

Freedom, Sovereignty and Democracy in Lebanon

The Center for Democracy in Lebanon
Declaration #6; December 4, 2006

A significant proportion of the Lebanese society took to the streets of Beirut on December 1, 2006. Demonstrators gathered in a solemn show of democracy and civility to express dissatisfaction with the Lebanese cabinet, demanding the creation of a unity government and an end to the political stalemate plaguing Lebanese politics for more than a year, more specifically since the assassination of ex-PM Rafiq Hariri on February 14, 2005. The veracity of a mixed blend of demonstrators under one flag is yet another affirmation of the tenacity of the Lebanese people in their firm belief in freedom of expression and democracy in Lebanon, a social order truly exemplary for the rest of the Middle East and Arab world.

We salute and honor all forms of free expression and support the demonstrators' demands *in principle*.

Concurrently, we express our surprise at the lack of leadership exhibited by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora in this regard:

- a) In response to the massive and peaceful demonstration in front of the Grand Seraille, PM Siniora peeked at the demonstrators twice off his balcony without taking the initiative to address them once, a gesture reminiscent of the leaders of totalitarian regimes.
- b) Inviting his Excellency the Mufti of the Lebanese Republic Sheikh Mohammed Rashid Qabbani to hold a Sunni Friday prayer in the Grand Seraille, and hosting a Maronite memorial for slain Minister Pierre Gemayel on Sunday are not official functions of the cabinet and violate the sanctity of the Lebanese government. The Grand Seraille is the headquarters of Lebanon's cabinet, a public government office building and not the private grounds of the Prime Minister. These actions show sectarian favoritism, set a dangerous precedent that threatens the institutions of civil government in Lebanon, and lack any justification in faith and in customs; they only serve the purpose of further inflaming the demonstrators.
- c) We express grave concern vis-à-vis reports of attacks against the political offices of members of the opposition and against the demonstrators in Beirut and the Bekaa Valley and North Lebanon and we present our condolences to the family of Mr. Ahmad El-Mahmoud, a demonstrator killed in related confrontations. These skirmishes are a daunting reminder of the oppressive campaigns of the Syrian intelligence regime that governed Lebanon for the past 15 years and its dictatorial tactics, which we vehemently denounced before and stood firmly against; today similar tactics appear to be aimed at silencing free, democratic and peaceful opposition to the Siniora cabinet in Lebanon.

Reaffirming our previous declarations (Declaration 1, 2/20/2005; Declaration 2, 3/2/2005; Declaration 3, 3/11/2005; Declaration 4, 6/22/2005; Declaration 5, 7/25/2006) we reiterate the following:

I - The need for an INDEPENDENT AND THOROUGH INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATION to reveal the powers behind the assassinations and assassination attempts against a number of Lebanese officials and public figures since September 2004 through the assassination of Minister Pierre Gemayel on November 21, 2006; we offer our sincere condolences to the Lebanese people and the family of slain minister Gemayel. We support the FORMATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL COURT OR TRIBUNAL to try the suspects in these crimes.

II - We stand firmly in opposition to any form of foreign intervention, custody or tutelage in Lebanon; hence our support of the demonstrators' call for a sovereign government in Lebanon. Having denounced all forms of Syrian intervention in Lebanon, we condemn today other foreign meddling in Lebanon's internal affairs, particularly recent declarations by the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Egypt (less-than-exemplary beacons of democracy in their own countries) in response to the December 1 demonstration, siding with one Lebanese group and the cabinet to the dismay of a significant proportion of the Lebanese

population, in what amounts to an incitement for sectarian strife in Lebanon and a blatant intervention in the Lebanese internal affairs in contravention to the UN charter and international law. The legitimacy of the cabinet or lack thereof is an internal Lebanese matter of constitutional law and must be settled by the Lebanese people and their constitutional court alone; neutral good-will mediators remain welcome.

In addition,

1- regardless of the current public upheaval, we endorse the formation of a cabinet of national unity formed by ministers representing all political parties elected to Parliament in a proportionate number to their Parliamentary seats. The current government and its Prime Minister must therefore heed the call for reforming the cabinet into a truly representative one.

2- we trust the Lebanese people will remain united under the Lebanese flag and will continue to distinguish political disagreements from sectarian conflicts.

3- we reaffirm our vision for a peaceful, sovereign and prosperous Lebanon built on respect for diversity, neutrality in international affairs and a secular government.

Having outlined our concern regarding the current political stalemate, the dysfunctional government and the dangerous political divide accentuated by a recent savage Israeli invasion of Lebanese territory with thousands of civilians massacred, maimed or displaced, we hereby caution that Lebanon still has to face great challenges ahead, including the formation of an international tribunal (see 'I' above), the release of Lebanese citizens unlawfully held in Syrian and Israeli jails, the liberation of the Shebaa farms, the disarmament of all militias and armed groups on Lebanese soil and full implementation of UNSC Resolution 1701.

We could only seriously meet these challenges as a united people. Democracy remains our best hope for unity and attaining a peaceful and functional social order.

Long live Lebanon and Democracy in Lebanon.