



**Address**

**by**

**H.E. General Michel Aoun**

**President of the Republic of Lebanon**

**at the**

**Seventy-fourth session of the**

**United Nations General Assembly**

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*Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations  
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Your Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the General Assembly,  
Your Excellency Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
Honorable Heads of States and Governments,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the onset, it gives great pleasure to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over the seventy-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly, wishing you success in your duties.

I would also like to thank Her Excellency Mrs. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés for her good conduct of the last session, and to salute the UN Secretary-General for his endeavors, especially his reform project for the international organization, targeting its various areas of competency, and the attention he is granting to the issues of our region in general, and Lebanon in particular.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of this month of September, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 73/ 344 in favor of the establishment of “the Academy for Human Encounters and Dialogue” in Lebanon. In this context, allow me to convey my country’s acknowledgement to all the Member-States that co-hosted this project and voted in its favor, with all the encouragement that this bears for us to move forward with this initiative that I had launched before you two years ago.

I will follow up with keenness the creation of this Academy, because I believe that true peace is the one established between humans and not on paper, and because I also have faith in the role and vocation of Lebanon as a land of convergence and dialogue, and in the experiences and expertise of its people and plural society, which made them reject intellectual and religious extremism, and taught them how to live tolerance and the acceptance of the other.

This Academy is all the more important because it embodies an international project for the convergence of the various cultures, religions and ethnicities, promotes the spirit of coexistence, and spreads the culture of knowing and accepting the other, in line with the principles of the UN and what the organization aims for through its noble programs which strive to bridge the gap among peoples, on top of which preventive diplomacy for the prior eradication of the causes of conflicts.

Two days ago, the Climate Summit was held here at the United Nations, upon the invitation of the Secretary-General. In this context, Lebanon joined the group of countries supporting the initiative of His Excellency the President of Austria “for more Climate Ambition”, after it was at the forefront of the signatory countries of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

On another hand, Lebanon has taken numerous steps this year to promote the role of women. Indeed, the Lebanese Government adopted a comprehensive national plan to put into effect UN Security Council Resolution 1325 about women, peace and security, and it embarked on its implementation. We have also completed all the steps related to the work of the National Commission for Human Rights and the Torture prevention committee.

Mr. President,  
Esteemed audience,

The heated war that prevailed over many countries in the Middle East during the last decade has recessed. Nevertheless, its repercussions on our countries and societies are becoming more widespread and entrenched, especially at the economic and social levels.



The debates of the General Assembly this year are under the theme “Galvanizing the multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion”. Shall we remind you again of the size of the adverse impact entailed by the Syrian displacement crisis and its repercussions on Lebanon in the security, political, social, economic and environmental spheres, as well as on infrastructure, growth and the increased unemployment rate? This displacement has posed a serious threat to the achievement of the sustainable development goal agenda in Lebanon, and led to the aggravation of its economic crisis.

If Lebanon strives hard to face the difficult economic situation, relying on a set of drastic structural measures and reforms to its economic and financial system, in cooperation with the concerned international institutions, this also urges me to call on all the world leaders to work for the safe return of the displaced to Syria, especially that addressing this crisis is certainly not the sole responsibility of Lebanon, but rather a shared international responsibility that makes it imperative for all of us to collaborate together to urgently find solutions thereof. Indeed, the international community cannot content itself with providing minimum assistance to the displaced and refugees in their regions of displacement only, while excluding programs for their safe and dignified return.

The conditions of such return have become available: in fact, as per international reports, the security situation on most of the Syrian territories has become stable, the military confrontations have become confined to the Idlib region, and the Syrian State has officially declared, time and again, that it welcomes the return of its displaced citizens. To date, around 370.000 displaced have left Lebanon, more than 250.000 of whom having returned to Syria; and the feedback which states that they have been subject to persecution or mistreatment.

On the other hand, we have many question marks about the positions of some active States and concerned international organizations, trying to hinder this return, the allegations that the security situation in Syria is dangerous, and sowing fear among the displaced, which clearly indicates the political postulates through which the displacement crisis is being tackled, as if the displaced have become hostages in an international game to be swapped when settlements and solutions are imposed! De facto, this may drive Lebanon to foster the undertaken return process, in agreement with the Syrian State, when needed, to solve this dilemma which threatens our entity and existence, because the experience of displaced peoples around the world, and waiting for political solutions are not at all reassuring.

Our history witnessed two discouraging experiences in this respect: the first in 1974, after the war broke out in Cyprus, and a large number of Cypriots took refuge in Lebanon, then they swiftly returned to their country as soon as a cease-fire was declared, without waiting for the political solution, which has not been achieved till the day. The second experience started in 1948, with the waves of displacement of the Palestinian people to the countries of diaspora, and in particular to Lebanon where the Palestinians are still living in camps, nurturing the dream of return, and awaiting the political solution and the implementation of Resolution 194 for seventy-one years now.

In a connected context, I guard against the danger of reducing the services provided by UNRWA to the Palestinian refugees, which added to the social and fiscal strains weighing on them and on us, thus threatening to turn the Palestinian youth from ‘education candidates’ to ‘revenge candidates’. Here I would like to note Lebanon’s categorical rejection of any attempt to undermine the UNRWA or modify its mandate. I call on the countries that contribute to its budget to double their contributions to enable it to recover its vital role.



Mr. President,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Middle East crisis which has been lingering for decades is becoming more complicated because all the solution approaches and all the Israeli practices contradict the founding principles of the United Nations.

Indeed, the judaization of Al-Quds (Jerusalem), the methodic colonial policy, the legislations that contradict human rights, the recognition of the annexation of lands that were occupied by force, as in the case of the Golan Heights, the electoral promises to annex new lands, with all what leaks about “the Deal of the Century” from removing the borders of some States and striking their territorial unity, to liquidating the Palestinian cause, keeping the Palestinians where they are, the subsequent damage that Lebanon will suffer because it hosts a large number of refugees,... all the above undermines any chance for peace in the Middle East and points undoubtedly to a dark unknown future because the rights of the peoples remain alive as long as it takes.

Mr. President,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Israeli violations of Resolution 1701 have never ceased, and neither have the exaggerated aggressions against the Lebanese sovereignty, by land, sea and air. The blatant hostile act carried out last month against a residential area in the heart of Beirut is the most serious infringement of this Resolution. Moreover, the fires that lasted for days in the occupied Shebaa farms as a result of the incendiary Israeli shells, represent an international environmental crime that requires a condemnation of those who caused them.

From this rostrum, I reiterate that Lebanon is a peace-loving country, that we are committed to Resolution 1701, and we always strive to respect it; yet, this commitment does not eliminate our natural non-transferable right to legitimately defend ourselves, our land and our people, with all available means.

I also reiterate that Lebanon holds on to its sovereign rights over the occupied Shebaa Farms, the Kfarshouba Hills and the Northern Ghajar. It shall spare no opportunity to consecrate its internationally land borders which are firmly documented at the United Nations, and to demarcate its maritime borders as well, under UN supervision, while welcoming any help from any country in this respect, at a time when the exploratory oil and gas drilling operations will start in its territorial waters by the end of the year as per international laws and norms.

Mr. President,  
Esteemed audience,

As Lebanon embarks on the preparations to celebrate the centenary of “Greater Lebanon”, you celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations which was founded on 24/10/1945. Ever since, the world has known many wars and conflicts, especially in the Middle East, the constant flashpoint where temperature rises or drops but never cools down, and our people always pay the price, with their security, stability, peace, economy and even demographic diversity.

The core of the problem is the same: contradiction between the interest of the strong and the right of the weak; thus principles, logic and justice are lost, and solutions are diluted.

The aberration prevailing on politics nowadays has cost the world its stability after all the guiding milestones have been undermined, and there are no more criteria to stem and control differences and thus solve them according to the applicable rules. This has made many countries incapable of taking political decisions beyond their limits, and has prevented them from converging and cooperating. Thus, many opportunities for conflict resolution were lost, and the door was wide open for chaos.

The United Nations has undertaken many initiatives aimed at making the voice of peace and development heard. Some of them succeeded while many did not reach the desired outcome. We hope that the UN will promote today the general principles, the international law and the charters as they are the only reference to safeguard the rights, for no justice shall rise, no right shall be consecrated and no peace will be established, as long as the principle prevailing in our world is: I am strong, then I am right!

Thank you.