

***Check against delivery!***



**Statement of Lebanon  
UNHCR Executive Committee Session 2023**

***Delivered by H.E. Mr. Salim Baddoura  
Permanent Representative of Lebanon***

Thank you,

سيدتي الرئيسة، اسمحي لي بداية أن أهنئك على رئاستك الحكيمة وأن أؤكد لك تعاون وفدي الكامل لضمان نجاح هذه الدورة للجنة التنفيذية.

وأشكر المفوض السامي العزيز فيليبو غراندي على إحاطته الشفوية الثاقبة، كما أشيد بإدارته السليمة للمفوضية وأحيي جهوده وجهود طاقم المفوضية في المقر وفي الميدان لمواجهة التحديات الصعبة. ينبغي دعم هذه الجهود ومدتها بالتمويل الكافي.

Madame Chair,

We are seriously concerned by the steady increase in the numbers of emergencies and of forcibly displaced persons. This worrying trajectory is largely the result of our collective failure in tackling the pressing challenges of collective security, climate change, development, and mobility in a globalized world.

This collective failure is now in full display in the middle east. The current dreadful escalation could be largely attributed to the reticence of the international community to end the Israeli occupation and impunity, and to restore the legitimate rights of the oppressed Palestinian people, that we assure of our solidarity.

Madam Chair,

Allow me to touch upon the unbearable plight of my country Lebanon, where around 40% of its population is now constituted of displaced people from neighboring countries. It is very alarming. Today I m not just delivering a statement, I am voicing the bitterness of my people who resent being ignored let alone sacrificed on the altar of middle eastern volatile power politics.

I will say it calmly but bluntly: over the years Lebanon has grown skeptical of the true intentions of the international community. **How the country and its people are going to survive the existential challenge seems of little concern to the rest of the world.** This is what all ordinary people in Lebanon these days firmly believe.

Everybody commends our generosity, and we are proud of it because Syrians are our brothers. But shouldn't generosity at some point be reciprocated with deeds and not only words? The crisis response is underfunded, and when funds exist, they often are channeled in opaque manners through

intermediaries, bypassing our government oversight, and overlooking host communities.

Madame Chair,

When it comes to Lebanon the international approach towards durable solution is deeply flawed. We feel that slowly but irrevocably, de facto integration is forced on us. Can anybody tell us how on earth could a small developing country of 5 million accommodate more than 2 million displaced people on its soil indefinitely? How are we to preserve our model of tolerance, democracy and religious conviviality if confronted with such a dystopian scenario? Can I just kindly ask our interlocutors who keep repeating that the situation in the country of origin is not yet ripe to start a gradual return, can I ask them about the alternatives?

We are not alien to the complexity of the situation but how to envisage a way forward if the international community is not ready to listen to the legitimate concerns of the host country nor to those of the country of origin? Conversely, for the sake of argument does anybody think that the deteriorating situation in Lebanon is conducive for hosting the displaced Syrians *ad vitam aeternam*?

The “hear nothing, see nothing and say nothing” approach is not sustainable let alone contrary to burden and responsibility sharing principle. Ominous signs shouldn’t be overlooked. There is a worrying surge in number of illegal migrants smuggled into the country through the border with Syria. The Lebanese armed forces are doing their best to curb the smuggling, but their task is very complicated, and they need to be supported.

Other illegal migrants are risking their lives trying to navigate the Mediterranean from Lebanese shores to reach the EU entry points.

Clashes are erupting between local communities and groups of displaced and resentment is growing. Municipalities are not able to cope anymore with the total disregard for law and order on the part of some displaced. The overall security in the country is deteriorating. Is the UNHCR aware of this process of delinquency? Is some rebalancing taking place, are some new initiatives being explored?

Over the years we have proven our attachment to a good relationship with UNHCR and other International UN entities operating in Lebanon. But they

should kindly be reminded that they do not operate in a vacuum and that they must adapt to our national context and respect our sovereignty.

When we say that not all Syrians are forcibly displaced nor are eligible to international protection, some being illegal or economic migrants our concerns shouldn't be brushed aside. We count on UNHCR to help us identify those who are abusing the system. The agreement we reached in the summer is a step in the right direction, hopefully we will speed up the implementation.

In the same vein, international organizations working in Lebanon should maybe ask themselves if the aid they are providing in an indiscriminate manner without real scrutiny is not creating a moral hazard, and indirectly fueling illicit migration camouflaged as forcible displacement.

Finding a durable solution to this ongoing refugee crisis in Lebanon could help alleviate the plight of Lebanese and Syrians alike and will indisputably contribute to easing some of the simmering tensions in the middle east.

Thank you.