

Check against delivery

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

Mark Malloch Brown

--

ADDRESS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LEBANON

Stockholm, 31 August 2006

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Government of Sweden for hosting this meeting, and all of you for being here on such short notice. I also apologise that you get me and not Kofi Annan, but he, as you know, is in the region itself seeking a political way forward for Lebanon and Israel.

Sadly, we gather at another cruel moment in the history of Lebanon. After decades of civil war and instability, what should have been that country's summer to shine succumbed overnight to an unexpected and unwelcome conflict. Where record numbers of visitors were expected, bombs arrived instead.

The destruction wrought by the war is dramatic and dispiriting: years of painstaking reconstruction un-done with breathtaking speed; buildings, neighbourhoods and infrastructure—some still receiving their finishing touches—reduced to ruins, once more.

It is heartening to see so many nations represented today. I know you are here because of your concern at the deaths and destruction in Lebanon, and because you share our determination to help Lebanon recover as rapidly as possible. And because beyond the bricks and mortar this is also about spirit – Lebanon’s – and its support, and a determination that it must prevail over the bombs.

The Lebanese people and Government, having rebuilt once, will surely do so again. They have the engineering knowledge, the planning skills, and the construction experience, as well as the private sector energy together with tremendous will and vision.

Yet they must not be left to do so alone. The international community’s inability to force a rapid halt to the fighting must not be compounded, in Lebanese eyes, by our invisibility in this post-conflict stage.

Today, the Lebanese people are looking to this conference for a signal that the international community is indeed ready to assist their efforts to rebuild Lebanon as a stable, independent, democratic, prosperous country, at peace with itself and with its neighbours; to help restore the bustle of busy cafes and restaurants, and fill streets with the harmonious kaleidoscope of the region's religions and ethnicities.

Our challenge is now two-fold: to respond to Lebanon's immediate needs, and to get the Government-led recovery off to a determined start in the weeks ahead, even as we prepare for an international conference on the country's longer-term needs.

As you know, the cessation of hostilities has allowed a strong and effective humanitarian response to move into high gear.

Despite a continuing Israeli air and sea blockade which severely hinders relief efforts, urgently needed supplies—including food, medicines, blankets and fuel—are reaching those in need in ever increasing quantities. Those whose homes were destroyed are finding shelter in their communities. Unexploded ordnance, including hundreds of cluster bombs dropped during the final days of conflict, are

being defused so that villagers can return home in safety and resume tilling their lands.

But the blockade's effect on Lebanon's civilian economy, and therefore our efforts today, cannot be minimized. Aid when there is a blockade, is like putting someone on life support when there is a foot on their wind pipe. Further, we need a political solution both to the blockade and the underlying causes of the conflict otherwise aid risks substituting for the real oxygen of recovery, private investment, which will stay away if the risk of conflict remains high.

Nevertheless, the humanitarian situation has stabilized, and Lebanon is quickly progressing from emergency response into the early stages of recovery and reconstruction. This is reflected in the UN's revised Flash Appeal that my colleague Jan Egeland will discuss with you later today.

Indeed, the revised Appeal ultimately reflects the great national unity of the Lebanese people during the long days of conflict. All of them supported their brethren in the South, and provided generously for the needs of the displaced. Their solidarity helped avert a potential humanitarian catastrophe.

That is why the Government is already leading the transition from the humanitarian phase towards recovery and eventual reconstruction of the country.

With UN support, it has set-up a recovery and coordination cell within the Prime Minister's office, and is carrying out a comprehensive assessment for a longer-term National Recovery Plan.

Yet it is the immediate recovery process that demands our most urgent attention. We must act quickly to restore some normalcy to lives affected by the conflict.

That means helping to provide resources and materials to repair houses, or to expand the housing of families sheltering others. It means rehabilitation of schools for the school year that is about to start. It means removing rubble and debris and reopening roads to traffic, as well as restoring water, sanitation and power lines.

It means restoring livelihoods through cash grants, small loans, or cash-for-work programmes. It means assistance to small businesses.

It means an emergency environmental cleanup, addressing especially the devastating oil spill threatening Lebanon's coastline. It means rapid repair of key municipal infrastructure to restart local social services.

These are some of the immediate goals of the Early Recovery process being shared with you today. This strategy, developed by the Lebanese Government in consultation with the UN and the World Bank, reflects Lebanese needs, Lebanese ownership and Lebanese leadership of the recovery process.

It will be led by the Government, and it will draw on the tremendous skills and ingenuity of the country's private sector and its resilient civil society.

For if there is a silver lining to Lebanon's heartbreaking devastation, it is in this country's proven record of rebuilding. Lebanese leaders, engineers, planners and businesses not only know how to do it, they have already done so, and they will do so yet again.

There could perhaps be no greater tribute to the late Prime Minister Hariri than to do again what he did for Lebanon: galvanising a public-private partnership that brings Beirut and much of Lebanon back to world class status in terms of infrastructure and amenities.

In fact, many of the activities covered by the Early Recovery process are already getting underway. But given the urgency of the tasks and the enormity of the challenge, international support is going to be crucial throughout this process. We must keep the money flowing to keep the recovery momentum going.

We remain in a race against time. The Lebanese Government is clearly committed to a strong, sovereign and united Lebanon, with the State as the foundation of its citizen's support and welfare.

Prime Minister Siniora and his cabinet have taken courageous and unprecedented decisions in recent days; decisions which helped bring an end to the fighting, and which have bolstered their citizens' desire to see a strong, capable and representative central authority in Lebanon. Ultimately, however, it is on the success or failure of the current recovery process that the Prime Minister and his Government will be judged.

That is why the coming weeks are crucial. If we, the international community, fail in supporting Lebanon now, we fail not just the brave Lebanese people, but also their national aspiration for a stable, strong and democratic Government that reaches, and supports, all its people throughout the country.

Let me thank those who have stepped forward already: countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Arab nations, who have given generously in Lebanon's hour of need; the international organizations that are providing invaluable support; and the heroic Lebanese civil society institutions that are providing community leadership. Above all, let me recognize the leadership of the Government of Lebanon. The huge rescue and recovery effort would not have been possible without its initiative and ingenuity.

In closing, let me say I visited Lebanon several years ago as Administrator of UNDP. Mr. Siniora was at that time Finance Minister. It was a time of economic and political hope: a single Lebanon was rising above the divisions of a cruel war, buoyed by growth and a vision that made it a beacon for the region; apparent proof of what could be achieved by determination and tolerance in equal parts. Today in Stockholm, beyond money, we are here to express solidarity and support to those two abiding values that must remain at the heart of Lebanon's next reconstruction.

Thank you very much.