

UN Secretary-General's statement to Security Council on Adoption of Resolution on Lebanon

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New York, 11 August 2006 – Secretary-General's statement to the Security Council on the adoption of a resolution on Lebanon

Mr. President,

Distinguished ministers,

Excellencies,

I welcome wholeheartedly the resolution you are about to adopt, and I am greatly relieved that it provides for a full and immediate cessation of hostilities. It is absolutely vital that the fighting now stop. Provided it does, I believe this resolution will make it possible to conclude a sustainable and lasting ceasefire agreement in the days ahead. And I hope that this could be the beginning of a process to solve the underlying political problems in the region through peaceful means.

But I would be remiss if I did not tell you how profoundly disappointed I am that the Council did not reach this point much, much earlier. And I am convinced that my disappointment and sense of frustration are shared by hundreds of millions of people around the world. For weeks now, I and many others have been calling repeatedly for an immediate cessation of hostilities, for the sake of the civilian population on both sides who have suffered such terrible, unnecessary pain and loss. All members of this Council must be aware that its inability to act sooner has badly shaken the world's faith in its authority and integrity.

Since 12 July, when Hezbollah launched an unprovoked attack on Israel, killing eight Israeli soldiers and kidnapping two, both Lebanon and Israel have been thrown back into the turmoil of war, death and destruction.

According to the Government of Lebanon, over a thousand Lebanese have been killed, and over 3600 injured. Around a quarter of all Lebanon's inhabitants – close to a million people –

have been displaced.

Too many of the victims have been children. In fact, more children than fighters have been killed in this conflict. Israeli bombing has turned thousands of homes to rubble. It has also destroyed dozens of bridges and roads, with the result that more than a hundred thousand people cannot reach safety, nor can relief supplies reach them. Such devastation would be tragic at any time. That it has been inflicted on Lebanon's people just when they were making real progress towards political reform and economic recovery makes it all the more so.

Israelis, for their part, have been newly awakened to a threat which they hoped, with good reason, to have escaped when – as this Council certified on my recommendation – they withdrew from Lebanon six years ago. Some 41 Israeli civilians have been killed, and hundreds of thousands have had their lives disrupted – being forced into shelters or to flee their homes – by rocket attacks from Hezbollah, which has launched its fire indiscriminately, to sow the widest possible terror, making no effort to distinguish between civilian and military targets, and also endangering civilians on its own side by firing from the midst of heavily populated areas.

Nor has the damage been limited to Lebanon and Israel. A region that could ill afford another chapter of violence, and another source of instability, has been inflamed further still. Extremists have been given new ammunition. The UN itself has been a target of protest and violence, despite the Organization's humanitarian efforts, including those of our valiant peacekeepers in UNIFIL, to reach people trapped in the cross-fire. UNIFIL has had to cope with a situation for which it was neither mandated nor equipped.

I am full of pride and admiration for the courage that the men and women who serve under the UN flag, and indeed all the humanitarian workers, have shown, since 12 July, in carrying out their duties in the midst of intense fighting, which has injured 16 UN personnel and, tragically, caused the deaths of five.

Indeed, UNIFIL's tenacity has made possible the diplomatic solution you have just forged. Without it, you would have had to face the difficult prospect of UNIFIL's withdrawal. Indeed, you may yet have to face it in the hours and days ahead, if the immediate cessation of hostilities called for in this resolution does not hold.

So this resolution comes none too soon, and it marks a vital step forward. I am glad that Council members have been able to resolve their differences, accommodating many points of view, and I hope they will adopt this text unanimously. Having done so, they must work with equal determination to make what they have agreed fully effective on the ground.

First of all, humanitarian convoys and relief workers must be given a real guarantee of safe passage and access to those who need help. As soon as the fighting stops, the daunting challenge of helping people to return to their homes safely and rebuild their lives begins.

Secondly, the resolution rightly has at its core Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity, consistent with your resolutions 425, 1559 and 1680. The international community must give the Lebanese Government all possible support, so that it can make that sovereignty effective. The Government, acting through its regular armed forces and police, must be able to assert its authority throughout the country and on all its borders, particularly to prevent illegal and destabilizing flows of arms. Only when there is one authority, and one gun, will there be a chance of lasting stability. The Lebanese State, like any other sovereign State, must have a monopoly of the use of force on its own territory.

That implies, of course, a full and swift Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory. We now have a clear scenario for achieving that.

The decision of the Lebanese Government to deploy 15,000 of the country's armed forces to the south is a significant development. But, ready and willing as the Army may be to undertake this task, the Government itself has acknowledged the need for help. This makes the Council's decision to strengthen the mandate and the numbers of UNIFIL a vital ingredient of the package.

Now, UNIFIL faces a new task, perhaps even more difficult and dangerous than its previous one. It must be robust and effective, and ensure that no vacuum is left between the Israeli withdrawal and the deployment of Lebanese forces. Obviously, if it is to carry out this new mandate, it needs to be augmented with the utmost urgency, and provided with sophisticated military capabilities. The Council cannot afford to relax for one minute. I urge its members to consult closely, and at once, with both existing and potential troop contributors, with a view to generating the additional forces needed as quickly as possible, before the situation on the ground once again spins out of control. And I urge you to make sure they have the equipment they will need.

I also appeal to all potential donors to respond swiftly to requests from the Lebanese Government for financial help, as it struggles to reconstruct its devastated country.

Some may well be reluctant to do so, without solid assurances that this time peace is here to stay. Such assurances are indeed essential. And they must rest, not only on the cessation of hostilities or the deployment of an expanded peace force, but on the resolution of fundamental underlying political problems, including the release of prisoners, starting with those who have been taken hostage, and a resolution of the Shebaa Farms issue in accordance with resolution 1680.

I will therefore lose no time in taking up the role assigned to me in today's resolution. We have just had a terrible lesson in the dangers of allowing problems to fester. We must by now all know that unless we address unfinished business, it can and will take us unawares.

The Lebanese Cabinet will meet tomorrow, and the Israeli Cabinet on Sunday, to review the Resolution. Over the weekend I will undertake to establish with both parties the exact date and time at which the cessation of hostilities will come into effect.

Mr. President,

Lebanon has been a victim for too long. Mired in an incomplete political transformation since the end of the civil war, it has remained an arena in which both domestic and regional actors could play out their self-interested schemes. Such exploitation of a vulnerable country is shameful. It has undermined the laudable effort of many Lebanese citizens to consolidate their country as a sovereign, independent and democratic State.

The country and its people deserve better. They deserve the full support of the United Nations, in their effort to cast off the chains of external interference and domestic strife. Doing so will require both the establishment of national consensus among Lebanese and constructive cooperation, based on mutual goodwill and sustained dialogue, by all relevant parties and actors on the regional level, including the Governments of Syria and Iran.

Indeed, over the last five weeks we have been reminded yet again what a fragile, tense and crisis-ridden region the Middle East has become – probably now more complex and difficult than ever before. It is now undergoing changes, shifts and realignments on a scale, and of a strategic significance, not seen since the colonial powers withdrew at the end of the Second World War. Perhaps even more ominous than the physical destruction are the changes in perception that have been occurring, both inside the region and beyond it. The Middle East, which has long figured at the very top of this Council's agenda, is likely to remain there for years to come.

The resolution you are about to adopt is only one step towards the comprehensive approach that is needed. Other steps will need to be taken – many others. In order to prevent yet another eruption of violence and bloodshed, the international community must now be prepared to offer sustained support and assistance for the political and economic reconstruction of Lebanon, and also to address the broader context of crisis in the region.

In particular, we must not turn our backs on the bloodshed, suffering and hardship that have continued to afflict Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, or the danger from Qassam rockets that continues to threaten the Israeli communities bordering the Gaza Strip.

Progress in the Middle East peace process would undoubtedly facilitate the resolution of conflicts elsewhere in the region, and vice versa. Therefore, the various crises in the region must henceforth be addressed not in isolation or bilaterally, but as part of a holistic and comprehensive effort, sanctioned and championed by this Council, to bring peace and stability to the region as a whole.

Mr. President,

The parallel crises in Lebanon and Gaza over the past few weeks have demonstrated, once again, that there are no military solutions to this conflict. War is not, and I repeat, war is not “the continuation of politics by other means”. On the contrary, it represents a catastrophic failure of political skill and imagination – a dethronement of peaceful politics from the primacy which it should enjoy. By taking the first step today towards ending the fighting in Lebanon, the Council is belatedly reasserting that primacy – as the founders of this Organization expected it to do.

Only political solutions will be sustainable in the long term. The peace treaties between Israel and Egypt, and between Israel and Jordan, are expressions of stable political arrangements and agreements. Through these treaties, the leaders of the countries concerned have courageously brought stability and peace to borders that were previously beset with violence, and thus to their peoples. Ultimately, similar arrangements, based on foundations that are well known to all of us, will have to be put in place along all the borders where there is conflict. Only comprehensive solutions can bring lasting peace.

The United Nations stands for a just solution to all these issues. We stand for security for Lebanon, for Israel, for the region. We stand for a comprehensive solution, and must therefore do our utmost to address all the separate but intertwined issues and conflicts in the region, whether manifest or latent. Delays will mean only more lost lives, more shattered hopes, and a further decline in the standing and authority of this Council and the Organization.

We must spare the people of Lebanon, of Israel, and of the wider region any further bloodshed – both now and in the months and years ahead.

Thank you very much.

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