



## Memorandum

### Lebanon and Active Neutrality

In a sermon delivered on July 5, 2020, I appealed to the United Nations to reaffirm the independence of Lebanon, implement all relevant UN resolutions, and **recognize the country's neutrality**. Lebanon's neutrality is indeed the guarantee of the country's unity and its historical role, especially in this period characterized by geopolitical and constitutional transformations. Lebanon's strength and stability will be safeguarded by its neutrality. It is, therefore, a neutral Lebanon that would be able to contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region, defend the rights of the Arab peoples, and forge just and equitable relations between the Middle East and Europe, due to Lebanon's privileged position on the Mediterranean shores.

**Our appeal for neutrality has been met with wide approval** from various confessional groups, political parties, and the country's intelligentsia who have expressed reasoned opinions in various news outlets and media publications; though some have had reservations and questions concerning the concept of neutrality. This is the reason I deemed it necessary to put in print this **Memorandum on "Lebanon and Active Neutrality"**. I broach the subject in five points: The Proposal's Rationale; the Concept of Neutrality; its Importance as a Necessary Platform for the Independence and Stability of Lebanon; the Interests of Lebanon and its Economy of Neutrality; and a Conclusion.

#### 1. Proposal's Rationale

**Lebanon's neutrality**, as a constitutional form of government, may not have been on the minds of the founders of the State of Greater Lebanon. However, it certainly proved to be the driving force behind Lebanon's foreign relations and defense policy that this small and emergent nation adopted to assert its right to self-determination and to preserve its independence, unity and identity. During the drafting of the Lebanese Constitution, Henri De Jouvenel, the French High Commissioner, asked his government to send him a copy of the Swiss Constitution, believing that it can be used as a blueprint for the constitution of Lebanese society.

**This political constitutional framework** was confirmed in 1943 when the government, which secured independence, declared that Lebanon was committed to “neutrality between East and West.” This concept of neutrality was enshrined in 1945 when the Charter of the League of Arab Countries was drafted, which stipulated that the decisions of the League would not be binding, even those taken unanimously. The preparatory work as well as the many interventions preceding the final text of the League’s Charter insisted on the fact that “**Lebanon is a State of support, not of confrontation.**” This aimed to make Lebanon a catalyst for solidarity among the Arab nations, not a cause for divisions and inter Arab conflicts. It must be noted that Lebanon has always advocated against defection from Arab solidarity for the sake of strategies that would serve foreign regimes at the expense of common Arab interest.

**The idea of neutrality** has been a **recurrent theme** in the speeches of the presidents of the Republic and in the statements of succeeding governments (Cabinet of Ministers), as well as in the documents that came out of the conferences of national dialogue, including “the Declaration of Baabda” of June 11, 2012, approved unanimously and which included the expression “to ensure the neutrality (distancing) of Lebanon.” This statement was communicated to the United Nations, and was distributed as an official document of the Security Council and the General Assembly (see both documents: A/66/849 and S/2012/477). Likewise, the Security Council communiqué, dated 03/19/2015, called on all Lebanese parties to abide by the letter and spirit of this Declaration.

Due to **this policy of wisdom and prudence**, Lebanon has managed to preserve the unity of its territory, despite the numerous attempts and calls for Arab unification proposals and the countless Israeli-Arab wars. Indeed, all of Israel’s neighboring countries (Syria, Jordan, and Egypt) have lost parts of their territory, except the State of Lebanon. In addition, Lebanon’s relative distancing from regional conflicts—between 1943 and 1975—created prosperity, wealth, growth, and rising individual income, as well as declining unemployment, which has earned Lebanon the title of “**Switzerland of the East**”.

**This period was disrupted in 1958**, when Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser tried to include Lebanon in the short-lived project of Syro-Egyptian unity. The Lebanese, however, quickly survived this crisis, reconciled, and continued on the path of nation building. The balance of power in Lebanon was turned upside down with the ascendancy of the Palestine Liberation organization as a military power in

its armed struggle against Israel. This destabilizing factor divided the Lebanese into two camps: those who supported the PLO and those who opposed it. A situation that led to the outbreak of the civil war **in 1975**.

Under pressure from internal divisions and external interference, the Lebanese government made crucial concessions and signed **the Cairo Accord in 1969**, compromising its sovereignty. The Cairo Accord authorized Palestinian groups to carry out military operations against Israel from Lebanese territory, especially in the southern region of the country.

These events caused the Lebanese government and various ideological and political groups **to be drawn into regional conflicts**, which were mostly aligned along political, religious, ideological, and military considerations. As a consequence, **Israel** occupied Lebanon (1978-2000); **Palestinian organizations** controlled most of southern territory, reaching as far as central Beirut (1969-2005); **Syrian army** entered Lebanon (1976-2005); and continuing the same trend of outside interference and dominance, **Hezbollah** was established and molded religiously, ideologically, and militarily to be the instrument that spreads the ideas of the revolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1981-...).

All these events took place because of **the country's deviation from the policy of neutrality**, which was tacitly recognized but without a supporting constitutional text. Thus, the State began gradually to lose its central authority, the country its territorial sovereignty, the nation its political role, the national pact its equilibrium, and society its specific cultural identity. This imbalance has also produced secondary internal conflicts, but as violent as the main conflicts that brought into existence in the first place. And behold, Lebanon today is teetering between unity and division.

The experience of one hundred years (1920-2020) of the life of the State of Greater Lebanon has shown that it is difficult for Lebanon to be the **country-message** without adopting the politics of neutrality. Alignment with the conflicts of the Middle East and its peoples has affected the principle of partnership between Christians and Muslims, in its spiritual, national, and human aspects. Lebanon has thus entered a state of disintegration, and the various attempts at a solution and compromise have failed. This is why nothing would save its unity, its independence, and its stability except neutrality, knowing that these various and deep seated conflicts threaten not only the State but the very being of the nation.

**The declaration of the neutrality of Lebanon is a founding act**, like the declaration of the State of Greater Lebanon in 1920, and the declaration of

independence in 1943. The creation of Greater Lebanon as an independent State prevented the Lebanese from being absorbed by various attempts at Arab - Islamic unity and gave them a democratic system of governance which allowed them to peacefully coexist together. The independence of Lebanon legitimized its existence as a sovereign nation with a central authority to protect its citizens from internal and external threats. Political neutrality, which is yet to be achieved, prevents the division of Lebanon, protects it from wars and retains its specificity. **Neutrality is thus the “pact of stability”**, after the two pacts of existence and sovereignty.

## **2. The Concept of Active Neutrality**

Lebanon, with its active neutrality, **enjoys three interconnected, complementary and indivisible dimensions.**

**The first dimension** is the definitive refusal of Lebanon to join coalitions, axes, political conflicts and wars regionally and internationally; as well as the abstention of any state, of the region or elsewhere, from interfering in its affairs, or dominating it, or invading it, or occupying it, or using its territory for military purposes, according to the second The Hague Convention (October 18, 1907) as well as the other regional and international conventions which followed it.

It is Lebanon’s prerogative to remain an active member of the League of Arab Nations and the United Nations. Lebanon’s membership to both organizations not only contributes to the prospect of solidarity among the nations, but also strengthens the international commitment for peace and human progress.

**The second dimension** concerns Lebanon’s solidarity with the causes of Human Rights and freedom, especially Arab causes which gained unanimous support from the member nations of the Arab League and from the United Nations. Therefore, Lebanon will continue to defend the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and work for a just and equitable solution for the Palestinian refugees, especially those who live in its territory. Neutral Lebanon could thus play its role and assume “**its mission**” in its Arab context, which the Apostolic Exhortation of Saint Pope John Paul II, “A New Hope for Lebanon”, presents in detail (paragraphs 92-93), as well as take initiatives for reconciliation and rapprochement between various Arab Countries and regional powers, and resolve conflicts. Religious and cultural pluralism, which encapsulate the true nature of Lebanon society, makes Lebanon a land of encounter and dialogue between religions, cultures and civilizations in

accordance with the United Nations' decision of September 2019, establishing in Lebanon "the Academy for Human Encounters and Dialogue". Given the ideal location of Lebanon on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon is also a bridge linking the cultures, economies and civilizations of East and West.

**The third dimension** consists in strengthening the Lebanese State through its various institutions: military, judicial, legislative, and executive. A strong Lebanese State will promote unity, peace, and justice for all its citizens and will ensure opportunities for creativity, entrepreneurship, and social and economic prosperity. Furthermore, a strong State endowed with these qualities will certainly be capable of safeguarding internal peace and defending the nation from external threats. A strong and neutral Lebanon also needs a just and swift resolutions to the issues of border demarcation with Israel, in accordance with the Armistice Agreement (1949), as well as acceptance of Lebanon's border as recognized internationally by the State of Syria.

### **3. Neutrality as a Source of Independence and Stability for Lebanon**

Neutrality ensures Lebanon's withdrawal from prospects of regional and international conflicts and wars. Moreover, neutrality will provide Lebanon with the necessary political and military means to prevent the reoccurrence of internal struggles and turmoil (1958, 1969, 1973, 1975) that have rocked the nation since the declaration of the State of Greater Lebanon. A cursory reading of the historical causes of conflicts enables to identify four main categories:

- A. Internal conflicts between religious groups and confessional communities that have different allegiances justified on the basis of nationalistic and ideological trends aiming to change the government regime in the country, or to serve the interests of other countries.
- B. Geo-political conflicts in neighboring countries which have spilled over into Lebanon.
- C. The lack of Political clarity in Syria's relationship with Lebanon regarding its territory or authority or its international borders, which have often caused conflicts between the two countries.
- D. The political, military, economic, social and border implications of the creation of the State of Israel on Lebanon and the arrival of thousands of displaced Palestinian refugees to reside in its territory.

It is a fact of history that these conflicts and their causes received **superficial and temporary solutions**, until the moment when the Constitution was amended after the Taef Agreement of 1989, with the transfer of executive power from the Presidency of the Republic to the Cabinet of Ministers, and the adoption of parity in parliament. All these political and constitutional compromises succeeded in stopping the war, but not the conflict, which escalated after each compromise; a situation which included within it the seeds of future conflicts. Lebanon has thus become a country where religious and communitarian groups contend for more power. This power grab by these various religious and political groups has made outside interference in Lebanon's internal affairs a necessary factor for the very survival of these groups. As a consequence, Lebanon has become a terrain for "proxy wars" for others.

If these causes are not dealt with adequately, conflicts and wars will continue, and consequently **one of these three scenarios** might obtain: either one confessional community dominates the others by force through armed warfare, exercising hegemony over the State and threatening its neighbors and regional balance; or Lebanon remains a failed State, exposed without weight or stability; or others may decide the fate of Lebanon by redefining its territorial integrity and national sovereignty in the context of the radical changes that continue to shape the present and future of the entire region. This is why our call for Neutrality is to avoid any or all of these scenarios and to strengthen and consolidate sovereignty and stability.

#### **4. The Benefits of Neutrality for Lebanon and its Economy**

a) **Lebanon will benefit from the status of neutrality in two main points:**

1. **Neutrality** safeguards the unity of Lebanon, in terms of its territorial integrity and the preservation of its population, and revives the national Islamic-Christian partnership, which was weakened in many instances. Lebanon's neutrality ensures that its eighteen confessional communities regain their security and stability, as well as their mutual trust far from conflicts. It is only on the basis of this political platform of neutrality and peaceful coexistence among various social and religious groups that Lebanon would be able to positively contribute to the stability of the region and peace in the world.
2. **Neutrality** makes all components of Lebanese society become more flexible and positive, because it excludes alignment and biased approach in the

exercise of prerogatives and authority among those in power regardless of their political or confessional affiliation.

**b) Many sectors of the economy will benefit from Lebanon's neutrality.**

Neutrality will strengthen the economy due to stability, security and the ingenuity of the Lebanese people who tend to prosper in times of peace and opportunity. **We mention here seven sectors specific to Lebanon, which could strengthen its economy:**

1. The long history of Lebanon as a **banking and financial hub** in the Middle East and its internationally renowned experts in this field surely puts Lebanon at an advantage over other countries in the region. This is simply because stability and security build trust.
2. **The health sector** and the high standard of hospitals and advancement in technology: Lebanon is closer to Middle Eastern countries than Europe and the United States, Lebanon's official language is Arabic, educated Lebanese are fluent in several Western languages, and Lebanon hospitality business make the country suitable to a major medical center not for the Middle East, but also for the world.
3. Lebanon is a **tourism destination** for the Middle East and for the world. When stability and security are in place, as history demonstrates, Lebanon can regain its status as a major world destination for tourists. Lebanon's first class hotels, resorts, restaurants, and hospitality industry make the country an attractive tourism destination.
4. Throughout its history, Lebanon has been a **leading center for education** for the entire Middle East due to its high standards of learning, research and publications, which led many Arab families to prefer Lebanon over Europe and the United States. Through this, Lebanon contributes to the promotion of the spirit of concord and peace.
5. Lebanon's stability and security **attracts expatriates** to return to invest in various projects. They will contribute to the creation of jobs, growth, and a quality of life that Lebanon experienced between the fifties and the beginning of the seventies of the last century.

6. Lebanon benefits from neutrality thanks to its **membership in the Arab world**, and its location **on the shores of the Mediterranean**, and its historical role and civilization.
7. Due to its unique history, cultural and political characteristics, Lebanon will become **the axis of the Mediterranean Union**, and become the place where the interests of all parties intersect. The European Partnership and the Mediterranean Union are two vital projects for Lebanon. The idea of the Mediterranean Union is at the heart of a vision for the future; and this “Union” carries the capacity to create a new system of values as well as political, economic, cultural, and maritime force in this strategic region of the world. Moreover, this would make Europe more linked to the Arab world, and more attentive to its interests, and therefore less quick to defend Israel.

## 5. What WE Need

In accordance with what has been delineated in this Memorandum, **we call on both the Arab and international communities** to understand the compelling historical, security, political, economic, and cultural reasons which drive most Lebanese to adopt “Active Neutrality”; and that the **organization of the United Nations** should decide Lebanon’s neutrality in a timely fashion. **We consider neutrality in three dimensions:**

**First**, Lebanon pursued neutrality from its founding until the “Cairo Accord”, signed in 1969, allowing Palestinian refugees to acquire heavy weapons and to fight Israel from Lebanese territory, which was followed by the emergence of armed Lebanese and non-Lebanese groups outside the control of the State.

**Second**, Lebanon, thanks to its democratic and liberal political system of governance, and its specific religious and cultural pluralism, organized within the framework of the Constitution and the National Pact, and thanks to its location on the shores of the Mediterranean between the East and Europe, enjoys the role of promoting peace and stability in the region. Due to Lebanon’s policy of mediation, rapprochement and reconciliation between Arab countries, and its staunch commitment to human rights continues to provide an indispensable forum for dialogue between religions, cultures and civilizations.



**Thirdly**, Lebanon, founded on pluralism and the balance between its diverse religious and cultural groups, needs, in order to survive, that the United Nations, along the countries concerned, find a solution for the half a million Palestinian refugees and almost one and a half million displaced Syrians present on its territory.

Dimane, August 7, 2020

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**Patriarch of Antioch and All the East**