



His Eminence Patriarch Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai's speech at the popular rally in Bkerki—Saturday, February 27, 2021

Long live Lebanon, united, independent, neutrally active, free, strong and prosperous. Lebanon communion and love.

1. You have come, men and women of all ages, from all across the nation despite the dangers of the Corona virus pandemic to support both the proposal of active neutrality and the international conference on Lebanon. In a word you have come demanding to save Lebanon. Together, yes together, we will save Lebanon. Thank you for your love, thank you to all those who organized the rally, and thank you to all those who committed time, talent and treasure. Greetings to all those who join us from across the globe. May God protect you from this pandemic and heal those who have been afflicted by it. Let us now observe a minute of silence for the lives that perished due to this epidemic and the victims of the Beirut seaport explosion.

2. You have come to support the demand to declare Lebanon's positive and active neutrality.

No two people disagree that the abandonment of the policy of active neutrality by either the State or political factions is the main reason for all the turmoil and wars that have decimated our nation. Historical experiences, both of yesteryears and today, have shown that when some are drawn to regional or international alliances, the nation gets divided, the constitution gets suspended, governance gets disrupted, the Lebanese national accord is set back, and wars break out. The essence of an independent Lebanon is neutrality. In this regard, the very foundation of greater Lebanon was to create a neutral entity in the Levant whose role was and still is to form a link between the region's peoples and their civilizations and a bridge between East and West. The choice of the policy of neutrality is to preserve Lebanon in its current political system, which is essentially based on common citizenship, not on religious affiliation, and distinguished by its cultural and religious pluralism, openness to the international community, and non-alliance. We renew with you the call to endorse Lebanon's neutrality in order to give it a viable and legitimate constitutional character as it has been declared in various statements: in the document establishing the state of Lebanon, in the speeches of the presidents of the republic, in the

statement of the Independence Cabinet of Ministers, the statements of all successive governments, and the Baabda Declaration on June 11, 2012.

3. You have come to support the demand for an international conference on Lebanon

With you, we did not call for an International Conference on Lebanon until it became evident that all other possible initiatives have reached a dead end, which made it impossible for us to agree on the destiny of our country. Even politicians, involved in the decision making process, were not able to sit at the table for dialogue. Consequently, it has become known to us that all attempts at reconciliation have been rejected—a situation that led to chaos, the fall of the State, and seizure of power. For to keep things as they are has certainly produced an impoverished population and the collapse of the State, and that is what we do not accept. We are facing a *coup d'état*, affecting every aspect of public life; a *coup* against our society and the cultural specificity of our country in the Levant. The first coup is against the National Accord Charter, which was approved by the Taif Conference in 1989 held with international and Arab sponsorship. But its spirit and letter have not yet been fully implemented. The Constitution was amended on its basis, and, to be sure, loopholes appeared that deeply affected the function of the State until it was paralyzed. If our politicians were able to hold a responsibly dialogue to solidify the National Accord and address the gaps in the Constitution, we would never have called for an internal conference sponsored by the United Nations to help us solve these issues that have paralyzed our political system.

What do we want?

4. We want the international conference to affirm the sovereignty of Lebanon, which is constantly under threat, and to recognize its international borders.

We want the international conference to renew support for the Lebanese democratic system that expresses its adherence to freedom, justice and equality.

We want the international conference to declare Lebanon's neutrality so that it will no longer fall prey to conflicts, wars, and divisions, and to strengthen the balance of power to the exclusion of sectarian interests liable always to constitute a threat to security.

We want the international conference to exert every possible effort to implement international resolutions concerning Lebanon, which have been shelved or partially implemented. The implementation of these resolutions would safeguard Lebanon's sovereignty, and allow the Lebanese State to extend its legitimate authority over all its territory without any partnership or competition.

We want the international conference to provide support to the Lebanese army to be the sole defender of the nation; an army capable of absorbing the military capabilities of the Lebanese people through a legitimate defense system responsible of war and peace decisions.

We want the international conference to put an end to an emerging plan to resettle the Palestinians refugees in Lebanon and to safely return displaced Syrians to their homes.

We do not want the international conference to send armies and to establish military installations in our country.

We do not want to harm Lebanon's existence, as it cannot be subject for reconsideration, and its borders of Lebanon cannot be modified. For the partnership that exists between Christian and Muslims is untouchable, and its democracy cannot be reversed. Lebanon's indispensable role cannot be compromised, and its identity cannot be forged. Any development of the system, and this is the law of progress, should not be at the expense of what we have agreed upon since the establishment of the State of Lebanon. Development does not mean revocation, but improvement. Development does not mean abolishing constitutional charters, but rather clarifying what is ambiguous in them, so as to integrate constitutional powers. Development does not mean erasing the past, but rather solidifying historical constants. We have the right to live a decent life in our homeland.

We were born to live in the pastures of permanent peace, not on the battlefields of permanent wars. Peoples' problems have become solvable through dialogue, negotiations and peaceful relations. The destiny of humankind is to create friends, not enemies. And to abide in love, not bitterness and resentment. **Lebanon's message** is to be an example of peaceful human relations. No matter how long that lasts, no one will ever succeed in undermining Lebanon and its message.

Lebanon is the message that Saint Pope John Paul II spoke about during his historic visit to Lebanon, which is again reinforced in two successive letters by His Holiness Pope Francis, who attaches special importance to the role that Lebanon plays in the world. His Holiness Pope Francis continues to admonish the nations of the earth to support Lebanon and to exert every effort to save its unique place in the world. We greet His holiness we thank him for his love for Lebanon.

Dear Beloved;

5. All that we are proposing today, in terms of declaring Lebanon's active neutrality and the convocation of special international conference, is to renew our resolve for a free, sovereign, independent and stable existence. **All we are proposing** is to revive the scattered, crippled and confiscated Lebanese State. We have liberated the land, let us now liberate the State. Let us free it from everything that hinders her authority and its function. The greatness of all liberation and resistance movements in the world is that they feed into the State and its legitimacy. The greatness of the state is to serve its people. We wonder how far removed we are from this greatness? The State is the supreme entity, and because it is so, a State that respects its institutions, does not tolerate ambiguity, duplication, and vulnerability. There are no two states or states on the same land, and there are no two or more armies in one country. Furthermore, there can never be two or

more peoples in one nation. Any tampering with these constants threatens the unity of the nation.

6. In this Patriarchal Palace, we offer projects of solutions, not projects of problems.

The solutions are for all Lebanon and every citizen. The real solution is a solution for all the people, not just for any sectarian group at the expense of others. We the Lebanese are called to approach ideas in a positive spirit away from negativity, especially when they spring forth from this Patriarchal See, because here we only think positively, and we only think nationally, and we only think about all Lebanese. The Lebanese are all our beloved. In this See, Christian and Muslim leaders commissioned Patriarch Elias Hoyek to lead the Lebanese Delegation to the Peace Conference in Versailles in 1919 to speak in the name of all the Lebanese and to demand the creation of the State of greater Lebanon. In this See, the Lebanese Christian and Islamic statesmen held a conference on December 25, 1941 under the leadership of Patriarch Antoun Arida, demanding Lebanon's full and effective independence guaranteed by the International Community.

Dear Beloved;

The Lebanese blood flowing in your veins is what led you today spontaneously, despite all dangers, to this Patriarchal Palace. We will not disappoint your hopes.

7. You are the ones here and those out there overseas, share these moments with us on TV stations. You are the source of our confidence in the future. You are the future of Lebanon and Lebanon of the future. Lebanon is for all or can never be, and everyone is for Lebanon or they can never be. Your coming today from everywhere renews hope and expels frustration. Your coming confirms that no right dies, for which there is a claimant, a citizen, a fighter, a revolutionary and a people.

8. I fully understand your cry and your anger, and I understand your uprising and your revolution.

Do not be silent about the plurality of loyalties; do not be silent about corruption; do not remain silent about the embezzlement of your money; do not remain silent about uncontrolled borderers; do not remain silent about the violation of our airspace; do not be silent about the failures of the political class; do not remain silent about the wrong choices and alignment; do not be silent about the chaotic investigations of the crimes of the seaport explosion; do not be silent about the politicization of the judiciary; do not remain silent about illegal weapons, which are not under the legitimate authority of the State; do not remain silent on the imprisonment of the innocent and the release of the guilty; do not be silent about the Palestinian naturalization and the integration of the displaced Syrians; do not remain silent about the confiscation of the national decision; do not remain silent about the *coup* against the State and the regime; do not be silent about not forming a government; do not remain silent about the failure to implement reforms;

and do not be silent about the forgetfulness of the martyrs. Our martyrs are the relics of our spiritual and national existence. Woe to those who forget their martyrs and barter for them.

9. Lebanon is a community of people, not separate individuals, and you, you are the people of Lebanon. You are Lebanon with all that it represents: the message, values, spirit and religious and cultural pluralism. The Patriarch does not differentiate between Lebanese and another, because solidarity is the basis of our unity, and our unity in one Lebanon is our historical project.

10. Beloved, coming from different regions and different confessions and parties, we are united by one color that is Lebanon to which we belong on the basis of common citizenship, not religion. This is Lebanon, the civil State that separates religion and state. Let us preserve it. Lebanon is our pride in what it represents as a precious jewel, a cultural, civilizational and humanitarian bridge between East and West on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

Long Live Lebanon.