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LEBANON AND ITS MULTIPLE CHALLENGES

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SHAIKH: Good evening. It is my great pleasure to invite you all to the Brookings Doha Center for I think what you will all agree is going to be a very special event. We're very, very pleased to have with us our four esteemed guests tonight. Let me also say that this is -- right off the bat that this is a public event. The event is actually being broadcast live on Al-Jazeera Mubasher, so a warm welcome to all of you in this hall here, as well as back at home. And those particularly on social media as well.

Let me also recognize a few esteemed guests in the audience. Our representatives from the embassy of Lebanon, in Qatar, as well as in particular Miguel Moratinos, the former foreign minister of Spain and also European Union envoy. It's a pleasure to have you as well as our friends, our regular friends of the center, and those from both the Lebanese community and the Syrian community, including some of our key leaders from the opposition side and others in the

Syrian community.

I was always excited about doing an event on Lebanon. We haven't actually talked about Lebanon for quite a while but that's because we wanted to get this esteemed panel in front of you. And I'm very pleased to have with us tonight His Excellency, Dr. Ziyad Baroud, the former Lebanese Minister of Interior and Municipalities; Mr. Mohamad Chatah, of course, the senior foreign policy advisor to the former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri; and former Lebanese Finance Minister, Ali Hamdan, the head of the Foreign Affairs Bureau of Lebanon's Amal Movement; His Excellency Speaker Berri; as well as Rami Rayess, spokesman of Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party and media advisor to His Excellency and Minister of Parliament, Walid Jumblatt. It's a great pleasure in particular because I feel as if I'm sitting here with friends.

SPEAKER: Same here. Sure. Likewise.

SPEAKER: Same here.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. And in light of

that I know we're going to have a very interesting discussion on Lebanon and its multiple challenges.

You know, Lebanon, just briefly, is a country which often hits the headlines. Most recently, perhaps, it's been eclipsed by what's going on with regards to its neighbor. But ever since its independence in 1943, and even before that in terms of its founding in 1920, it has been a source for both inspiration, discussion, and in terms of the interests of key international actors as well as those in the region.

How we're going to arrange this is that we're going to spend a little bit of time talking amongst ourselves. I will fire the questions and then towards the end we will open it up to you for questions from the audience.

So without further adieu let me start with you, Ali. The Mikati government has been in power since June 2011. Many thought that this government, composed of a single coalition marked H-block, would not be hamstrung by the familiar divisions and

obstructions that maybe have hindered other governments to govern effectively. How has the government performed so far in your view? And to what extent has it delivered on the kinds of public services and implemented in succeeding its programs? And I say this, and you know this full well, Lebanon faces a costly and unreliable electricity set of issues in regards to underdevelopment of its infrastructure, poor water supply, youth unemployment at over 20 percent, as well as, of course, diversioning debt of the country, somewhere over 130 percent of GDP. Could it have done better? How is it performing?

MR. HAMDAN: Thank you to receive us today. Thanks for the audience.

But allow me to correct something with the question. It's not one group that formed the cabinet. In fact, yes, part of 8 March and Prime Minister Mikati and the Finance Minister Safadi are another block, and we have the block of Mr. Walid Jumblatt and also independent groups. So it is a wider collusion

that makes this government.

Number two, in fact, I'm the adviser to the speaker of the house, so we're supposed to make the accountability for the government, not to defend the government. Now you put me in the position to defend the government. In fact, Lebanon is not an island. The moment that this government came into power it was a very critical moment in the region, not only in Lebanon. And Lebanon is seriously affected by this turbulence that hit the region.

What I would like, I would like to talk generally about that achievement within this 18 months or so. They manage, in fact, to do some steps that are important and they used to be hanged from previous times. Economically speaking, they have made serious steps on the oil and gas offshore Lebanon. They managed to do the authority and now they are preparing for the first round. So this is, economically speaking, they made few steps. The oil and gas authority, one of them, it is remarkable for them.

On the other hand, this government respected

the Lebanese or Lebanon's obligations toward the international community and the international rules and also commitment that Lebanon has to be committed for. In addition to that, with this turbulence dropping in the whole region, this government chose for itself a policy. They constructed a policy, which is Lebanon to be disassociated from what's happening in the region. And mainly we have the Syrian crisis.

MR. SHAIKH: We'll come to that.

MR. HAMDAN: Yes, we will come to talk more about that but this is a major policy. It was considered a very remarkable step for the government and maintained Lebanon with such stability, acceptable stability. Otherwise, everybody is afraid of what's happening in the region and they don't want it to spill over to Lebanon. This is, if I want to add more for the Lebanese or for the actual government, they are pushing for the dialogue and they, with the president of the republic, this is also one of the major policies that they are following, which is to call everybody into dialogue to save what can be

possible to be solved.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. We'll get back to the issues of the regional effects as well as the efforts at building a greater dialogue to a more effective government and the governance in Lebanon.

But let me stay on this just a little bit. And you're right to correct me. It's just not March 8. It is a broader coalition, though many would say that the yoke, the core of this and the drivers of this is very much March 8.

Rami, I'll ask you a similar question since your party is in the government. Could more have been achieved in this current climate from this government in trying to alleviate some of the very real problems that Lebanon faces. Look at the, for example, in terms of communications, ICT. And as I said, electricity.

MR. RAYESS: Thank you again for hosting this. Thanks for this esteemed audience as well.

I think, of course, much more could have been done in this government. Unfortunately, some of

the circumstances at the security level and at the political level have not been conducive for it to be more constructive, more productive, I mean. However, part of the problem does not strictly lie in this government in particular; rather, it lies with the whole political community in Lebanon, specifically in how we, as political parties, view the economic and the social issues, for example, although the economic and the social difficulties pertain to all the Lebanese population regardless of their political affiliations. Yet, we have never succeeded as a political community to address the economic challenges and the social difficulties based on technical constituencies. Rather, we always address and approach the economic issues based on our political considerations. And this has hindered our capacities to address the economic and social issues. So this cabinet is not an exception to this rule. This has been an issue which has been as such with previous cabinets as well.

I think some issues could have been

addressed further, specifically in the economic and the social issues. Unfortunately, this has not happened, but taking into consideration the difficulties at the regional level, the difficulties at the political level, at the security level, what has happened until now has been good enough at least to try to preserve the stability of the country in light of the Syrian crisis.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

Dr. Ziyad, Rami makes a very interesting point in terms of perhaps the lack of a real focus of the political communities and focusing on the real economic and social issues because of the bigger challenges that Lebanon faces, and it's a big achievement that it has remained stable. Would you agree with that or do you think, again, that -- actually, we have to focus a little bit more on the economic and social?

MR. BAROUD: We definitely should. Again, the challenges Lebanon is facing are not new. I mean, we've been facing the same challenges for years, for

decades now. It is getting more difficult to handle today because of the turmoil we're going through. And it requires definitely more national unity in order to be able to address the issues that are becoming really hard to manage. And I think that economically and socially we'll be facing more challenges in the upcoming month and maybe years because what is being done today is only reactive. We're not being proactive. We're not planning for the coming years. We're only in a state of responsiveness and it's really the minimum required response we're providing. The government, because it is composed of -- yes, it is a one cabinet format but within you will find some turbulence even inside the cabinet, which makes things more difficult to deal with. And politically, the impact of politics will be huge on the energy sector. They are already huge on the energy sector and on the social sector, not to mention the Syrian refugees' issues that are being today raised again or newly raised. Because when you have something like 140,000 people on your borders you need to address this not

only on the humanitarian level but also on the social level and how to deal with this new fact and how to make it happen without really much damage on both Syrians and Lebanese.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

Mohamad, I was leaving you till last because I presumed you would perhaps take a different view of the performance of this government. But I wanted to slightly change the question to you. And, of course, as background, point out that since the assassination with Wissam al-Hassan in October 2012, the March 14 Movement has boycotted all government and parliamentary activities. Why has it chosen this course of action? And what does the Mustafa Movement, in particular, hope to achieve by doing this?

MR. CHATAH: Salman, before I answer this question specifically let me say that I will not list the bad things that this government has done. Obviously, one can point to reasons why it didn't do as well as some people had hoped. The point is to me that the standards and the expectations of Lebanese

have dropped so low over the years that very little is expected of any government. And this is not an exaggeration. The faith in government in Lebanon is probably at an all-time low. And it's not only this government. This is an accumulation of bad governance, of a dysfunctional system that one can trace back perhaps to the birth of Lebanon. But even if we don't go back that far, since the end of the civil war and the Syrian administration of Lebanon for 15 years and then the last 7 years of utmost dysfunctionality that is made worse by external factors but one cannot ignore the fact that the system itself as it is built is so flawed.

MR. SHAIKH: So what's the answer?

MR. CHATAH: Well, my answer is -- going back to your answer, you know, against this backdrop what we said a long time ago, certainly not this year, the year before, seeing that this government came to power in a forceful way, the prime minister of this government accepted to preside over this government after the previous one was toppled under the threat of

the use of force. He accepted to become prime minister, lest there be sectarian war. And, okay, this is a commendable thing to do but that shouldn't happen in a democracy where you step in and put together a government -- and it took him six months to put together -- just to prevent civil war. This points to a problem. And what we said many, many months ago, listen, we're lucky that Lebanon is not at war. Syria is a terrible situation. It's almost like a perfect storm for Lebanon. The Shia, the Sunni, Iran, Syria, the West and the East and all of that, we're safe so far. But let's get together and find real solutions to the system because we can't continue like this. State authority is declining. The faith of the people in the state is gone and we want a government that we can both trust; not a partisan government that we can then use to administer everyday life for the Lebanese. And let's sit together as leaders and find the flaws and solve them. We can't live off this luck of being able to withstand one shock after the other.

What happened was, however, is exactly the opposite. We've seen a number of things that pointed to our adversaries insisting on using this seemingly okay situation to protect assassins of our leaders. And I'm referring her specifically to four indicted gentlemen who are now being protected by the main party in this government, which is Hezbollah. And this was so difficult to accept, yet we dealt with this government as a normal opposition. What we saw is more of the same. There were two assassination attempts on political leaders of March 14. In one case there was also a suspect with a name and an address. The Party of God said, "No, you cannot question this gentleman." Now, this went on and on. Another assassination attempt on Mr. Zaza.

Now, the straw that broke the camel's back was the assassination of the person who was directly involved in the indictment I mentioned before, who was directly involved in uncovering an attempt by the Syrian intelligence and a Syrian ally in Lebanon to blow up dozens of leaders. This is documented. It's

not an allegation. The point is we said, okay, we cannot continue like this. We need a government that we can both trust and then we can sit together and solve this problem and not let impunity continue like this.

MR. SHAIKH: So, Mohamad, just to follow up, President Suleiman is trying to relaunch the national dialogue sessions, and yet they keep being postponed or canceled -- the last one being I think January 7th. Why isn't it that we have these dialogue sessions?

MR. CHATAH: Well, the answer is very simple to tell you the truth. The dialogue started six years ago.

MR. SHAIKH: Yes.

MR. CHATAH: And the dialogue was about Hezbollah's weapons. I mean, Hezbollah's militia. People don't like to use the term "militia" but it's an Imam state army. And over the past six years we've had I don't know how many rounds of dialogue. Really, they go in circles because Hezbollah says we're not going to tackle this baby. These arms are staying as

long as the Koran and the Bible and all of that are there. I mean, these are the words used. What we said was, well, we'll go to dialogue tomorrow if we can define the objective as simply putting all arms under state authority as an objective and we can sit together to program that transition. We have a 60,000 or 70,000 man army. It's very expensive and very professional. We have also tens of thousands of policemen. We can work out a plan to have a normal state with normal authority, normal army that is under the political authority of the government. I mean, nothing abnormal, just to be a normal state. Let's see how we can transit from the very abnormal situation we're in to that. And let's work it out together. But that's not the objective of the dialogue as far as Hezbollah is concerned. Unfortunately, their objective is to maintain the status quo using any means possible, both political and otherwise.

MR. SHAIKH: Ali, what would you say to that?

MR. HAMDAN: First of all, toppling the last government and bringing the actual one, what I would like to assure here is that it was 100 percent constitutional. There was no threat. It was one-third plus one according to the constitution and they resigned from the government. They toppled the government. This is what happened. And then the president of the Republic went for consultation and this is how the government came in. I want to make it clear.

On the other hand, I agree with most of what Mr. Chatah mentioned regarding the regime crisis in Lebanon, and it is historical. It is not one or two or three or four years. Let's admit that the Lebanese from independence, till now they failed to build up a government, to build a citizenship for the Lebanese. This is the major problem. And from time to time, with any turbulence in the region, this will affect the Lebanese communities and will make every community back up from the others because the level of trust will be almost negligible if it is not absent. And

here you can -- this will lead to here a lot of accusation from this side to the other side, like --

MR. SHAIKH: What about the dialogue now?

As Mohamad said, this is a dialogue --

MR. HAMDAN: I will reach the dialogue. I will reach the dialogue.

As he mentioned, in 2006, (inaudible) announced and he launched the dialogue in the Parliament and it was not only the topic -- it wasn't only the strategy or defense strategy in Lebanon; it was 12 topics, part of them the international tribunal. And they agreed, all the Lebanese, that we should have an international tribunal.

But after that what happened -- this is a long story -- what happened to reach or to see how the international tribunal was built up, this is a big question in Lebanon and we can talk till tomorrow and nobody will be convinced. And in Lebanon we'll have a lot. And not only in Lebanon. Some highly respected legal figures, they complain about the way this tribunal built up. So this is the question. It is

not that there is covering for four who are accused or the others because this is becoming a political issue and politicized. These are the major accusations against the tribunal.

On the other hand, economically speaking, I believe not to protect this government but in short, due to the circumstances and the turbulence that hits the region and Lebanon has a border, Syria, sea, and the enemy, Israel, 70 percent of our economy related to the road by Syria to the Arab countries. And 70 percent of our tourism comes from the Arab countries also via Syria. When this is blocked, this is blocked. The worst is coming if the situation will continue like that.

I don't want to take all the time talking about what's happening and what is the situation. Let's look for a solution. The solution for the Lebanese is to go for the dialogue, not to waste time anymore. Dialogue -- if you spend more time in dialogue, it's better than staying boycotting the government and the dialogue. This will lead to

nothing. Even for Syria, they should impose a solution because from national interest, number one, as a Lebanese, I would like to see stability in Syria. I would like to see stability according to what the Syrians wish. I have nothing to do with their demand and what they can do. This is from a Lebanese national interest first of all. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: You still didn't answer the question as to what you'd do in terms of framing the dialogue, including the agenda Isom, which has been going on for six years regarding Hezbollah's arms and the national defense strategy.

MR. HAMDAN: But this is the remaining topic and it went with the coming in 2008 electing President Suleiman, so he took to preside over the dialogue and the dialogue also went on. If you are telling me what are the results and the complaint that there is no result, it's okay. I agree.

MR. SHAIKH: As you know --

MR. HAMDAN: No solid results. Yes. But it is better to keep on talking in a positive way to find

a solution how to defend Lebanon and the Lebanese interest. No matter the time it will take, it's better. What's the other option? The other option is to have civil war. Is this an option?

MR. SHAIKH: Mohamad, one word and then I want to go to Rami.

MR. CHATAH: Yeah, just one word.

Obviously, the alternative to this kind of dialogue is good dialogue. The problem is the dialogue has become like the peace process between the Palestinians and the Israelis. This year I think it's the 20th anniversary. And the Israelis use it as a way of keeping the status quo, and worse, sending more settlers to the West Bank. I'm not drawing parallels, but the objective is not simply dialogue. The objective is to reach solutions.

MR. SHAIKH: On that it's a good point to go to Rami because Walid Jumblatt, of course, has been a strong advocate recently of a genuine national dialogue and even of a unity government. Can you explain a little bit more this third way, this third

approach?

MR. RAYESS: We are convinced that this country cannot be built by consensus. All our historic experiences, whether recent or the more -- the older experiences have shown that it is impossible to build this country based on a situation where one group wins over the other. We should have learned this from the long civil strife which we passed through. Unfortunately, I'm not fully convinced that everyone in Lebanon has reached this conclusion, so the faster we reach this conclusion, the faster we can create a situation which is more possible for us to preserve our stability in the country.

But I have a comment, if you may, on the issue of weapons.

MR. SHAIKH: Yes.

MR. RAYESS: I think you think that the faster we build a consensus on a national strategy of defense, the more we will be capable to preserve our stability and to create more capacities in confronting any possible Israeli aggression. And the slower we

reach this, the more divided we will be on the weapons issue and the weaker we will be on confronting Israel. However, this does not happen but through dialogue. We are with the theory which says that this is the ultimate right of any state to monopolize power, to monopolize weapons, and to do its job in defending its territory. This cannot be outsourced to any group.

Having said that, of course, there is a status quo. Hezbollah and Lebanon have done a good job in liberating the land. However, we should reach a stage through dialogue and there is no other way but dialogue to reach a solution for this issue. We take the example of Northern Ireland where it took several years to reach this situation, and I think --

SPEAKER: Decades.

MR. RAYESS: Decades. But I think it's in the best interest of the resistance itself or Hezbollah itself to create consensus, national consensus on the national defense issue and make use of the experience of the Hezbollah weaponry rather than to keep the division as is.

MR. SHAIKH: Do you really think that is possible right now?

MR. RAYESS: We are aware that this requests a conducive region and maybe international circumstances which are not available right now. So keeping the dialogue going not for the sake of the dialogue but for the sake of preserving the minimum possible channels open because other alternatives are very limited. We either have to go to civil war again whereby we will reach a situation where we will come to a conclusion that no one can fully win over the other. Then we will sit around the table to reach a new agreement. So let's do this shorthand and not go to more casualties.

MR. SHAIKH: Ziyad, what is possible right now?

MR. BAROUD: Very quickly.

MR. SHAIKH: Yes.

MR. BAROUD: As long as we don't have an agreement on major issues like those that we are debating over, we need to keep calm and we need to

have this national dialogue, this internal national dialogue. There has been a breakthrough. We're forgetting that we have this so-called Baabda Declaration where many things were agreed upon. The problem is implementation -- how to implement what we agree upon. The problem is how to have enough guarantees for everybody that what we agree upon would be implemented. The president is trying to offer an alternative to the time when institutions and constitutional institutions are unable to provide Lebanese people with answers. The cabinet cannot because it's perceived as being partisan. The parliament, in a couple of weeks, will be electing hopefully a new parliament. So everybody is saying that this is not my job. Someone has to do it and the national dialogue is an alternative -- a much needed alternative actually. And we would like to see what would be the other alternative. And I think we're in agreement on this. And I do believe in consensus on that level. If we don't have consensus, Lebanon, that's how it functions. That's how --

MR. SHAIKH: So you would say that those parties who are perhaps holding out need to join in this dialogue and get on?

MR. BAROUD: Definitely. I do believe that this is the only alternative that is left unless they have something else to offer. And I know that the frustration of those who are against -- that's not because they are against the dialogue per se but because they feel that they have frustration over what the implementation process has been.

MR. CHATAH: Yes, Salman, there's no question that the so-called opposition is not interested in any violence as an alternative to dialogue. Let's get this clear. However, it's a sham. It's a charade to go through something like this forever because the time we spend not really doing something about this is not a standstill. We've seen the state authority degrade. We've seen all elements of authority of the state drop from the policemen who give stickers for traffic violations, to every administration. This is not an exaggeration.

We've also seen sectarian tensions go up, and whether we like it or not there's that connotation of Hezbollah being mostly a particular confession. There's also the threat from outside, and I'll be frank here. Many of us look at Hezbollah with all due respect, and there is respect for what they did in South Lebanon and the sacrifices they accepted and so forth for the sake of Lebanon. But also, many of us see a very close, strategic link with the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is a declared one. It's not a secret. And Iran reminds us every time we try to forget that Hezbollah is part of its strategic defense.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay.

MR. CHATAH: This is declared at the highest level. What this means is just simply taking it as it is, waiting for the next war that is not decided by Lebanese or waiting for the state to disintegrate further. No, this is not an acceptable sort of state of affairs. We want solutions. We're ready to sit down and find solutions that are peaceful, that make

sense, that should make sense to all Lebanese of all confessions.

MR. SHAIKH: Sure. Thank you. And as I promised everyone we'll come to the regional dimension in just a minute. But before we do that you have parliamentary elections coming up in June. Now, there's been quintessentially Lebanese discussion on the electoral law and amending the 1960 law with respect to this. And there are a number of proposals on the table right now. I'll come to you first, Ziyad. What is the solution here in terms of having a blueprint now for these elections?

MR. BAROUD: How much time do we have?

MR. SHAIKH: You can do it in two minutes.

MR. BAROUD: No, no. I'm kidding.

You know, each time we have elections we rethink the electoral law. That's the main problem. We don't have stability. We don't have a stable legislation as far as the electoral law is concerned. And this is the major issue. And political parties and groups in Lebanon would look at the results and

accordingly they would draft the law. And in my reading, unless you have a draft law or a law, an electoral law where nobody would think that any party would have it all or lose, as long as you don't have a win-win situation you will unlikely go to elections. So what you need is a fair electoral law where both parties, both groups would believe that they would have something out of this. If you know the results before you go to elections you wouldn't -- I think wouldn't go to elections. This is how risky it is.

And when you draft the law, actually, it's an exercise that requires lots of I would say genius, I mean, it's not an easy exercise to say the least. And let us not forget that here in Doha -- in the Doha Agreement we had our elections.

MR. SHAIKH: Yes.

MR. BAROUD: I would say that we really had our elections in Doha and then we had bi-elections on the 7th of June of 2009. And then both groups were convinced each that they will get the majority, the ruling majority. Bearing in mind that we do not have

in Lebanon any -- I mean, we don't have a ruling majority. Even ruling majorities are unable to rule. That's how it is. You always need, again, consensus.

MR. SHAIKH: Anyone else want to comment on this just briefly?

MR. RAYESS: In fact, between 2008 and 2013, is the same story.

MR. SHAIKH: Yes.

MR. RAYESS: Nothing changed. The Lebanese leaders came to Doha for electoral law national-unity cabinet and presidential election. Now, we have the same three topics out on the table, on the desk of the Lebanese politicians. This is the same, in fact. But this will lead to the question about the regime crisis. Electoral law in Lebanon in every term we will face the same trouble and the same problem and the same complex. It is -- it should be clear that the solution is in the constitution. Our problem that we drop the constitution and we enjoy what the Lebanese we call an Ishjihad. We ask everyone to bring his own way how to interpret the constitution.

They will tell you this constitution, this law is unconstitutional. Show me where is the constitutional one that you vote or you elected or you went to election for? There is not.

MR. CHATAH: I will add, I think we can all agree, that Lebanon is a difficult country. It's a small country but very difficult. I mean, the diversity is legendary. The largest denomination, religious denomination is like 28 percent of the population. And these fault lines are not marginal. I mean, they are the fault lines of the region or maybe globally even if we take Islam and Christianity, Shia and Sunnis, and so forth. Also, the hills, the topography of Lebanon creates a lot of provincialism.

I think it's a mistake to base a system that's supposed to organize such a society -- to base it on what some people consider constructive ambiguity. I mean, it's proven to be very, very destructive. The elements of the system are interpreted differently by different people. Many things are left for so-called consensus. Now, what

does that mean? I mean, consensus is usually put into the system through clear, high majorities on certain things, and that usually is very clear in the constitution. More specifically, our constitution, as was rewritten in 1980, (inaudible) recognized that the 4 million Lebanese or so are individuals that are supposed to be equal -- and that's a universal principle, I suppose -- but we're also communities that are supposed to be equal regardless of numbers if you take Christians and Muslims.

Now, with the demography working against Christians, then you need a good mathematician to square that circle. How can we be equal as individuals and equal as groups while the numbers change? The constitution at that time foresaw the problem and very intelligently said you cannot solve this with one representative institution. You need two. You need a body that puts together the confessions, the denominations, a senate, in which everyone is equal in the sense that can protect its group from being overtaken by numbers, by majorities.

It provides the real protection on matters that it should protect itself against, while allowing more competition and normal representation in the house or in parliament. This was 24 years ago. For the last 24 years, as my colleague said, we've been getting into elections every four years and ignoring the real problem. And instead of fixing the disease or really dealing with the problem, we've been trying to deal with the symptoms the way we can, and everyone comes out of these compromises feeling short changed. And the system is not resilient enough to withstand shocks. And now we have multiple shocks. So the objective that we are calling for, and tonight I think some of you may listen to Mr. Saad Hariri to whom I'm advisor addressing some of these things. Sure, you can say why get into these difficult issues now? Well, every time we try to get into these difficult issues they say, well, maybe it's not an opportune time. So yes, there's a fundamental problem that needs to be addressed. Otherwise, it will pop up every four years or every two years or gradually it's

becoming a constant problem.

MR. SHAIKH: It seems to me that ever since the formation of the National Pact and the constitution, Lebanon has been organized into effectively a sectarian straightjacket. And what you referred to, even when it comes to elections, so often there's sort of a bartering and a bargaining going on in order to slice up the cake in that respect. And even when you look at issues to do with civil marriage, for example, the sectarian element or the foundations of the society very much try and reinforce that what is going on.

MR. RAYESS: Can I say --

MR. SHAIKH: Yes, Rami first and then I'll come to you.

MR. RAYESS: I would like to agree with (inaudible), of course, unless we leap into a bicameralism system, I don't think there will be a way out of this deadlock. This is the best system which could be a way out. Just like there is in the United States, the Senate, where the Congress -- I mean,

where the Senate represents the states regardless of their sizes, whereas they are proportionally represented in the House of Representatives, we could take the same idea, apply it to the confessions.

Now, what's happening now is that the absence of any compromise regarding the new electoral law should not be used as a pretext by any local or regional players who are effective in Lebanon to postpone the elections. I think at the time when the Arab region, the Arab people are putting lots of sacrifices to reach a democratic situation and hold up elections, we cannot go back. We've been doing elections despite our democratic system has been fragile and we'll all have remarks about it. We've been doing elections for the last 60 years and it is not logical that now we postpone this. So I think this should be starting point for everybody, and some of the voices which we are hearing now regarding the postponement of elections should not be used to create public opinion which society would have accepted slowly and gradually, and then we would reach a

situation where we don't reach it. Of course, there are lots of issues regarding the electoral law. How could we find a compromise between increasing the representative value of the deputies being backwards of course, because I think we should redefine this idea of what is more or better, who better represents this community, or better yet, preserves the diversity in the Lebanese community, contrary to some proposals that have been flourishing the last couple of weeks where each sect should elect its representatives. I think this takes us four centuries backwards.

MR. SHAIKH: Just one minute.

MR. HAMDAN: I agree with Rami on the importance of holding elections as scheduled, I mean, in June. But yet, time is of the essence regarding the new law because we know what the current law is about and how political parties would react if the same law is still in force. Now, it's a false problem if we think that it's only about the electoral law. It's about mechanisms on how to make diversity function. This is the main question, whether we go

for a senate or a new electoral law or anything else, it's about details. The main issue is how to deal with diversity in Lebanon. Many societies are diverse. We're not the only one. We need to find mechanisms that would ensure that our diversity is protected and that our diversity functions because it's not functioning because many Lebanese do not feel that they are represented. Many do not feel that they are part of the process and this is frustrating and this will lead to problems. We want to face this reality and to make something to really be in a better situation.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Well, so far I've taken --

MR. RAYESS: I would like to make --

MR. SHAIKH: Really have a minute.

MR. RAYESS: It is enough.

I want to add and make clear before Michel leaves regarding the bicameral system.

MR. SHAIKH: Yes.

MR. RAYESS: Let's not repeat the same

mistake since '89 till now or since '90 till now. We implement selectively Taif. It means our constitution. Now we face problem? Okay, we want to deal with the diverse in Lebanon or minorities or something, then let's tell them we will give you now, let's speak from the constitution, the senate house, and we will give them the senate house. Probably they work on next what we will have. We have a constitution Taif Agreement fully implemented. Let's say we want this Taif. Let's aim to implement our constitution from A to Z. If it's not suitable, then this is another question with it and we will say let's look for another new contract for development between the Lebanese.

MR. HAMDAN: The bigger the package the less likely to implement it.

MR. RAYESS: No, but this is always the excuse. Sometimes it's a large package. Now let's reduce it. It is constitutional. Take it and we will say let's implement this within 10 years, 20 years, but at least we know.

MR. SHAIKH: What do you mean in particular when you talk about big package just so that --

MR. RAYESS: Let's say now their advice is that we will go for the senate and we will have elections and then people will come. It's a compromise. A new compromise. This will serve probably for 40 years. The next 40 years we have another question.

Allow me just to continue.

Part of the agreement states that electoral law should be according to provinces, number one. Number two, we go to the senate. When we elect a parliament based on a national way, not on a sectarian way. But let's implement how it is stated. If it doesn't suit is now, then fine. Let's say we wait and we recall the Taif and we recall the Lebanese leaders and this is the Taif. You agree on this or you need a new social contract between us.

MR. CHATAH: I'll be frank with you.

MR. RAYESS: Please do. Please do.

MR. CHATAH: The fact is that recently, a

few weeks ago, there was this big brouhaha about somebody suggesting first half seriously that each confession will have its own deputy, sort of parliamentary federalism, which, of course, is unconstitutional as the president said. But you know how it is. Populist politics is dangerous. People caught into this. And an atmosphere of minority fears coming from what we see in Syria, what we see in Iran, many Christians and other minorities felt intimidated and their fear is justified. Actually, I can add that some of that fear is instilled for obvious reasons from across the border and some Lebanese politicians. So when this was proposed and caught on so much that even people who did not believe it's a good idea felt that they could not reject it, even the boss of my friend here who I know deep in his heart knows that it cannot work; it's dangerous. But it's difficult to oppose something that becomes popular among a big community.

So the idea now is not to glide over the elections. No, we want an election. We want election

on time, but we want also to address the fears that exist, both real and contrived, and address them in a serious way so that it's not a zero sum game. I mean, if we address the parliamentary issue as a zero sum game, every time I get something somebody loses. It's no win, and people come out of elections feeling that they're shortchanged, that it's unfair. We want fairness to be in the hands. Comfort to be in the hands.

So the package is not a hastily concocted one. It has the senate precisely to comfort denominations and religious. It has decentralization, which is another major issue that my friend Mr. Baroud has worked on and is working on because we need that, even a small country like Lebanon, for political and - - let's not treat this as a marginal event in our history. The Arab world is going through a transition. We need to go through our transition. We have been trying to transit for decades. If we simply get a compromised election and forget about those other things. I'm afraid the Arab world may surpass

us and we'll be stuck in this limbo while the world goes on.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Thank you for that.

I think you summed up sort of where we are in this section. Lebanon remains in transition and you face a number of challenges, both practical on the social side but also in terms of the entire political system and how it's coping with Lebanon and its communities and managing diversity in particular.

But let's move on to the region now. As you know particularly with regards to Syria, a disassociation policy or I heard President Suleiman saying he doesn't like that. He wants to talk more about neutrality rather than dissociation because how can you dissociate from the terrible things that are going on in Syria.

Ali, let me start with you. How do we manage now? There is a real feeling that as Syria goes from bad to worse, Lebanon inevitably is going to slip into perhaps greater conflict itself. You already have allegedly, and maybe there's some

evidence to this, various communities now actively taking part in the Syria conflict, whether it's allegedly Hezbollah and its operatives or certain Sunni fighters taking part, coming across from Lebanon. How can Lebanon possibly escape what is going on?

MR. HAMDAN: It is, first of all, the greatest threat for Lebanon from Independence Day till now for the entity as an entity is what's happening, the turbulence that's happening in the region, mainly in Syria. And we look at it in Lebanon. This threat comes from the partition between the Arab world and the Islamic world. This is the serious threat that affects Lebanon.

Now, the Lebanese with the national dialogue, at Baabda presided by the president of the Republic, we made so-called Baabda announcement. It's up to 17 points and states clearly, emphasized on the disassociation policy and they call it positive neutralism or this is -- it doesn't mean we're not neutral with the enmity with Israel. We are not

neutral between the right and wrong. But when the Arabs not only in partition but in confrontation, in direct confrontation -- and allow me to say in military confrontation -- the Lebanese, they have no other choice. We can only be affected by this case and we can affect zero. We can do zero margin. The best thing for us is to be a way to be disassociated from what's happening in the region. Because we have no influence we can do nothing.

MR. SHAIKH: But how can you be disassociated? Look what's going on. First of all, you have a 375 kilometer long border, which is not delineated. Secondly, you have now 200,000 probably plus refugees coming across which could disrupt the delicate social balance. Thirdly, as I said, you have perhaps directly Lebanese taking part in the fighting. I mean, one could go on and on in this respect. Isn't this a legacy of the fact that Lebanon hasn't been able to manage its relationship with Syria for a very long time and now it's having to face the effects of that?

MR. HAMDAN: This is part of it. And if we go back to the Independence Day, to Sykes-Picot, and to the demarcation and how the Syrians agreed and what the Lebanese provide to have Lebanon independent and separate from Syria. If we go back to this time, the Lebanese, we have the late Prime Minister Riad al-Solh still has a statute in downtown Beirut and under the statute they wrote that we don't allow Lebanon to be a passage or a place where there can be a conspiracy against Syria.

MR. RAYESS: Allow me -- passage or a place for a conspiracy against Syria.

MR. HAMDAN: Yes. This is -- we should be clear. It is a strategic issue. It is a matter for Lebanon of death and life. It is not something that could take a compromise. Lebanon, since 1948, when the Palestinians were kicked out from Palestine and the Arabs lost Palestine, we have now a Lebanon where there is a population of between 3 to 4 million at maximum. We have up to 500,000 or 450,000 Palestinians -- 500,000 Palestinians. From 1948 till

now, Lebanon cannot afford also another crisis in the region where you are saying now the figure is 370,000 but it is not the proper figure because let's be realistic. The only labor hands that we have in Lebanon, the majority of them are Syrians and there is an extraordinary relationship that are there. Probably there is up to 700,000. If you are telling me, I will tell you.

In the meantime, we never forget what the Syrians provide for the Lebanese. And mainly during the civil war and recently, in 2006, where 170,000 Lebanese went to Syria. But you can't compare the size of Lebanon. But they did everything for the 170. But this is to confirm --

MR. SHAIKH: Let me -- sorry -- I apologize for interrupting. I know in years of discussions that we've had how sensitive and how much you feel that we have to deal with this situation in a very careful manner, and I think this is the point that you're making even now in terms of the relationships here. I get that. As you respond, Mohamad, the Sunni

community is increasingly involved in Syria. And some would say that there are clear lines now in that respect. And that is also drawing Lebanon into this.

MR. CHATAH: Let me first make a very, very important distinction between relations between Lebanon and Syria or Lebanese and Syrian people, and the attitude and the lengths to the regime in Syria. These are two separate matters. And you will find in Lebanon those who are closest to Syria socially and ethnically or whatever you want to call it, are the foremost adversaries of the Syrian regime. And for a good reason or let's say for an understandable reason if you don't want to call it good or bad. Some of these regions, say in North Lebanon, were subjected to the same ruthlessness that you find in Syria cities today only 25 years ago.

Now, people should remember their children, their fathers, their brothers. Few go to places in the north. And not only in the north they tell you stories about Special Forces bombarding, kidnapping, killing. Now, this is a fact; not a rumor. Also,

other communities outside the north, Christian and Muslim, have been subjected to the power of the Syrian Special Forces. So when we talk about feelings of Lebanese and not only Sunni, many Lebanese, it's because of that, not because they like to take a position on some other country.

Now, those who feel otherwise, who support the Syrian regime, frankly are by and large those who have a strategic link with the Syrian regime. And let's not kid ourselves. There is a Syrian-Iranian-Hezbollah alliance declared. I mean, this is not a rumor. And it's obviously the case that Hezbollah will feel that the survival of the current regime is critical for its own posture in Lebanon. So we have a very divided country. And many in the middle who maybe have strong feelings as well but maybe not as strong, but the point is today I would say a vast majority of Lebanese, even those who feel very strongly for or against do not want Lebanon to be directly involved.

MR. SHAIKH: Mutual assured destruction.

MR. CHATAH: Well, they know that getting directly involved, as my friend Ali said, is not going to make or break in Syria but it's going to invite all kinds of bad things. And that's why we, on our part, have not only declared that we want no direct business in Syria, but we went as far as saying the Lebanese Army should deploy all along the border and do what it needs to do, even if it needs the support -- technical support or any support from the international community such as the United Nations. I mean, if the Lebanese Army feels that it needs more support to monitor the border, let's do it. Of course, Hezbollah objected to that for other reasons that I will not get into here. The point is we do not want as March 14, as future movements, as strongly as we feel about the Syrian regime, we do not want to be directly involved. Neither do we want Hezbollah or anyone else to send troops. And we see the same reports. And frankly, we're concerned.

Now, in Baabda there was a declaration. That's months ago. That's like in June. And that's

many months ago. Last June there was a declaration, not only of dissociation with what's happening in Syria. They are taking positions at the U.N., the Arab League, but also staying away and neutral towards regional conflicts and alliances. And of course --

MR. SHAIKH: Mohamad, with all due respect, that agreement seems to be --

MR. CHATAH: But that's the point. Exactly. That's the point, Salman. This came out of the dialogue. We worked a lot to have this documentation. It's not a secret. We talked to the president and the president's men all the time because we want the same things. I mean, supposedly the whole country wants to protect itself. This declaration of neutrality is historic and should be in the constitution. Now, what happened afterwards? Declarations by Iran and actions by Hezbollah that affirmed the strategic military alliance. Now, you're right. So what do we do with these declarations? We need to put them in place, and that's why we need a holistic approach that covers the domestic issues, like senate, like decentralization,

but also the security issues because we can't depend on the luck of the Lebanese or the Irish or whatever to stay out of harm's way.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. I know this gentleman wants to ask a question. I assure you I will come to you. If I don't, I'll buy you dinner. But we'll go for a little bit longer if you don't mind and then I will open it. No, I will come back to you. I will come back to you. Thank you. I will come back to you, sir. Thank you.

We can't have a discussion on what's going on right now without talking about what just happened in the last 48 hours or so with regards to apparently Israel's involvement. And if you read the Israeli news reports as well, there is a sense that they are having to get involved because of the transfer of arms across the Syrian-Lebanese border. And in fact, quoting one of sort of the respected correspondents, he says that we are perhaps closer today than at any point since 2006 to a new conflict between Israel and Lebanon.

Ziyad, could you comment on this increasingly complex environment where we see the Israelis perhaps also entering the fray?

MR. BAROUD: We will have to rely on Mr. Moratinos' expertise in that regard.

I know that we've been facing the same threats for decades. This is not new. This is maybe a signal. Maybe this is meant to be a signal for something else. At no time aggressions were declared previously. We always had sort of surprises. That's how it happened in '82. That's how it happened in 2006. I don't believe that Israelis would send signals before going (inaudible). That's how I see it.

Now, internally, as far as Lebanese people are united in this -- on this, it's always better for Lebanon. And we need to be united when an external threat comes from anywhere. I mean, wherever it comes from we need to be united. And I think that the Syrian situation today is making things more difficult, and the fact that we're in a way trying to

absorb the impact and effects of what is happening in Syria makes Lebanon more fragile and more vulnerable to address any -- that's what the perception could be. But actually, I believe that Israel is not in a position to impose anything in the coming future.

MR. RAYESS: I think Israel -- it never seems that Israel could do any new aggression on Lebanon. This has been historically such as Ziyad has said. And this should be another incentive for us as Lebanese to increase our efforts to reach consensus on a national defense strategy. And I would like to see it as such. Definitely, it's difficult to comment directly now on what has happened because there are conflicting reports, but whatever is the situation, whether Israel will join the conflict or will start a new aggression on Lebanon which is always a possibility, taking into consideration that Israelis have never had any -- they were never fond of the Lebanese fragile but democratic and diverse experience which is contrary to their unilateral (inaudible).

MR. SHAIKH: But what if there are arms

coming across from Syria to Lebanon?

MR. RAYESS: Well, this has to be checked. And as we said earlier, despite the fact that the Baabda Declaration is a very important declaration, we should try to reiterate our commitment to this declaration, whether it is in regards to any participation of Lebanese parties inside the struggle, inside the Syrian territories, or whether it is as well the (inaudible) plane that has been launched by Hezbollah. But regardless of whether we are fond of that technically, technologically or not, but I think we should all as Lebanese stick more to the Baabda Declaration because this could make our internal situation stronger.

MR. CHATAH: Well, Salman, we still don't know if this is like what the U.S. says, a hit on a convoy coming towards Lebanon with some sophisticated weapons or an R&D center as the Syrian government has declared today. Either way, we cannot but be totally against such acts. Frankly, basically, all Arabs, including the vast majority of Lebanese, feel the same

way about any strike by Israel against any part of the Arab world, be that Gaza or Lebanon or Syria. And this is not something that any Syrian is going to cheer. If the Syrians think that by doing so they will get some credit with the Syrian people who are trying to liberate themselves, then they're damn wrong. We don't know the facts what concerns us as Lebanese, even though we're also concerned as Arabs about the strike is that Lebanon not be dragged into this war in any kind of way, whether in the form of fighters going to western Syria to fight along the Syrian Army or amassing weapons that are safer to be kept in Lebanon. Either way, we don't think, first, we don't think it's wise. It puts us in harm's way. It goes against the declarations and it's something that the large majority of Lebanese would oppose. And I would say -- Ali, you can correct me -- I think a large majority of the Shiite community would be against. They have perhaps mixed feelings about Syria. Some feel that the regime should go and some maybe they think it should stay because Hezbollah says

so. But dragging Lebanon or bringing these types of weapons, putting Lebanon in harm's way is something that most Lebanese, including most Shia would be against.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. Let me ask you a final question before I throw it open. You alluded a little bit at some point to the role that the international community could play in terms of technical assistance in the past on the border. What should be the role of the international community now? What support can they give to Lebanon in these very perilous times? And here I specifically ask with regards to regional actors, the Gulf States, as well as the United States.

Start with you, Ali.

MR. HAMDAN: I want to go back to --

MR. SHAIKH: No, let's (inaudible).

MR. HAMDAN: No, this is -- they are related. They are related because we ended up as if we are giving the Israelis the right to -- no, not us. No, no, no. Don't misunderstand me. Wait Mohamad. I agree with you and all what you have mentioned.

One thing I would like to say here is that the Lebanese -- the Shia in Lebanon, they are Lebanese and they are with what is called Baabda announcement and they are part of the national dialogue and they have agreed, number one.

Number two, Lebanon has Resolution 1701. Till now --- and you lived part of that in Lebanon, Salman, 1701 till now is cessation of (inaudible). And the Israelis daily, daily, daily violate this resolution and the international community overfly, by sea, on the ground, everything. They consider this is their right and the international community, they are watching. The highest that we can receive from the Security Council is we ask both parties to exercise patience. This is not a policy. There is an international resolution respective. They promise that within seven days they can get a cease fire. It is seven years and we are still with cessation of authority. When I said that we ended up as if the Israelis have the right to fly all over, they are our enemies and this is their policy, Salman, sorry, not

from now; from 1948 and before until now. This is how they took Palestine. And this is where the Arabs should be aware and they should wake up and they should see that the Israelis are waiting for the right moment until the power that belongs to the Arabs is destroyed. They want to check now whether Syria, after two years, if it is destroyed or not yet so they can join again. And they will do the same in other places.

MR. SHAIKH: Specifically, in just half a minute, what can the international community -- other than to enforce resolutions, but here we, of course, have other resolutions like 15159 as well, but aside from that, what is it that the international community should do with regards to stabilizing the situation? Is it on the refugee issue?

MR. HAMDAN: In one word they should not implement a double standard policy in the region.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay.

MR. HAMDAN: Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Ziyad.

MR. BAROUD: There is something that they need to do and there is something they definitely need to refrain from doing. What they need to refrain from doing is redrawing the region. We've been hearing a lot about a new Sykes-Picot. Sykes-Picot is a line in the sand as Jeff Smart put it in his book. It's a line in the sand that generated states and borders.

MR. SHAIKH: Let me get you right here. Are you saying that the international community might be working towards this or should prevent it?

MR. BAROUD: I'm saying they should prevent it and refrain from doing anything in this regard because we're hearing a lot about this, especially in Syria. And I think that what we witnessed in Iraq should be a lesson for all to avoid any adventure in this --

MR. HAMDAN: Another word is they promise us with creativity in chaos and we are in and a greater Middle East or a new Middle East and we are in. If this is the policy --

MR. BAROUD: I'm just trying to say that

what we have are states, independent states. They have their problems, internal problems, yes. In Lebanon, in Syria, everywhere. But let us try if we're talking about democracy and Arab Spring and Arab Awakening, yes, we'll do it ourselves. So the international community should help and support in this regard in this direction, not in any other, whatever it is.

Number two, when we have such difficult impact and effects on the humanitarian level, something should be done. You cannot leave it to the Arab world. You cannot leave it to the Arab League alone. Yes, we had this Kuwait meeting or summit two days ago. Lebanon is calling for \$370 million for refugees. It's not a huge amount. I mean, when you see what is being paid in Syria in terms of ammunitions and weapons. This is not for Lebanon. This is for the borders. This is to absorb the humanitarian problems we're facing.

MR. SHAIKH: And those borders should remain open?

MR. BAROUD: No, but you know, the borders issue goes back to maybe to Sykes-Picot again. And we started something with the international community years ago who were in the same cabinet when we started to seriously take it into consideration and to implement a system because we don't have even the system. So yes, it's feasible, but can you do it now with all the problems we're facing? The Lebanese Army is deploying. The Lebanese Army is making great efforts. But again, it is not something that can be - - we cannot deal with this situation only on the ground. It should be dealt with also on upper levels.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. So one practical suggestion regarding the humanitarian side. Of course, Rami.

MR. RAYESS: In addition, of course, to the humanitarian side which I think is very necessary for Lebanon to be able to deal with this challenge. I think the shortest way or the best way -- it might not be the shortest; it might be the most difficult way -- but the best way to preserve Lebanese civility vis-à-

vis the Syrian crisis which we as Lebanese are divided on how to look at it. Some people consider it a revolution. Others consider, you know, the conspiracy theory. But I think the best way is to try to build consensus one way or another in the international community regarding the Geneva Accords because this is the best way to regain some sort of solution for Syria. Otherwise, not only Syria will be in a difficult situation; Lebanon as well would be in a difficult situation. Of course, the disassociation policy and the Baabda Declaration have been up till now in a certain way or another helpful in preserving a sort of civility but this is a very fragile state.

MR. SHAIKH: Excuse me for interrupting, but Mr. Jumblatt has taken a pretty straightforward view here with regards to the Syrian regime. And a very emotive set of actions in that respect as well. Does that square with how the Geneva Communiqué currently lies in terms of the --

MR. HAMDAN: I think one of the reasons why the Geneva Communiqué has not had the chance to be

applied is because there are different interpretations at the international level of how to look at it, especially the transitioning period, whether it should be with Bashar al-Assad or without Bashar al-Assad. So without resolving this misinterpretation between the different international players, I think we will remain --

MR. SHAIKH: So for you with or without?

MR. HAMDAN: No, I think without is the best solution. I don't think the Syrian people could accept it, but again, I would say from a practical point of view, if the international community fails to build consensus on this issue, the issues will remain as such. It will aggravate further.

MR. CHATAH: (Inaudible) although I agree with a lot of what's being said --

MR. SHAIKH: I want to open it up to the floor.

MR. CHATAH: I'm one of those who have come to accept the fact that the influence of the international community is not what some people think.

It has waned for many reasons that are not to be discussed in this forum, but I think there's a lot of exaggeration what the international community can do.

Having said that, we cannot but see the fact that the international community is divided on Syria, and the side that is obstructing a transition is Russia, unfortunately. And we have, of course, good relations with Russia. We talk to the Russians a lot. We understand what they say are the reasons for standing up to the west, if you wish, and their fears of Islamic -- the rise of Islamic fundamentalism which Islam is like 15 percent of Russia and the southern border are all Russian Republic, so maybe they have reasons in addition to their competition with the west, but the longer it takes or the longer this situation lasts in Syria, the threat is for everyone, including Russia. Now, is it going to be an easy transition even if Russia agrees to a Security Council resolution? No, it's not an easy situation, but it can be done. Certainly force cannot do it and should not do it. I think to engage in a war, this is not

Libya and I think direct intervention is not expected.

Now, should the world assist the rebels or the people depending on how you look at it? Well, that's a controversial issue, but clearly when we watch jet fighters bombing cities there is something wrong with this when the world is standing still. Now, what can the world do about it? Well, I suppose Russia has a special role because maybe we should not expect Iran to play that role of telling the al-Assad regime to hold the line. That's why we think Russia has a critical role and maybe we'll see that played out in the near future.

And Lebanon, well, one thing that we, as opposition have called on the government to do if needed is get the national technical assistance to monitor the water. That's one thing. But this was opposed strongly by Hezbollah by the way. The other thing that the international community can do is reaffirm and internalize and act upon the neutrality concept. And this is a big step for Lebanon to declare its neutrality outside our state of war with

Israel. The president, when we made that declaration, went that declaration to the Security Council. Why? Because it's not only about Lebanon's neutrality towards others; it's asking the world not to use the Lebanese theater for their conflicts. And Arabic (speaking in Arabic) we don't want others to use Lebanon as a staging ground or as a front or as an advanced army, if you wish. That's something that the Lebanese, at least in words, have agreed upon and we believe this should be pushed further because no matter what the state of Lebanon says, if the world wants to treat us as fair game or the fragile theater that can be used, we will still be in trouble. And that's been our history since the late '60s. And yes, the international community has to help us achieve that. They will not do it alone. We have to accept that. We have to act upon it but it's an international issue as well.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

Okay. I'm going to open up the floor for some questions. If you could keep them brief because

I want to take as many questions as possible. If you could also just mention your name or your affiliation that would be great. I will start with this gentleman here. Yes.

SPEAKER: Salman, I have a question to you, not to the panel.

MR. SHAIKH: Yes, please.

SPEAKER: Why Hezbollah is not represented today? And I am no proponent of Hezbollah; don't misunderstand me. I think it's more to keep it on the political lines rather than on the religious lines, and I think everybody is talking. Sorry about that question.

MR. SHAIKH: Sure. Sure.

SPEAKER: And again, I'm not a proponent of Hezbollah by all means.

MR. SHAIKH: Sure.

SPEAKER: With all due respect.

MR. SHAIKH: Let's come to this gentleman here. Yes.

SPEAKER: I would like to give you the point

of view of a simple Lebanese citizen, the challenges of living and the problem is that all its challenge for the past two years is that there has always been a passage and a bridge for others. If you see Lebanese from all parts of Lebanon you see that they represent all the other peoples that passed by this country. You can find different faces, different kinds of people, which makes (inaudible) so many people, other people passed by. Most of them are Arabs from Arab origins and there are pure Arabs. The problem is that Syria wants them to be emirates but that wasn't to be opposite and Cairo wants them to be Egyptian. And now last thing, we find that (inaudible) wants to put us under the Islamic Republic. The culture of Lebanon is a civilized one but France wants Lebanon to be French and England and America wants it to be American. And the Russians want it to be Slavic. And Italians want Lebanon to be Italian and so on.

Since 1943-1944, big lies continued in Lebanon. This lie continues to create wars and there will be so many agreements about it but nevertheless,

and then the other agreements are the renewals. The problem of Lebanon is that it's rulers are merchants. I am a citizen of Lebanon and I tell you that our rulers are merchants. They want even to steal everything and they don't have their hands clean. That's why they pushed the country to the west. So how can they build a country?

The question is if the Lebanese don't unite their ranks and solve their problem like the Americans did, like George Washington who unified the people. They wanted to make him a king. He said no, I don't want to be a king ruler. No, let's be a republic. And he made this law and refused to be a king and that's what pushed America to be the first in the world. Lebanese should also reach a constitutional solution, even if they are all (inaudible) or all orthodox. But to be it they should be clean. They should accept (inaudible) otherwise we will continue to have war one year after the other. I am a simple Lebanese citizen and I'm here by chance. I have hope that Lebanon will be better.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Thank you for your comments.

Please, if we can now keep it to questions, and ideally questions to the panelists that would be great.

SPEAKER: We heard the dialogue that was really good but we heard the statement that Lebanese failed like since 1940 to build a state and to make a nation and so forth. Basically, no, they did not fail. When basically (inaudible) came into power he made a lot of institutions and laws that are still implemented until now and they reshaped Lebanon profoundly. Later on, when later Rafic Hariri came in the 1990s, he also built a lot of infrastructure and gave hope to this nation. If you look around you in the world you would see from the GPL (inaudible) and the Mosh Project, through France and (inaudible) till you reach Japan. Very brilliant people, and here in Doha as well. So basically, our problem is neither in the religions nor in confessions but basically it's in the minds of people who listen to leaders without

really thinking about what these people are telling them. If we take the example of His Excellent Ziyad Baroud who was kind of independent in the previous government, he was fought by everyone though he tried to maybe stay on an equal status.

So basically, the question for the panel is if you don't agree upon (inaudible) law in the coming one month, what would happen to Lebanon bearing in mind that playing in any of what you would call the fraction line and the representation would have dramatic consequences. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much.

I'll go around. I'll come back. The gentleman at the back here.

SPEAKER: My question to Mr. Ali Hamdan, why till now after seven years of independence of Lebanon the population of Lebanese are still confidential? You mentioned that the Lebanese are 3 to 4 million; you are not sure about it. The Lebanese counting the Palestinians, counting the Syrians, but they don't count themselves. I think you (inaudible) Lebanon.

So you know that if this is true there are between 3 or 4 million. That means the Lebanese have more cars than people. So why it is still confidential the population of Lebanese.

MR. MORATINOS: Thank you to Salman and Brookings Doha Center and thank you to my dear friends. Now you can convey to my friends that your (inaudible) superiors, no? Or my greetings. And I think we've been listening to all of your with great interest. I learned a lot even if I'm not following on a daily basis what is going on in Lebanon you can imagine that I follow. And I've been extremely happy to have your latest assessment of the Lebanese situation. I will make three reflections, short ones, and one question.

The first one, to give a little optimism, of course in politics now we don't have a memory. We try to live on a daily basis what are the crises; what is the situation? But you will allow me to say after dealing with Lebanon within 20 years, when I go back now to Lebanon when I'm listening to all of you now

I'm optimistic. What is the Lebanon of today? Can we compare Lebanon today with just 5 years ago, 10 years ago, 15 years ago? I should now thank all of you and thank the prime minister, thank this bound agreement that you succeed not to get involved in the Syrian turmoil. Was it an easy issue? It was normal in the previous years. Can you imagine four years ago, three years ago that what is going on in Syria they were not totally involved, engaged, suffering even more that you are, of course, affected today. So with all my respect and my (inaudible) have been following all of you during the last decades. Today the situation in Lebanon is much better. First reflection.

Second reflection. The regional situation, the Syrian brutal tragedy and crisis it's good or bad for Lebanon? You know, when I was the foreign minister (inaudible) international community and they say what is going on in Lebanon is all right because it is international interference. Why Moratinos you are pro-Bashar or Syria? Why you are engaging with Syria? That's a hand of Syria. That is, you know,

the influence of the Americans; that's the influence of Hezbollah. Well, I think still there is some influence, important one, and you mentioned already from my point of view the Iranian influence with Hezbollah, but with all my respect, due to the tremendous crisis in Syria and whatever will help you will happen in Syria that al-Assad regime will collapse finally and confront the future with hope and with a different view. You have for the first time a story called time to take your destiny by your own, not influenced by others. You have the possibility to decide by your own, not with the influence of the others.

Third reflection. If that is the case, why do the Lebanese political not really have this consensus or this leadership or this responsibility to move forward to create a new Lebanon?

So the question. You will be ready to have this historical responsibility to think that what is going on in the Arab world can start in Lebanon; that you should not go to (inaudible) or to Doha; that you

can have your own dialogue in Beirut and show to the Arab world that communities -- either Shia, Sunni, Christian, Modernites -- can live together (inaudible) of the Arab world? Because you can. We fought international community influence. I think the best answer to you, Salman, hands off of Lebanon forever. They don't need anybody. It's your responsibility. So that's my question. Are you ready? Because if not we will continue and we will see it again, again, again, the Lebanese crisis.

MR. SHAIKH: I think it's a good point to stop and ask you that question. Are you ready? There is change coming. Are you ready? Please.

MR. HAMDAN: Allow me first to reply on the question that was --

MR. SHAIKH: Let's do that at the end.

MR. HAMDAN: Okay, great.

I highly appreciate His Excellency's opinion, and probably the way we conduct the dialogue made us busy not to cover this point but with all my colleagues this is what we were discussing; that this

is the time that Lebanon should take this opportunity where everybody is busy outside. Very unfortunately it was a bad time but this is an opportunity for Lebanon to put their hands together, to join hands together with a national dialogue and to go for a serious reconciliation and by then they can manage to build up a state and a citizenship. And then Lebanon will be as every Lebanese wish to be. We will count ourselves as Lebanese; not as Shia, Sunni, Jews and Modernites and orthodox and others. Then this is an opportunity. It is any opportunity. That's why if you notice that with the dialogue we are, with our discussion we are looking and pushing hard for the dialogue. This is the only solution. If it takes time it is better than wasting the time with nothing.

MR. SHAIKH: Mohamad and then --

MR. CHATAH: A couple of comments. I believe strongly that the vast majority of Lebanese want to get there, what Mr. Moratinos suggested, and it's only natural. People have the same aspirations, the same ambitions. They have families and they want

to send their children to school and they want them to graduate from college and stay in their own country, find jobs, and do what other countries do, what other societies do, the normal thing. So yes, people want that but do they know how to get there? The answer is no. I don't think they have yet internalized a roadmap.

Second, and this is even more problematic, more difficult. I think the current system, the way it's implemented is filled with moral hazards that drives people to being sectarian, to doing the wrong thing, to not want to do the right thing because it's more beneficial to do the wrong thing. It's like everyone is standing up in a stadium trying to see better. Of course everybody gets tired. Nobody sees any better but there's no mechanism to make them sit down. There is a desire; no one has a roadmap.

What I started with a little while talking about the sectarian element in the system was one element but an important one because Lebanon is divided along sectarian lines and sectarian sentiments

are fueled not in a theological way. Most of the really sectarian people who behave in obnoxious sectarian ways have nothing to do with religion. Actually, they're more distant from their religion than others who are not as hostile to other confessions. The moral hazard exists throughout from the top down and the administration, you have to act sectarian to protect yourself. You have to affirm your allegiance to make sure that your colleague is not promoted before you. You need to do that to convince your constituency to elect you, to protect you or the community from other confessions. Why? Because the contract is not explicit. We have a very ambiguous, very unclear lines of demarcation of what is the social contract among groups in Lebanon. When you have diversity, which is great, and diversity has made us a little bit country in many ways but it is also a curse because you need to find a way of keeping these people. Not only keeping them together. And I'm not satisfied by the fact that we're still one country and doing relatively well. Today, Lebanon has

a per capita income of \$10,000. And my own back of the envelope calculation, had it continued in a normal way in the past two, three decades, it should be at 30. The same as Cyprus, Spain, and yes, Israel. It's one-third of that and we're still -- if you go to many parts of the country it's fourth world, not first world. Fourth world. Lebanon ranks one of the lowest countries in many, many, many criteria of social development, infrastructure. No jobs in Lebanon. Literally, no one graduates from a good school in Lebanon and stays there. This is a fact. Four hundred thousand people. That's like one-third of the labor force is in the region. The point is --

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) politicians.

MR. CHATAH: No, I think it's not the politicians with all due respect. The system drives everyone. Even if you remove them, the ones that take over -- and this is the moral hazard. There are flaws in the system that need to be straightened out.

MR. SHAIKH: So who corrects that? If it's a moral hazard at all levels of society --

MR. CHATAH: I'll come to that. The remarks of His Excellency, someone who knows our country so well, I'm optimistic. I've become optimistic. So thank you. But again, what he said puts responsibility on us Lebanese. Traditionally, the political class is held responsible traditionally and it should be responsible. And it should be held responsible for the choices all political groups and even individuals would take.

But let me add that we need the civil society to be responsible as well or to be held responsible. We have a very dynamic and active civil society in Lebanon. What is the civil society doing in order to get ready? The civil society should put some pressure on the political class. Civil society groups that are active and dynamic should be part of the process. They would be part of the choice we're making for our future, and I think this is where it should start.

What if we don't go to elections? The answer is very simple. The answer is another

question. What if we don't go to elections, who guarantees that the system will not collapse? And if it does collapse, who guarantees that we will get another system and at what price? The question is not only about Muslims and Christians. It's not only about Shia and Sunni. It's about political minorities. Christians are not minorities in Lebanon but there are political minorities. There are women and you that are not being able to be part of the process. This is the good question to ask and this is what we need to address. What is happening in neighboring Syria is something that we need to address as well in terms of consequences. What would we do afterwards when things are calmer? What would be --

SPEAKER: Perhaps (inaudible).

MR. CHATAH: If the regime collapsed, what would we do? This would be a new starting point and the Lebanese people should deal with this new reality not the way they are dealing actually.

MR. SHAIKH: I note, and I'll ask you, Rami, as well on this, I note that there was -- as the Arab

Awakenings and the uprisings took off, in Lebanon, too, there was an effect. There were anti-sectarian marches and civil society but it didn't take root.

MR. CHATAH: Maybe it will. Maybe it will.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. Yes, Rami, quick, please.

MR. RAYESS: Although I disagree with the fact that regional players are not intervening anymore in Lebanon or at least are intervening with a lesser extent, the proof is the -- I don't know if the audience is aware of this -- Imam Luqman plot which was about to explode in Northern Lebanon and do a lot of things which was orchestrated by the Syrian regime despite the Syrian crisis which they are passing through now, they had the time to plot something for Lebanon. But this does not eliminate the fact that we are truly now in a position as Lebanese to try to increase the possibilities of taking the initiative ourselves. And this cannot happen neither by boycotting nor by remaining out of dialogue. Although we have no ceilings of expectation regarding dialogue,

national dialogue, I do not think there is another way out. Plus, of course, the issue of reforming the political system itself, part of which could be what we have discussed earlier abolishing political confessionalism, trying to provide additional safeguards and guarantees for different political groups in Lebanon so that not any group would have the feeling that they have been losing, they have been ousted in one way or another.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much.

Do you want to quickly answer that question and then I'll ask the question on the population.

MR. BAROUD: As a matter of fact, when we said the Lebanese or the Palestinians, between 400,000 and 500,000 and the Lebanese, 3 to 4 million, there is no proper figure about the Lebanese. The Lebanese all over the world, up to 14 million. In Brazil by itself, between 7 to 9 million.

SPEAKER: No, we're talking about --

MR. BAROUD: The Lebanese living also, there is no -- there is one million candidates or one

million membership with electricity of Lebanon. This can tell you probably but some Lebanese they have two or three houses. This is how (inaudible). I didn't mean anything when I said the Syrians are more and we have the Palestinians between 400,000 to 500,000.

This has nothing to do with --

SPEAKER: (off mic)

MR. BAROUD: Very quickly because it happens -- I know a bit about figures and numbers when I was at the Ministry. We do have figures and numbers. We know exactly how much we are, I mean, how many we are. But we don't know -- we don't have an official census. But I mean, yes, we know exactly how many voters we have and how many Lebanese citizens are registered. Lebanese abroad or people of Lebanese origin, that's another story I won't go through.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. I'll take a couple more questions.

Mr. Jafari. And again, if I can ask you to keep to questions, please. I really would like to fit in a couple.

MR. JAFARI: I think Lebanon is involved in the Syrian affairs against arming the rebels in Syria. I agree or I oppose an economic boycott on Syria. All of what is happening in Syria impacts Lebanon seriously. The problem with Lebanon is they have a (inaudible) Hezbollah as a military organization, not a political party. And nobody should be allowed to impose their influence. And Lebanon used to be respected in Lebanon but the (inaudible) went against the Lebanese and they went against the Christians. They were kicked out. Then they kicked out the Jews. I met two Lebanese fighting each other using guns in a parking lot. They are violent people; now they should be civilized (speaking in Arabic).

MR. SHAIKH: The gentleman at the back there, Justin, and then we'll come to these gentlemen here.

MR. ALEXANDER: Hello. Justin Alexander. Some time in the near future, hopefully sooner rather than later, Syria may come to its own Taif moment and I'd be interested to know from each of

you naturally Syrians will look to Lebanon as some kind of model and experiment. What positive things should they take from the Lebanese experience when they're building the foundations for new societies and what should they avoid from the Lebanese model?

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. The gentleman there.

SPEAKER: My name is (inaudible), employee at Al-Jazeera English.

My question is to Mr. Ali and Mr. Mohamad. How seriously do you take the threat of a growing grassroots-based Sunni movement like in the example of Mr. Hassir and (inaudible)? Lots of reports I've read seem to suggest a lot of young angry Sunni men are arming themselves in Lebanon. So to both of you, how seriously do you take this threat? Do you feel you might be outlined one day if the sectarian tension continues in Lebanon by the grassroots movements on the street of (inaudible) and Tripoli and other places?

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. The gentleman next

to you. Question?

SPEAKER: I have a quick question to the three gentlemen on that side. From Mr. Ali.

I'm a Lebanese Christian. My name is George, so I'm not saying I am a Lebanese Christian. I have a feeling deep inside as a Lebanese Christian. The constitution of Taif is 50 percent Christian and 50 percent Muslims, which means 64 percent of our parliament is Christian from Catholic to orthodox to everybody, and the other 64 are the other Muslim party. Since one month to month until this moment we open the television in Lebanon, we have a lot of political talk shows. I didn't see one person from Imam or Hezbollah or 14th of March, Hariri. Even the party of Jumblatt saying that we will release the Christians to vote for themselves. I'm not really orthodox agreement because the 64 Christians into parliament, more than 50 percent comes with the votes of the Jews and the Sunnites and the Shiite. We want from you to hear that you have to release us. Otherwise, we will go back to war. Not me, but this

is the feeling inside of the people. And this is very important. Even President Hariri didn't say that the whole fight now between the whole parties is who's going to get more votes from the Christians. And that's how we should proceed in the parliament. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. Last comment here. Question, and then we'll come back. Please.

SPEAKER: Thank you. I want to ask about two mini challenges for Lebanon. Debt problem. You never mentioned the debt problem. The second, to challenge what I mean, I mean the gas -- the petroleum gas in the Mediterranean Sea because this is a common problem with us and corruption in Lebanon, I mean, these are three challenges common to Egypt or the Arab Spring. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Thank you very much.

We have -- yes, we have about five minutes.

SPEAKER: Free for all?

MR. SHAIKH: Yes, but you don't have to

answer every single one. You can choose.

First of all, regarding Lebanon as a model for Syria.

MR. BAROUD: No, I'll pick another one. There was one question on the Christian representation from the gentleman.

MR. SHAIKH: And on the Sunni side as well.

MR. BAROUD: Yes. Well, the point is yes, we want everyone, including the Christians, to feel that they are represented fairly. Let's start with this. One way of doing it is to draw up the districts in such a small way that most of the constituency electing would be from one denomination. March 14 Christians have proposed one that divides up the small country into 50 districts into the 26. Mr. Hariri and others supported it. This was the March 14 proposal. But, of course, others are opposed to it for good reasons. I'm not saying that this is necessarily a good one.

But the point is -- and I want to interject this point -- the weight of the Christian influence

and decision-making is very important, and we want Lebanon to be equal, to have equal shares in decision-making, but not necessarily to have the Christian voter vote for Christians or the Catholic for Catholic and the Shia for Shia. I would propose, for example adding more Muslims to the Christian districts because I want the Christians to influence the selection of Muslims and vice versa. The point is, the Greek Orthodox law makes Lebanon into a different kind of society. Yes, okay.

Debt and gas. I just want to get into that. Yes. Debt is a problem. Fortunately, it has declined from 180 percent of GDP to 138 percent. When I was minister for two years, the sharpest decline, but that's because we didn't have any budget and that's the bad side of it. But this is a serious matter. One reason why we're able to deal with this high debt Lebanese here and in Dubai and Riyadh, they keep flooding Lebanese banks with money so that our banking sector today is like 320 percent of GDP, the highest in the world.

Now, gas is coming up. You mentioned corruption, and this is very important, talking about moral hazard. I, for one, have been saying recently, and many others, that Lebanon in the next seven years will reach two things. First, it will reach its first centennial. 1920, it will be 100 years for Lebanon as we know it has been formed, 100 years, centennial. Around the same time, the gas money is supposed to be flowing. It takes about six or seven years for the money to show up. Unless we fix the governance issue, unless we make Lebanon and its administration, political and administrative, good enough so that we give that administration our money, my proposal is to distribute the money to the Lebanese people equally. It's their money. It's not politicians' money. It's not even the government's money. This is a depletable asset that will be sold. So the shareholders who are equal shareholders should receive their share. That's done, by the way, in Alaska and a few other places and I've written about this.

I was in London yesterday and the Chatham

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House and this was brought up. We need the next seven years to make us stay as a country but also as a successful country, and also if there is money it will not perpetuate that government. We have seen Arab countries stay -- some Arab regimes stay longer than they would have had it not been for the oil money that kept them going with bad government. And what we saw later is a destruction of money that belonged to the people. We don't want Lebanon to go through more years of bad government, abuse of money, and corruption.

MR. SHAIKH: If I could ask you to address the question of Lebanon as a model for Syria. Syrian-type of anything else.

MR. RAYESS: I think, of course, the Lebanese experience, especially in the Taif Accord should serve as a role model probably for us Syrians. How will the Syrians go about doing this? I'm not sure, especially that the nature of the conflict in Lebanon has been drastically different from the nature of conflict which is going on now in Syria. And I'm

not sure whether anything could be revocable in Syria, especially in what regards the fate of the regime, the future fate of the regime. Of course, this is a big question and I think that it's feasible to do a session about it. I think it's a good -- comparing the Lebanese and Syrian crisis, something which is very interesting.

Just allow me since we're running out of time to just give a remark for Mr. Hassan. I do not think that the fact that you saw two Lebanese fighting in a parking lot makes the whole Lebanese people uncivilized. And I'm sure that you have -- you meant it in a positive way but I think the Lebanese people, despite the challenges we have been addressing the challenges now and probably our end capability of finding our affairs by ourselves alone at the political front. This does not cancel the fact that the Lebanese people, as well, lots of them are qualified and they are part of this community and other Arab communities, so I would like to highlight this issue. Thank you anyway.

MR. BAROUD: Yes. I would like to go back. He already said what I would have loved to say. Also, the mountainous regions makes people -- it's not about numbers. Christians in Lebanon are still 40 percent on the electoral list so they are not minorities yet. But whatever the numbers are it is not about numbers and figures; it is about the role that Christians are invited to play in the upcoming future. The role they played already in building modern Lebanon, and the role they are invited and called for to play in the coming future.

And this is why the frustration that George addressed should be taken seriously into consideration. It should be tackled with care. And I think that our partners in the country, our Muslim partners, are aware of this and I can say that this is a common concern. It is not only a Christian concern. And I can feel it and I know it. The problem is how to trigger something that could give Christians what they owe to their partners or what their partners owe. It's not about giving gifts. You know, it's their

rights. The constitution is not about numbers. When we talk about parity it's about consensus again. It's consensus. And that's why what Christians are calling for is only rightful. If they are 40 percent on the lists, how can they expect to get 27 percent of the seats actually? They have 34 seats out of 64. I know that this could sound weird for those of you who are not familiar with the Lebanese complex system but that's now it works. And as long as it is confessional, we need to deal with religious groups as part of the reality. And I fully support the creation of a senate. It could lead us to a better future. But in the meantime, we need to give all minorities -- because Lebanon is a gathering of minorities. It is a mosaic of minorities. All of them should feel part of the whole picture.

So yes, there is a problem. It is being addressed in the electoral law but again, in the senate and in the constitutional framework based on the role they are invited play, not based on any figures or numbers, bearing in mind that the numbers

are not the way they are being presented. Forty percent is not minority.

MR. SHAIKH: Ali, I'd ask you to give us a final comment on actually the question with regards to the growing grassroots Sunni movement. Is this something that is of particular note?

MR. HAMDAN: What about --

MR. SHAIKH: Sure.

MR. HAMDAN: -- the question also --

MR. SHAIKH: Okay.

MR. HAMDAN: As a matter of fact, 2008, my party and my boss, who is the speaker of the parliament, Mr. Nabih Berri, agreed in the dialogue in Doha on the 1960 law because the Christians wanted that. We didn't want it. And every knows. He remained the last one to approve until he was sure. He said this is against the constitution and against what I believe as a leader of a party. But because my partner, meaning the Christians, wanted so, I have to join them. And we agreed on the same thing.

Now, the so-called orthodox law, we are not

-- it is not our law but we said is the same formula. If they want to try this or this is what they want or what they believe this could give them the right then we have to support. I want to make it clear and crystal. So I'm not against. It's a matter of our belief is this is the constitution and let's implement and everybody will be happy.

What you are looking for is a result. The same thing, the demand of the orthodox law is a result. So let's --

SPEAKER: A reaction.

MR. HAMDAN: Yes, it is a reaction. So our belief is let's deal or treat the cause, the real cause. So then we deal with the fears among all the Lebanese and then we make everybody happy.

Regarding a fear issue or the cellatist wave in Lebanon or something, Lebanon is part of the Arab world and the Islamic world and it's a free country and democratic country. And --

SPEAKER: It's Christian, too.

MR. HAMDAN: Pardon?

SPEAKER: It's Christian, too.

MR. HAMDAN: Yes. Okay, no, no. We are not saying it's a Muslim country. We are not saying but I'm telling in particular, according to what he asked.

I want to answer you in Arabic now. I respect your keenness to talk about Lebanon but it's not right to say that in this particular juncture of the history of Lebanon and the period before Taif that we should recognize Christians and Modernites in particular because they used to lead Lebanon. We should recognize that they protected Lebanon. They protected the Arabic language, the Bastani family, and nobody until now in the Arab world started an encyclopedia for the Arabic language. The Bastanis did that. The first printing house in the east was by the Burmese Christians. Teaching Arabic was done by Lebanese Christians but this is different than the question of justice. When we did not implement Taif correctly, this impacted not only Christians but Christians, Muslims, and the entire Lebanese people. Fourteen million Lebanese abroad. They are not all

Christians but they are abroad because they recognize that there is bad governance in Lebanon. There is corruption and there is lack of respect for the constitution. This is what was driving them to immigrate abroad.

For example, electricity in Lebanon has gone beyond the contractual 15 years. The problem is still there. Later on the Israeli aggression but the inability to correct the national electricity grid et cetera, the remedy is in the constitution but the Lebanese are not doing that.

I'm sorry to say that in some Arab countries which we were envious of the stability suddenly we found then a football stadium or on the street people were being killed as if there is no spiritual citizenship.

INTERPRETER: We can't hear the speaker because he is not using a microphone.

SPEAKER: (off mic)

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. I think you've made your point very clearly.

We have run out of time. We could go on, I think, until tomorrow I'm sure. I'm sure you'll agree that we've had a very rich discussion. We've covered a lot of areas in a very long discussion and I thank you for that. And I thank you for listening so intently and taking part as well.

Perhaps just two or three quick takeaways that I would have trying to see the woods from the trees. I certainly keep hearing emphasis on dialogue, a national dialogue and building consensus. And in that respect, some acceptance of the need to reform the political system and the like. But yes, still seeing a discussion which still becomes confessional in its shape. Until we get beyond that I guess we will still be looking to see how Lebanon can build an effective state and governance.

I think of all the multiple challenges that Lebanon visits, maybe Mr. Moratinos actually highlighted the supreme one. Is Lebanon ready perhaps for the change that is coming? And it may well coincide with a period where you will have more

natural resources as well to administer.

And Mohamad, I was drawn to what you said in that right now at least no one has the roadmap. But as I'm sure you can tell in this discussion you've got four gentlemen who are thinking very hard in that respect and may you succeed because Lebanon, as we all know, for all of us who have traveled there, it's just an absolutely wonderful country. It is an example if it gets it right to the entire region. In many ways it's ahead of its time and we wish you and we wish Lebanon in that respect the utmost respect and luck in the days, weeks, and months and years ahead.

Let me just say thank you very much to our four guests. I'm sure you'd like to join us. And then afterwards we have something for you to eat. I know this is now eating into your dinnertime. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

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