitely stress on the upcoming wintery weather factor. It looks like Lebanon and the area are unfortunately expecting a blistery winter which already started as a strong snowy storm called Alexa is hitting the area today to make an already tragic situation even worse.
- It is important to note that the displaced families are hosted in communities that are structurally disadvantaged, underdeveloped and suffer extreme poverty. The coming of the displaced Syrian families aggravated the misery and the suffering of both Syrian and Lebanese. That is why efforts for assistance should be seen along these lines.
- International agencies and NGOs have been swift in responding to the immediate needs. Unfortunately, assistance remains unequal and fragmented in absence of an overall framework for action. A

remarkable effort is done at the level of the UN agencies specially UNHCR to elicit such a mechanism.

- Sensitive efforts have been concentrating on assisting the Syrian displaced and touched peripherally on the Lebanese hosting communities' needs that are increasing by the day. This is reflected in the increase tension between the two communities at different levels.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Government of Lebanon is committed to support within its capacities the displaced Syrian families awaiting their return to their homes. That goes along acknowledging the right of the Lebanese hosting communities for adequate social services. However, these capacities have reached a deadlock and immediate help is needed as the escalation of violence and massive influx of displaced is expected and that require extensive resources. If these are not made available, then the Government of Lebanon would be forced to opt for a different approach in dealing with the Syrian displaced.

All these measures seem pressing and urgent, pending the desired political solution for Syria which hopefully will be provided by the Geneva 2 Conference to which Lebanon when invited will attend, a solution that will likely and hopefully ensure for these refugees a dignified and safe return to their country.

Let me conclude by emphasizing a fact that by assisting the neighboring countries of Syria to cope with the refugees problem, you will enhance the security and the stability of these countries. The spillover of the

Syrian situation to these countries, Lebanon included, is capable to destabilize the regional stability thus creating a conducive environment for terrorism and terrorist organizations.

About half of the refugees are children and Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said: "If we do not act quickly, a generation of innocents will become lasting casualties for an appalling war." Thank you.