

Check against delivery

**PRIME MINISTER FUAD SINIORA'S ADDRESS
AT THE STOCKHOLM CONFERENCE FOR LEBANON'S
EARLY RECOVERY - AUGUST 31, 2006**

I would like to thank the government of Sweden, particularly Prime Minister Goran Persson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan Eliasson, and Minister for International Development Cooperation, Carin Jamtin for hosting this conference in Stockholm today, promptly after the tragic events which continued unabated for thirty three days, causing much loss of life and tremendous damage to our homes, infrastructure, environment, and socio-economic system. We are here today to bear witness to the resilience of the Lebanese people and their determination to rise up again. We are here to draw strength from your solidarity and convey to our people and to the international community the importance of concerted efforts and collective responsibility in dealing with Lebanon's deep wounds. I need not remind you that prior to this unjustified war against my country, and as we were preparing to present our package of economic and social reforms to the anticipated Beirut conference for the support of Lebanon, our economy was beginning to show healthy signs of recovery, and we were looking forward to a record year in influx of tourists, and a construction boom. We were putting in place a comprehensive macroeconomic vision to rejuvenate the economy and resolve our accumulated debt overhang, due in large part to the repeated Israeli aggressions that severely damaged our country and killed tens of thousands over almost four decades. We were also

taking economic and institutional reform measures to redress the fiscal imbalance and help the Lebanese economy achieve its growth potential, promote sustainable social and economic development, and create new job opportunities.

The direct damage from this last invasion to our infrastructure and to our public and private property is now running into the billions of dollars, while loss to GDP, job losses and the long term direct and indirect costs to the economy, including lost revenues in tourism, agriculture and industry are expected to be billions more. Moreover, Lebanon's well-known achievements in fifteen years of post-war development have been wiped out in a matter of days by Israel's deadly military machine. Where we had growth of almost 6% this year, we now have a deep recession with all the consequences that entails; where we had a future full of promise, we must now pick up the pieces of our devastated country.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On July 12, fulfilling its threat to set Lebanon back twenty years, Israel started the latest of its seven invasions of our country, killing over 1100 civilians, a third of whom were children; wounding over 4000; displacing one million people, or a quarter of our population, many with no homes to return to; destroying tens of thousands of homes, hospitals, schools, factories, roads and most of our bridges; severely damaging airports, power stations, fuel depots, and warehouses; enforcing a cruel siege of the entire country

thereby creating shortages of food, fuel, medical supplies, and hampering essential humanitarian relief supplies; causing an environmental disaster in the eastern Mediterranean; and burdening future generations with more pain, suffering and debt. Israel has repeatedly and willfully violated international law and international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions. In short, ladies and gentlemen, Lebanon, which only seven weeks ago was full of hope and promise, has been torn to shreds by destruction, displacement, dispossession, desolation, and death.

At the International Conference for Lebanon held in Rome on July 26, I proposed a comprehensive seven point plan. It was unanimously adopted by the Council of Ministers, which as you know includes members of Hezbollah, and was supported by a broad national consensus as well as by the international community. The plan called, among other things, for the release of Lebanese and Israeli detainees; the withdrawal of the Israeli army behind the Blue Line; a UN commitment to put the Shebaa Farms and the Kfar Shouba Hills under its custody until Lebanese sovereignty over them is confirmed; the extension of Lebanese government authority over all its territory through its legitimate armed forces, with no weapons or authority other than that of the Lebanese State; an expansion of the UN force in south Lebanon, with a wider mandate and scope of operation, to undertake humanitarian work and guarantee security; UN action to enforce the 1949 armistice agreement between Lebanon and Israel (as the south of Lebanon has become less secure and more exposed after the latest aggression,

and hence the revival of an updated armistice agreement will be the only guarantee binding Israel); and a commitment by the international community to support Lebanon's relief, reconstruction and development needs, to help us overcome the recession caused by this latest aggression.

Israel responded by intensifying its attacks on innocent civilians. Finally, on August 11, after one month of unrelenting aggression, the Security Council passed Resolution 1701 which called for an immediate cessation of hostilities to be followed by a number of steps, including the deployment of up to 15,000 UNIFIL troops into the area south of the Litani River alongside the Lebanese armed forces. The Lebanese government unanimously welcomed the resolution and acted immediately by commencing the deployment of our forces in the south, for the first time in almost forty years, followed by the deployment of 8600 troops on its border with Syria. Israel's first response, however, was to delay the cessation of hostilities by three days during which time it further punished Lebanon by unleashing more of its deadly bombs, and causing more death and destruction. Then, even after the cessation of hostilities came into effect, and while the international community looked helplessly on, Israel did not comply with Resolution 1701, nor did it complete its withdrawal from all Lebanese territory, while it continued its provocations by violating Lebanese airspace daily, and carried out commando operations deep inside Lebanese territory. Furthermore, Israel maintained its illegal air, sea, and land blockade, and continues to do so to this moment,

in utter disregard of the wishes of the international community. Israel also left thousands of unexploded bomblets resulting from cluster bombs in towns, villages, and hillsides throughout the country, in clear violation of international humanitarian law, as by their very nature they cannot discriminate between civilian and military targets, and which are continuing to maim and kill well after the cessation of hostilities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, if Israel does not immediately lift its humiliating siege on Lebanon, as it was justly described by Secretary General Kofi Annan; if it does not withdraw immediately from the positions it still occupies within Lebanon in violation of UNSCR 1701, the recovery process, including this conference today which you earnestly called for, will be severely undermined. So I call upon you to join the UN Secretary General in deploying all effort to remove every obstacle preventing the Lebanese people from regaining their freedom and sovereignty.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our primary objective is to provide the necessary assistance to the hundreds of thousands of displaced before winter sets in, helping them to rebuild their lives and their tens of thousands of homes; to tend to the orphaned children and the wounded; to reopen the airport and ports and rebuild the essential infrastructure which Israel has so systematically destroyed; and to provide essential services to the most damaged and needy areas. The major challenge will then be to come out of the recession by setting the wheels of our

shattered economy into motion, as the destruction did not only affect the physical infrastructure which can be rebuilt in time, but it also resulted in the severe impairment and disruption of our economic and social life. Looking ahead, we will aim to achieve sustainable development, financial stability and healthy economic growth, while consolidating our internal political cohesion and strengthening our democratic institutions. Indeed, as soon as the bombing stopped, the government swiftly began to repair essential infrastructure and pave the way for long term reconstruction.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Lebanese people are determined to build a strong state: a state which can reclaim the position of Lebanon as a haven of moderation, where tolerance and enlightenment triumph over fanaticism, ignorance and oppression; where individual initiative and potential can be fulfilled; a state that rekindles the beacon of freedom and democracy in Lebanon where justice and the rule of law prevail.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that this conference aimed at marshalling support for Lebanon, and focusing on relief and early recovery, which we hope will be a key first and important step on the long path of reconstruction of Lebanon. I am also sure that, in addition to setting the pace for future efforts, it will be a true demonstration of cooperation and

partnership based on shared values. Moreover, it will help us overcome the difficult months ahead, and prepare for the broader conference of support for Lebanon. I believe that the backing of the international community will be paramount to the rebirth of our country, and that your continued support will be absolutely crucial for the Lebanese democratic experience to succeed in a part of the world in dire need for democracy. Financial contributions must focus on the rehabilitation of infrastructure and on enabling those in our society who have been most affected to rebuild their lives and homes, and on kick-starting the economy by getting small and medium enterprises in the most affected areas back on their feet. Our short term relief and reconstruction projects, prepared in cooperation with UN agencies, are spelled out in the document that has been placed before you which includes elements of the early rapid assessment of the damage caused by the aggression on Lebanon. This assessment will be further strengthened and validated through an in-depth study which is already under preparation. The document also includes a sample of sectoral early recovery projects that can be quickly delivered with high impact in order to restore some form of normalcy to the lives of many of our people. But I would remind you that a high level of grant funding is needed as we suffer from one of the highest levels of indebtedness in the world, brought about in large measure by repeated Israeli invasions, whereby more than half of our revenues go to service our public debt.

I am pleased to announce, from this platform and before this distinguished audience, the launching of our

“Rebuilding the Nation of Hope” initiative. This can be achieved through a variety of mechanisms that can guarantee swift implementation, full transparency and efficiency. These mechanisms would consist of donor funds, direct contributions, or sponsorship of specific reconstruction projects such as villages and schools.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we are to have real peace and stability in the Middle East, the root causes of this war must be addressed. It is also of the utmost importance that the festering issues of the region of which we are a vital part be settled once and for all. Is it not the time for Israel and us all to ask ourselves what Israel has gained from all its wars, occupations, repression, displacement, state of the art weaponry and security barriers?

Israel must be brought to realize that war has given it neither security nor peace, and that the peoples of the Middle East cannot be cowed into submission, that their will to resist grows ever stronger with each village destroyed and each massacre committed, and that they aspire only to live in freedom and dignity. The 2002 Arab Summit in Beirut, which called for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on the principle of land for peace, is the way forward. I promise you all, gathered here today, that I will work unrelentingly with you to achieve peace in our area, the birthplace of the three great religions and the

cradle of civilizations. I call upon you all to join me in deploying every effort to empower Lebanon to reclaim forcefully its regional vocation as a beacon of plurality, tolerance and freedom.

Military solutions are both morally unacceptable and totally unrealistic, and partial political tracks and unilateral initiatives have all failed. It is time for the UN Security Council to retake the lead to make a comprehensive, just and lasting peace happen in the Middle East. But a comprehensive political solution can only be implemented when Israel recognizes the right of the people of Palestine to a viable and independent state, and the right of return of refugees, pursuant to relevant UN resolutions, and withdraws from all the Arab lands it occupies in Lebanon, Gaza, Jerusalem, the West Bank and in the Syrian Golan Heights in accordance with Resolution 242. Only then will Israel enter into a just and lasting peace with its neighbors. Historic decisions require historic leaders who will rise up to the occasion and secure a better future for our children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In light of the lessons learnt from the recent experience of the last few weeks, let us join forces in seizing the opportunity to finally move forward towards a real, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank you all for caring about Lebanon and its recovery, and for taking part in this conference. I would also like to thank potential contributors to the International force and to the reconstruction of Lebanon and the recovery of its economy. Finally, I wish to thank the Swedish government and people for their kind initiative and gracious hospitality. Thank you.