

## Ministerial statements of the 68th and the 69th governments of Lebanon

### ● Fouad Siniora statement

Mr. Speaker, Honorable deputies,

In as much as this policy statement is addressed to you honorable deputies, it is also addressed to the Lebanese youth and all the Lebanese people. It is the first policy statement for the first Cabinet after elections, and after regaining the democratic system of Lebanon.

It is addressed to the youth of Lebanon and the Lebanese people, who rebelled for the dignity of the nation, liberated the South and West Bekaa, worked for consolidating Lebanon's independence and sovereignty, and overcame the ordeals of the past, after the assassination of the maker of the great achievements which were made over the past years, Martyr Premier Rafic Hariri, the one who should be standing in front of you today.

It is a statement of forgiveness, reconciliation, tolerance, dialogue, and agreement. It is a statement of brandished flags and ringing voice. It is a statement of democratic agreement among all political trends and their affiliation within our cabinet.

It is a statement of revising the past in order to understand and overcome it, and a statement of preparation for the future. It is a statement of openness toward all Lebanese, the brothers and the whole world in order for Lebanon to benefit from its national and cultural constituents.

That is why you will find in this statement a solid adherence to national positions starting with the goal of implementing the Taef Accord, and a decisive and determined effort to correct mistakes, launch reforms, revive institutions, fight corruption, eradicate squandering and build the base for a promising and fruitful future.

It is a statement for the return to the constitution, to the rule of the law, to real reconciliation, and to a civil life that controls government performance and the actions of the security services within democratic rules and respectful of the dignity and freedom of the citizenry, their rights within their state and system, and in respect for the values of justice and human rights. According to these bases, it is a statement that calls the honorable council to hold us accountable for our actions.

It is a statement to fulfill the promises that were made by all to all on the eve and during the elections. These promises will lead to a modern and just electoral law and the implementation of administrative decentralization in light of the technological changes in the era of the revolution in communications. It is a statement for witnessing real reform, and restructuring and uprooting corruption, whether it is squandering, transgression, negligence or embezzlement, and reforming the security apparatus so that it remains within its jurisdiction as specified in the Taef accord, a tool for protection and not control.

It is a statement for ensuring the true independence of the judicial authorities as a power and judges as individuals.

This statement carries high hopes for educating our youth, an appropriate education that matches their aspirations and the needs of our economy. It is also a decisive commitment to the health of our citizens, their social welfare and living standards, in order to utilize to our best ability the available resources, and a commitment to a clear program that would achieve continued growth and balanced development.

It is a statement for dealing with the economic and financial situation through the long-awaited radical reforms which were delayed due to various hindrances. It is a statement that seeks to launch the services and productive economic cycle by encouraging private sector initiative, improving the performance of public sector institutions and administrations to serve the citizens, and maintaining a rational spending policy in order to increase growth rates, control debt servicing, decrease the budget deficit, and tackling the problem of decreasing the public debt.

It is the statement of implementing the law and annulling all illegal activity or phone tapping and returning to the rules of penal courts which guarantee the rights and dignities of Lebanese citizens.



It is a statement of struggle that was filled with the blood of martyrs Rafic Hariri, Bassil Fuleihan and their companions, Samir Kassir and George Hawi, and the wounds of Marwan Hmadeh and Elias el-Murr. It is a statement of committed perseverance to discover the truth, reveal the perpetrators and bring them to justice whoever they are and wherever they are.

It is a statement for preserving our brave resistance; a statement of calm dialogue regarding the available choices within the Arab struggle against Israel, its occupations and greed, that would, at the same time, strengthens Lebanon. It is a statement of adherence to the Beirut Summit that called for just and comprehensive peace, and respect for international resolutions.

It is a statement of rebuilding Lebanese-Syrian ties unique in their strength, depth, transparency, equality, and devotion; unique in the dominance of common interests over any other consideration; unique in implementing the agreements accurately; unique in integration through effective institutions on clear bases, and active councils and bodies that represent the hopes and ambitions of the brotherly countries who really aspire to deepen cooperation ties, to integrate, exchange and bind through harmonious consultation and devoted and constructive cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, honorable deputies,

The Cabinet appearing in front of you today specifies its policies and determines its obligations in every available issue in the following fields:

#### First: Reforming the Electoral System

The issue of reforming the electoral system is one of the important issues which the Lebanese demand is resolved rapidly. That's why one of the priorities of the Cabinet is to reform the electoral system in order to strengthen the parliamentary democracy consecrated by the constitution and which stipulates the formation of modern political parties, on which public opinion is centered and popular representation is built and through which democratic practice will be completed.

The Cabinet believes that the creation of political formations which will encompass citizens of different sects is possible as long as a convenient electoral system is adopted. It is also convinced that sectarian pluralism does not prevent the formation of modern parties which will open the way to go beyond traditional sectarian instincts that have mired, and continue to mire, our political life and hamper its development. For this reason, the Cabinet considers that reforming the electoral system is strongly connected to the stipulations of the National Accord Document, notably the abrogation of political sectarianism. That's why the Cabinet will accelerate, after presenting a new electoral law to the parliament, the formation of the national committee that will look into ways to abrogate sectarianism as stipulated in the National Accord Document and the Constitution.

On this basis, the Cabinet will form, after winning the vote of confidence, a special national committee to draft an electoral law which will guarantee, through the positions and criteria stipulated by the National Accord Document, a true representation of the Lebanese people within the parliamentary democratic framework and in a way that will guarantee an efficient participation of the youth through lowering the minimum age required for participation in the elections.

The committee will comprise all political forces, including the representatives of parties and movements which are not in the Cabinet, and experts in order to study the draft laws and present a summary of its work during a period that will not exceed five months. For its part, the Cabinet will commit itself to presenting the project to the parliament within one month, so it will take its legal course through the committees and the general assembly.

And in order to strengthen democracy and the notion of popular participation through the activation of the municipalities, the Cabinet wants to stress that it will see that the municipalities will be able to manage their own affairs to serve the local community with the participation of the citizens and to shoulder its responsibility in public affairs. The Cabinet emphasizes that the municipalities play an important role in social and economic development, a role that should be embraced and developed within the framework of the comprehensive developmental program of the state.

#### Second: On the Arab and international relations

Considering that Lebanon belongs to the Arab fold and its active role in the defense of Arab causes, the Cabinet stresses its belief in the importance of the Arab common agenda and its commitment to the highest



degrees of Arab solidarity within the framework of the Arab League. The Cabinet also emphasizes its drive that Lebanese takes part in bolstering the framework of cooperation between Arab countries in all fields and on both official and civil levels.

The Cabinet also considers that the reason of instability in the region is caused by the continuing Israeli occupation of Arab territories, the violation of the rights of the Palestinian people, and preventing them from having their own independent state on their lands. The Cabinet also believes that the peace will not be achieved as long as there is an occupation and as long as the Palestinian people are prevented from enjoying their full national legitimate rights, including the right of return as stated in UNGAR #194.

Considering what was stated in the Taef Accord, the Cabinet stresses its eagerness to build healthy, serious, unique and solid relations with Syria, based on brotherly relations, and historical and geographical ties as well as our common interests.

The Cabinet stresses its commitment that Lebanon will not be a passageway or a base for any faction, force, or country that plans to threaten Lebanon's own security or Syria's, emphasizing the fact that Lebanon's security stems from Syria's and vice versa.

The Cabinet also reiterates its emphasis on the solidarity and cooperation with brotherly Syria, and the importance of coordinating stances between the two countries on the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Cabinet will endeavor, after winning the vote of confidence, to resolve the current border issue, in an effort to return the situation to normal, as it should be between two neighboring and brotherly countries. The Cabinet will also try to resolve other concerns that harm the interests of the two countries, and will look forward to a bright future and full cooperation in various fields, within the framework of each country's sovereignty and independence, in order to avert all dangers and challenges caused by regional and international pressures and transformations.

The Cabinet stresses its commitment to pursue the issue of the prisoners and missing people in Syrian prisons through the Lebanese-Syrian joint committee that was already agreed upon between the two countries. The Cabinet will endeavor, in the international arena, to attain the best cooperation with all friendly states and international organizations, within the framework of the UN charter and the European Partnership Agreement. The Cabinet will also work to activate the role of international organizations, to further advance the causes of peace and international security and to take part in the efforts to resolve regional conflicts, taking into consideration the international laws and charters that stipulate the illegality of occupying other countries' lands by force and the necessity of respecting the sovereignty of all member states, international relations and treaties.

The Cabinet stresses its commitment to uphold international law and maintain good relations with the international sovereignty and to respect its resolutions under the framework of our sovereignty, cooperation and national unity. Also in a framework of launching a Lebanese internal dialogue, the Cabinet will strive to achieve a national consensus built on upholding national unity, emphasizing the country's highest interests and reinforcing Lebanon's position and reputation in the international community.

The cabinet will give the disappearance of Immam Moussa Sader and his two companions the necessary attention.

The Cabinet considers the Lebanese resistance movement a genuine and natural expression of the Lebanese people's national rights to free their land and defend their dignity from Israeli aggressions, threats and designs, and to continue the effort to free Lebanese territory.

The Cabinet also stresses its rejection of settling the Palestinians, which contradicts the Palestinian Arab right and the Lebanese National Accord document.

The Cabinet declares its interest in pursuing the issue of the detainees and prisoners in the Israeli prisons, and its demand that the international community pressures Israel to release them.

Third: The reformation of the Security Institutions

To find a solution to the security incidents that are still plaguing Lebanon, the Cabinet will take all necessary actions to protect our country and the present and future security of all citizens, and confront these repeated incidents of assassinations and explosions. This is why the Cabinet pledges to support the army and bolster the internal security forces and offer the necessary means to allow them to achieve their national duties. One of

the priorities will be to restructure the security apparatus and institutions, and to redefine their duties, powers, and responsibilities and needs and to subjugate them to the stated principles of the Taef Accord, concerning the military/security prerogatives and its limits on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to protect the civil, political, economic and social rights of the Lebanese people from any form of control. Based on this reformist agenda, the cabinet will finalize the nomination of new security commanders.

#### Fourth: The Independence of the Judiciary branch

The Cabinet considers the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches as one of the cornerstones of the Lebanese constitution and the democratic parliamentary system, currently used in Lebanon. Therefore the Cabinet is adamant in its belief in the independence of the judiciary and stresses its intent to carry out the necessary reforms, while giving this issue, in all its aspects, the necessary attention to ensure the efficiency and integrity of the institutions.

Moreover, the Cabinet believes that the judiciary branch is the main guarantor of rights and freedoms for all citizens, which is why it is necessary to concentrate on the security of the judiciary because of the Cabinet's dedication to the independence of the judiciary and to offer all the necessary constitutional and legal guarantees for the judges and the judiciary so that the Lebanese people will trust and respect the judiciary. For a just and independent judiciary is not only a major stabilizing agent for society, it is also the main factor in bolstering international trust in Lebanon, which in turn will encourage foreign investments that will push the economy ahead and will further boost growth, development and the increase in the standard of living and strengthen the social security of the Lebanese.

On the other hand, in order to encourage the orderly functioning of the institution the Cabinet will endeavor, at the earliest time, to finalize the nomination for the constitutional council committee and to reactivate it.

The Cabinet will spare no effort in its incessant drive, along with its cooperation and coordination with the international investigation commission, to uncover the truth of the assassination of martyred Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and Deputy Basil Fuleihan. The Cabinet will also pursue, in force, the investigations in the several crimes that killed the writer and journalist Samir Kassir and George Hawi and injured or killed several other victims; in addition, to the attempted assassination of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defense Elias al-Murr, and before that the attempted assassination of Minister Marwan Hmadeh. The Cabinet emphasizes its resolve and more importantly the resolve of all Lebanese to bring to justice all those responsible for these crimes, so that they will take full responsibility for their actions.

#### Five: On the wiretap and the Penal Court Procedures

The Government, in the context of reestablishing the rule of law, will ask the Ministry of Telecommunication, with the cooperation and coordination of the ministers of justice, defense, and interior to immediately verify the implementation of the law on the secrecy of communications in all its forms.

The government will also suggest to Parliament the necessary modifications of the laws on wiretapping and Penal Court Procedures in order to return to the citizens the sanctity of their right and fundamental freedoms.

#### Six: On the Central Fund of the Displaced and the Council for the South

Following a fundamental article of the National Accord, the Government will work, diligently and seriously, on the full and complete closure of the file on the displaced. The Government intends to finalize the implementation of all projects and missions of the Council for the South, in order to completely close the Central Fund of the Displaced and the Council for the South.

#### Seven: On the Media

Reaffirming its emphasis on the protection of public and personal freedoms, the citizen's right to express their opinions, and the freedoms of the media and the protection of its diversity and variety, the Government announces its commitment to the implementation of all laws without discrimination, and its effort to develop these laws in order to stay abreast with technological progress, based on Lebanon's experience with the audio-visual law. The Government emphasizes its intention to give the National Council for the Media a more effective role after reconsidering its prerogatives and the way its members are selected, which will be based on merit and specialization to choose qualified people.



The Government also stresses its belief in the effective role of the Media in different fields of our national lives. Moreover, media is one of the most important productive sectors in the country. The government will deal in a spirit of openness and cooperation with all the mass media outlets and journalists in the interest of Lebanon and the protection of freedom, democracy and diversity. Based on all that, the Government declares its intent to support the draft law for the reopening of MTV.

The Government will consider the laws related to the advertising sector, a productive sector that attracts a large number of Lebanese who manage important institutions in the world. Moreover, the government believes that with the facilities that could be offered to this sector, it will be possible to attract substantial investments to Lebanon which will lead to multiple employment opportunities for the Lebanese.

Concerning the media's public institutions, the government is committed to halting the current deterioration, chaos, and financial losses by adopting a policy of privatization for the television and the radio in a way that preserves the right of the state in providing full media coverage to all Lebanese in all their regions. The Government will hold the majority in the privatized institution to guarantee its ability to protect the rights of the citizens and the higher Lebanese national interest. Moreover, the Government intends to activate the National News Agency. Until these measures are accomplished, the Government confirms its intention to implement the steps taken previously in order to treat the problem of human resources surplus in the Ministry of Information in cooperation between the ministry and other state bodies.

Eight: Expatriation, Expatriates, and the Universal Lebanese Village

Lebanese expatriates have created over several decades ample room for the Lebanese presence politically, economically, socially, and culturally. Since the Cabinet acknowledges the importance and role of Lebanese expatriates, it will strive to strengthen the relations between Lebanese residents and Lebanese expatriates through an ongoing intimate connection, with the aid of Lebanese political committees overseas and active expatriate organizations, in order to promote the role of the Lebanese Diaspora worldwide. This would eventually aid in defending national and Arab causes, attracting investments and expatriate Lebanese human resources to contribute to the homeland, and benefitting from Lebanese scientific, intellectual, economic and political resources.

In addition, since the Cabinet is deeply aware that the importance for Lebanon of the revolution in information technology in the era of globalization does not solely reside in the economic aspect, it also paves the way for a major change in the frequency and quality of communications between Lebanese resident and Lebanese expatriates, which consist of 15 million people. Therefore, developing this sector and enabling it to follow up on the latest available technology will enhance communication with Lebanese expatriates in economic, cultural, and national fields.

Ninth: Economic, financial, and social policy

The economic, financial, social, and living conditions, their development, as well as the trust in their future, are highly affected by the development and improvement of political, security, and judicial conditions.

The Lebanese public, especially young people, has expressed a pressing need to build their nation, reform its institutions, and set the foundation of a modern and productive economy that meets their capacities and ambitions.

Thus, the Cabinet will work on implementing its economic vision to build a productive, qualified, and competitive economic future. It has confirmed its determination to re-launch and adopt basic reforms to allow Lebanon to exploit its full capacities and human, financial, and time resources, and subsequently be placed on a track conducive to investment, growth, and creation of jobs. This will help improve living conditions and maintaining monetary stability.

The Cabinet's economic policy is based on the following general concepts:

1- Regaining trust in Lebanon's economic future in and outside by asserting the Cabinet's integrity and determination to implement the required financial, economic, and social reforms. Thus, the basic gateway in the process of regaining trust would be to reactivate these reforms that the Lebanese have awaited for years. In fact, the basics of these reforms were included in the 2003 draft budget, in Paris II conference, and in the other reform projects, the latest of which was the 2005 draft budget.

2- Any reform remains deficient, defective, and unconvincing if it is not complemented by a resolute commitment to combat corruption and squandering, to promote and reward productivity, and to adopt accountability.

3- Since the economic performance cannot be separated from social affairs there is a need to draw up effective policies for balanced and sustainable development, which are aimed at protecting marginalized social classes. There is also a need to work on overcoming poverty, illiteracy, and disease. The Cabinet will also strive to launch a national debate that can contribute to the achievement of a new social and economic pact between the producing parties in order to stimulate activity and promote productivity to benefit the national economy and the Lebanese interests.

4- The building of a modern economy should essentially revolve around a private dynamic sector, which is capable of adapting to the global technological changes and of facing global competition. This would secure high levels of sustainable growth, contribute to creating new employment opportunities for young people, and improve standards of living.

5- The process of revival and reform is not restricted to the efforts deployed by the Cabinet and the Cabinet's institutions but also requires the involvement of all political forces, economic bodies, and civil society organizations, including youth organizations, and the continuation of positive dialogue with the international community, international organizations, and friendly nations.

6- The Cabinet will strive to confirm the importance of Lebanon's reintegration into the Arab and international economies through its commitment to a bold policy aimed at enhancing and promoting economic bonds with Arab nations and economic integration. The Cabinet is also committed to strengthening Lebanon's cooperation with the European Union, reinforcing economic integration, and promoting political and cultural relations with the EU, within the framework of Barcelona and the partnership agreement signed between the two parties. The Cabinet will also speed up integration with the region's policy with the European Union, speed up Lebanon's accession to the World Trade Organization, enforce the laws on intellectual property protection, and fight piracy.

7- The success of the Cabinet in implementing its economic and financial agenda requires enforcing all the terms included therein without any reduction, dedication, selection or delay. This will increase the efficiency of this agenda and will enable the Cabinet to create the required positive impact to solve the pressing economic and financial issues.

\*The principal economic, financial, and social focal points in the Cabinet's economic, financial, and social agenda:

1- Economy, growth, and the promotion of productive industrial, agricultural, and services sectors:

a- The cabinet believes in achieving a quasi-balanced growth in all Lebanese regions and in the various economic sectors. The cabinet will give special attention to the traditional productive sectors such as industry and agriculture.

b- Support of national industry:

The cabinet will work on supporting national industry and focus on high value activities and goods. It will also resort to mechanisms that prompt the boosting of productivity levels and the competitive power of productive companies, as well as the adoption of international norms and standards. These mechanisms will also create the proper atmosphere to promote economic initiatives and increase growth Levels.

c- The agricultural sector:

Similarly to the industrial sector, the Cabinet will also heed the agricultural sector in order to solve the basic problems that it suffers from on several levels. This will lead the Cabinet, by promoting agricultural guidance and other mechanisms that contribute to change, to produce competitive goods for exports that meet international standards in quality and promotion tools.

In addition, the Cabinet will support agricultural loans, and finalize the processes of defining, register in, measuring, joining, and dividing Lebanese regions that have not been surveyed or measured.

d- The Cabinet will work on developing the services sector, which is capable of creating new jobs, especially in the tourist sector in view of its economic and developmental importance, its positive impact on other sectors, and its contribution to enhancing the image of Lebanon overseas. Moreover, the Cabinet will support productive sectors as part of the process turning the economy into that of the 21st century, based on “knowledge economy.” The Cabinet will also focus on emphasizing the “New Economy” sectors, which can achieve high growth rates and new jobs and subsequently lead to the adoption of intellectual productivity as a source of income and national wealth.

e- The Cabinet will take a special interest in small and medium sized enterprises, as well as start-ups, which allow young people to integrate into productive sectors and ensure they stay in Lebanon. The Cabinet will also resort to encouraging new economic initiatives by facilitating the integration and withdrawal from these productive sectors.

f- The Cabinet will also strive to back all its policies and initiatives by the development of human resources, especially among young people, which are Lebanon’s real wealth, on the basis of which it will build a modern economy.

g- The Cabinet will encourage the participation of the largest number of Lebanese young men and women in building their economy by providing them with great leadership opportunities in public institutions.

## 2- Public Finance and Public Debt:

The Cabinet believes that it is necessary to work seriously and try to correct the imbalance in public finances, achieve a steady decrease of deficit levels, and solve the public debt problem. Thus, the Cabinet will deploy efforts in order to achieve the following:

1- Guide and minimize public spending by approving and implementing the reform projects and the proposed economic amendments, which include the 2005 budget project, put forth in October 2004, comprising the one related to public institutions.

2- Boost revenues, modernize the tax system, and activate tax administration in order to improve collection of taxes and fees.

3- Modernize the public debt administration by implementing policies that permit a better risk management and reduce the cost burden on the economy.

4- Implement the privatization program in order to free the active sectors in the economy, especially the communication, electricity, and energy sectors, from the Cabinet’s monopoly, according to the laws in force, on the condition that the total revenues of the privatization operations will be used to settle part of the public debt. The Cabinet will strive, by balancing these privatization operations, to develop financial markets by stimulating the stock market’s work through offering a part of the concerned corporate stocks resulting from the privatization operations to the public, which will reinforce the operation and increase its success rate.

5- Activate the source of support from Lebanon’s allies by totally adopting the policies and procedures that Lebanon committed to in the Paris II conference and by being committed to a feasible administrative and financial reform agenda, which enjoys internal political support. The agenda would be at the basis of Lebanon’s action to plead for financial assistance from brethren and friends. Such assistance can support the Lebanese reform efforts, achieve economic and social revival, and pave the way for a complete and lasting revolution of the debt problem.

## 3- State’s Role and Institutions’ Work:

The achievement of economic, financial, and social goals demanded by the Lebanese basically depends on the Cabinet’s success, through its systems, institutions and practices, in paving the way for individual initiatives to produce, invest, and give impetus to economic development on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in curbing the costs to citizens and productive companies. The Cabinet’s understanding of this fact will lead to a reassessment of its role to the following:

1- Enhance the competence of public administration and government institutions, develop their human resources, adopt a policy of qualification and competence, rather than loyalty or affiliation, and reward it.

2- Improve the quality of services offered to citizens and respect their rights and dignity in order to gain their trust, since they represent the main target of the work and role of the Cabinet institutions and administration. This will be achieved by adopting modern, simple, fast, and transparent work methods, and by expanding and developing the Cabinet's electronic facilities in order to serve citizens in a modern way.

3- Fight corruption and bribery, seek modern methods of liability, accountability, and supervision, follow closely the work of officials in Cabinet departments and institutions, and hold them accountable based on their performance. This calls for adopting modern methods in order to renew the role and work of control bodies.

4- Eliminate administrative impediments in production initiatives, especially those undertaken by small and medium sized enterprises, and provide launching and funding assistance.

5- Set up reform policies to exploit the available human resources and adopt a modern description and classification of public jobs.

6- Complete and maintain the basic infrastructure on a national level and look into the Cabinet's investment program in order to adopt it to needs and capacities, while paving the way for the private sector to participate in investment development, when possible.

7- Undertake a basic reform of public institutions and reconsider the continuity and role of some of them.

8- Reinforce the cooperation possibilities between Cabinet departments and institutions and civil and private companies in the framework of regional development, including reinforcing the municipalities' role in this respect.

#### 4- Social Affairs:

The Cabinet will strive to adopt a new approach to revive social affairs in order to find a comprehensive, focused, and effective social agenda based on the following:

1- Curb poverty and eventually eradicate poverty according to the Millennium Development Goals put forth by the United Nations development study pertaining to Lebanon.

2- Find "Social Safety Nets" in the fields of health, education, and social security for seniors, and clearly set the norms for benefitting from these nets, in addition to attaching special importance to underprivileged social classes, especially those that have special needs (disables, orphans, elderly, and working children...).

3- Take effective steps to reform the social coverage system, especially the National Social Security Fund and the Ministry of Health in order to secure a more comprehensive coverage and more accurate norms to benefit in order to achieve an increase in returns and sound social and economic spending.

4- Improve the social returns of cabinet spending on main social services (health, education, and social affairs) in order to achieve a wider coverage and more balance among beneficiaries.

#### Tenth: Teaching and Education

The issues of availability, quality, and appropriateness in the field of teaching and education are the most important issues that concern Lebanese people since they represent one of their basic national rights. The future of Lebanon is molded by future generations. If we can prepare these generations in a good manner, we can build hopes and ambitions in the future of Lebanon. Therefore, teaching and education tasks top the list of priorities on the Cabinet's agenda. The Cabinet believes that it has to take into consideration in its educational policy the achievement of harmony and integration between the three dimensions that this policy represents. The first one is the freedom of education stipulated by the Constitution, and public interest, which is the norm set by the Constitution to practice this freedom. The second is the correlation between education at various levels and the needs of the labor market. The last dimension is the ability to participate in furthering the knowledge of the world and benefiting from Lebanon's privileged characteristics and cultural and economic openness.

The National Union that we are striving to achieve since the creation of this nation that is geographically small yet great in its mission starts with the civil unity in the spirit of the new generation, which is or about to be completed in the fundamental stage of education. Therefore, the Cabinet will complete the updating of



education systems, and lay the foundation for implementing the compulsory education law in the formative stages. It is normal that the latter should be complemented by the construction of well-equipped schools nationwide. It should also go hand in hand with dealing with overstaffing and providing a bigger opportunity for civil participation in public school administration. It should also be accompanied by enforcing a strict and alert supervision on the level and quality of education in private and free schools and on tuition fees, especially through the participation of municipalities and civil foundations.

With respect to secondary education, the Cabinet considers that Lebanon's need to encourage vocational and technical education has been clear for several decades. This would expand the labor force inside the country and the job opportunities overseas for holders of suitable vocational diplomas in various branches. Therefore, the Cabinet will promote official vocational and technical education, improve its levels, quality, and suitability, and increase supervision on private vocational schools in order to secure a level of education that guarantees conformity of graduates to the needs of the workplace so they can benefit from the available job opportunities.

Regarding university education, the Cabinet will pay special attention to the Lebanese University since it is the paradigm of national unity and an opportunity to achieve the concept of equal opportunities in higher education and secure university education at a high level of competence and conformity with special standards required by our economy and role in the Arab region and in the world. The Cabinet believes that this matter has fallen within easy reach, especially as the first stage of construction of the unified university campus in Hadath is on the verge of completion.

On the other hand, the Cabinet strives to confirm the academic independence of the university and the need to provide it with all kinds of possible support, whether financial, moral, or structural. However, it will undertake ongoing monitoring of the recorded graduates' results, with respect to the qualifications and competences they acquired during their university studies, by resorting to the best standards adopted in the universities of Lebanon and the world. Therefore the cabinet will draft a new law that secures this independence and the refined academic level of its educational staff. This law also ensures dealing with the academic and structural flaws impeding the world of the Lebanese University.

On the other hand, the Cabinet sees that the expansion witnessed in recent years in private higher education, which includes several academic and organizational problems, requires drafting a new law for higher education that guarantees the freedom of education and the state's role in preserving that freedom. It will also ensure academic standards, and respect laws and regulations to achieve public interest in organizational matters, the renewal of the curricula, as well as ensuring suitable university buildings.

The Cabinet is aware that our situation in Lebanon is a result of two things: freedom and quality in all fields, especially education and culture. Thus, we should aspire to reach high levels of quality in all the various levels of education and institutions.

#### Eleven: Culture

The Cabinet believes that cultural issues rank high in the project for building a new Lebanon, which the Cabinet calls for and pledges to achieve.

Lebanon's revival also means a revival of culture in a way that shows Lebanon's civilized face, the richness of its heritage and the contributions of the Lebanese. Culture in Lebanon is basic to the country's existence and identity. Culture does not flourish without freedom. Through its culture and freedom, Lebanon contributed to the Arab revival and is now urged to play a leading and pioneering role in launching a new Arab revival.

This requires that Beirut become once again the capital of Arab publishing, arts and other sorts of creativity and a bridge between Arab culture and the cultures of the world.

Culture does not need nor accept sponsorship; it deserves support in all fields, mainly the preservation of Lebanon's archaeological heritage.

The Cabinet's role is not to guide culture, but to stress the importance of creativity and supporting creative people.

To the Cabinet, culture in Lebanon is neither luxury nor a consumer product; it is a basic national product. Thus, it will mobilize and attract capabilities and invest them in all fields of cultural activity.

The Cabinet will also issue special laws to regulate the Ministry of Culture, especially the activities that relate to creative writers and artists. It will also work on helping them and guaranteeing their rights.

#### Twelve: Telecommunications

In the telecommunications field, the Cabinet, through coordination between the ministries of telecommunications and finance, will audit the revenues from the landline and cellular phone networks and other sources. The purpose is to streamline these revenues and channel them to a unified treasury account. The Cabinet also will carry out the necessary administrative and financial reforms and curb illegalities and unauthorized phone calls. It will also strictly enforce the current administration's cellular phone contracts and sort out pending lawsuits and matters. It will make preparations and carry out measures with respect to the landline network in order to establish Lebanon Telecom and its regulating body. On the other hand, the Cabinet will develop and liberalize the telecommunications sector, enhance quick and Internet communication and decrease the fees to encourage the economy to benefit from the vast chances of the knowledge economy. This includes preparations for pressing requirements in terms of privatizing this vital sector.

#### Thirteen: Energy and Water

##### 1- The Electricity Problem

The electricity sector and its administration in recent years were the source of severe logistical, operational and administrative problems. The sector was a mounting burden to citizens and has harmed their lives and interests while undermining the credibility of the state and burdening its finances. The problem was exacerbated by current increases in international oil prices, which increased the burden on the Treasury and the economy and increased the public budget's deficit and the public debt.

Thus, the Cabinet will work on gradual and phased solutions for the electricity problem on the short-, medium-, and long terms:

- 1- Installing additional pylons to complete the construction of the electricity transportation network.
- 2- Implementing a phased and correct policy to import oil derivatives that are necessary to operate production plants according to direct agreements between Lebanon and sisterly oil-rich states in order to decrease import costs.
- 3- Speeding up the enforcement of an agreement with sisterly Syria on importing natural gas in order to decrease the cost of power production in the Baddawi plants in northern Lebanon.
- 4- Strictly billing the power quantities that are being delivered to consumers and strictly collecting the bills from all consumers.
- 5- Seriously studying possible agreements with natural gas-producing institutions and countries in cooperation with the private sector and through private funding.
- 6- Involving the private sector and private funding in power plants and delivery networks.
- 7- Rapidly constructing new power plants and re-equipping existing power plants in cooperation with the private sector and with private funding to meet increasing power needs within the coming years.
- 8- Undertaking serious in-depth studies on the possibilities of developing Lebanon's water resources for hydroelectric use.
- 9- Studying ways of redressing the huge financial burden on the Treasury through enhancing the efficiency of production, delivery, billing and bill collection. There should be a balance between the endurance of the economy and the various sectors of the Lebanese people and the endurance of the treasury and the public debt.

##### 2- Water

The question of water remains very important because of the few months of rainfall and the extensive misuse and waste of water.



The cabinet will implement a master plan to protect water resources from waste and misuse according to economic and social standards. The plan should:

A- Secure drinking and irrigation water resources according to then needs of regions, people and economic growth, especially after several networks were completed without being connected to proper resources.

B- Completing studies and execution of all stages of the Litani project, which is a development requirement and national right, in order to meet some of our estimated needs in the future.

C- Continuing the construction of damns (Shabrouh, Assi, Qaisamani, etc.) and lakes according to an existing 10-year plan and in-force agreements, and guaranteeing Lebanon's rights in common rivers (Assi, Al-Kabeer al-Janoubi and Hasbabi).

D- Stressing the need to administer water as part of an integral approach and enhance the productivity of water authorities according to this new concept.

E- Working on streamlining the consumption of water, switching from underground to surface sources and increasing the replenishment of underground sources from surface trickle.

#### Fourteen: Public Health

The Cabinet pledges to sustain a comprehensive process of radical reforms in the public health system in order to reach a just and comprehensive healthcare service according to scientific and objective bases where advanced services become available at affordable prices. It also pledges to fight waste, cronyism and mismanagement in order to provide better use and results from invested funds. It will implement the healthcare map, including prophylaxis, care, hospitalization and medication. It will also modernize the administration of the healthcare sector through highly professional personnel and health date systems. It plans comprehensive computerization for the sector and put into operation all Government hospitals in Beirut and the regions, while enhancing supervisory and evaluation bodies and stressing the important role that the private sector and civil society institutions can play.

To reach these goals, the Cabinet, under the principles of partnership and responsibility, will work with concerned parties, including legislative institutions, unions, academic centers, international organizations and insurance and credit funds to reform the healthcare system. This will provide honorable and just medication for the Lebanese citizen by enhancing the uses and result of the available funds. The Cabinet will also work on sustaining and developing Lebanon's role in the region as a special center of special medical services and education for its people and visitors.

#### Fifteen: Women, Youths and Sports

Reviving the abilities of Lebanon's youth and encouraging them to take part in national politics require joint handling of several educational, cultural and economic aspects, including work to encourage economic, industrial and commercial initiatives by young people through the enactment of proper laws and the provision of soft loans and credits to their projects. Also needed is educational reorientation to cope with the labor market and provide new and suitable employment chances.

The state's role in reviving Lebanese sports should be free of political, regional and sectarian tensions and require supporting the infrastructure in all regions. This should complement the activation of the role of young people and the civil society in the new Lebanon.

On the other hand, the Cabinet will focus on the issues of women, who are basic and active partners in public life. This requires a proper legal atmosphere to encourage the role of women in all sectors and to mainstream women in all financial, economic and social policies in line with new international concepts in this regard.

The Cabinet will also put into effect all [of] Lebanon's commitments in relation with the recommendations of the international women's conference in Beijing in 1995.

#### Sixteen: The Environment

The Cabinet deeply believes that protecting the environment amounts to protecting Lebanon, the Lebanese

and their future. The environment is a national treasure, related to public health and an incentive to the economy and its growth.

Thus, protecting the environment is the collective responsibility of public and private sector institutions and of education and information institutions. It stretches beyond the national level to partnerships with sisterly Arab countries and friendly European countries. Thus, the Cabinet is aware of the responsibility of its different ministers, led by the Minister of Environment, to put an end to environmental degradation and its economic, social, health and aesthetic costs. The Cabinet will work on drafting a practical framework for cooperation between concerned ministries, including the Minister of Environment, and civil society and environmental organizations. The Cabinet will give special attention to reforesting Lebanon, halting desertification and protecting underground water.

The Cabinet will also work on a national plan to solve all aspects of the solid waste problem and will implement it according to effective coordination between all concerned ministries and in partnership with municipalities. It will also work on a solution for the sewage problem through a comprehensive plan based on existing achievements and the need to connect networks to purification plants. It will rely on regional aid and soft loans and on scientific international standards.

Thus, the cabinet believes that taking care of the environment and protecting it requires planning, legislation, programming and action to include environmental policies in the policies of development sectors. Also requires is a strict enforcement of laws and decisions and disregarding those influences that never cared for the environment, the country's interests and the future of the people.

#### Seventeen: The Relation with Parliament

The Cabinet considers the current stage a new era in the history of Lebanon. It is the era of implementing the Taif Accord, respecting the role assigned to constitutional institutions, especially Parliament and the Cabinet, and stressing the importance of the principle of separation of authority while encouraging their cooperation.

Thus, the Cabinet insists on activating the relation between these two constitutions institutions and spreading an atmosphere of democratic solidarity through openness, transparency in action, accountability, explanation, continuous communication and institutional questioning. This will allow the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs to play a new and effective role in this regard.

Here, the cabinet welcomes the idea of holding periodical parliamentary sessions to question the Cabinet, as [is] the case in many democratic countries. This stresses the separation between the legislative and executive authorities, encourages democratic and constitutional practice, and increases the levels of openness, accountability and performance.

#### Conclusion

Mr. Speaker,

Messrs. Deputies,

The last few months have been difficult and hard for the Lebanese, and for the brothers and friends who admired Lebanon and were saddened by its calamity. Yet, their belief in Lebanon was renewed by the determination of the youths and their rejection of disagreement, sedition, and division. Our losses were dear and hefty, but we won unity and our homeland. The challenge now is to be steadfast in order to win the future. It is impossible, unacceptable and unbearable to lose again. I am not speaking here of just economic and living conditions, no matter how hard and dire, but also about national existence and national well-being.

Today, we face several challenges. The region and this new era are full of dangers. The only safety gauge is the unity of our people, the confidence that the Lebanese have in their homeland and state and their desire for reform and revival.

It is unacceptable that the Lebanese live according to a constitution that we draft but do not implement or respect, under institutions that are mostly inoperable and under laws that are not being enforced.

It is unacceptable that people's security remains shaky and their lives threatened, that their problems, big and small, are generally unaddressed, except in the media and in public demonstrations.

If we want our country to survive, persevere and revive, then change, renewal and reform are imperative.



Reform is painful, and change is even more so. They are painful because they always clash with established interests whose stakeholders have succeeded in making them synonymous with the interests of a certain sect, a certain area, or a certain leader.

Mr. Speaker,

Messrs. Deputies,

We, like the Arabs and the world, are faced by a people, whose millions took to the streets, seeking accord and harmony, seeking freedom, seeking a strong and capable state, and seeking democracy and decent living. Existence, dignity and freedom require change that renews the system, require reform that streamlines institutions, puts into effect the constitution and the law and achieves a revival for the homeland, the state and the system.

We missed many chances. Responsibility is common to all. The homeland is one. The state is one. The system must be developed so it can face problems and challenges, otherwise the Lebanese will continue to look for a system that protects their existence, their freedoms, their coexistence and their promising future. Homelands cannot be changed or replaced. States cannot be changed or replaced. Systems can change and renew otherwise they fall. Since we want to win, not fall, we have to work with all our forces to renew and reform the system.

Needs are numerous and capabilities are few. Once we are united around these goals and once we have the determination and the will, we will manage to convince others that we are serious and to help us. Results then will improve and goals will be achieved. We have to start this ambitious program, this process, through specific workshops. We have to move forward according to achievements, according to the mentality of renewal, development and combating despair and nonsense. Therefore, two things are needed: a mentality of development and renewal and a process of new national revival.

Yes, we will work on change, for change and for the future. We wager that through this, we will gain the confidence and determination of the people, and the confidence, supervision and accountability of the parliament. This will happen now, amid suffering, ongoing security instability and mounting problems.

Martyred Prime Minister Rafic Hariri used to say, "When true democracy begins, stubbornness and foul play end." There will be no stubbornness vis-à-vis revision and accountability for achievement and laxity. There will be no foul play to protect private interests and to blame others. We are here to start a process, a process, as said before, of reform, revival and renewal. In it, we depend on your cooperation and hard work to gain the confidence of the Lebanese, their confidence in themselves, in their state, and in their future. Again, Rafic Hariri, God bless his soul, used to say, "The Lebanese may disagree about the past, but they agree about the future."

Mr. Speaker,

Messrs. Deputies,

Our cabinet is that of reform and revival. We seek to cooperate with your honorable council. According to this statement, it asks for your confidence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you Messrs. Deputies.

Long live Lebanon.

● **Najib Mikati statement**

"The new government's ministerial statement has specified a three-point procedure to bypass the problem of the election law. The procedure provides for forming a parliamentary-ministerial committee to study a new draft for the law in order to endorse it within 10 days and the adoption of an urgent bill allowing it to call the electoral bodies to the polls within 15 days from the end of the term of the current legislature (instead of the legal limit of one month). If the Chamber of Deputies were not to pass these two proposals, the government will be forced to invite the electoral bodies to vote on 29 May, in line with the election law of 2000, to avoid the constitutional consequences.

The government affirmed in its statement, of which As-Safir obtained a copy, its commitment to facilitate the investigation conducted by the international investigating committee into the assassination of the martyred former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and his comrades, by "placing at the disposal" the heads of the security bodies who have not so far taken the initiative of placing themselves at the disposal.

The statement spelt out what the government described as its national and pan-Arab foreign policy tenets, its commitment to the UN Charter and international conventions and treaties, and to the implementation of all international resolutions without selectivity, adherence to the Arab peace initiative, adherence to the Al-Ta'if Agreement and to implementing it in the letter and spirit in all its stipulations, and considering resistance against Israeli occupation a natural national right until the full liberation of occupied Lebanese territories.  
[Text of policy statement]

"Our government assumes its tasks in the extremely delicate and difficult circumstances, following a chain of stormy events that began with the attempted assassination of Deputy Marwan Hamada that was followed by the assassination of martyrs former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and Deputy Basil Fulayhan and their comrades, and the ramifications of this assassination which led to the formation of two international fact-finding committees and subsequently to the undertaking of an international investigation. In the events that accompanied these developments, the awareness of the Lebanese who rallied under the flag of their nation had the decisive effect in entrenching national unity and protecting national entente.

"All leaders and political parties have stressed they remain under the ceiling of the Al-Ta'if Agreement. It was within this framework that the fraternal Syrian army returned to its country after it fulfilled its assignments for which it is thanked in helping us come out of civil sedition, rebuilding the Lebanese armed forces and laying the foundation for establishing a more solid and firm relationship between the two countries in all spheres in an equitable manner based on respect for the sovereignty of both countries. The government will remain alert to the security situation and places its full confidence in the Lebanese army and in its ability to carry out the national role assigned to it.

"Our government will not indulge in promises about projects it proposes to implement during the short period of its tenure. But there has to be a reaffirmation of the national tenets it adheres to in its domestic and foreign policies.

Commitment to UN charter, resolutions, international treaties

"The government reiterates commitment to the UN Charter and the international conventions and treaties Lebanon has signed or joined. It reiterates its adherence to what was stipulated in the international convention on human rights, including the right of peoples to self-determination and to defending their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the legitimate right to resist occupation.

"The government underlines Lebanon's respect to the resolutions of international legitimacy and calls for implementing all of them without selectivity and invites all active parties to act diligently and seriously within this framework for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. These include Resolution 194 that underlines the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. The government further insists on the Arab peace initiative adopted by the 2002 Beirut Summit and reconfirmed at the 2005 Algiers Summit.

"The government will seek to strengthen Lebanon's fraternal relations with the brotherly Arab countries and the friendly countries. It highlights in this context the importance it attaches to deepening its relations with the European Union, especially the Euro-Med Partnership and its trajectory. The government intends to focus



on the global presence of the Lebanese and to take advantage of the large potential of this and to foster the Lebanese abroad who represent an extension of the homeland in various parts of the world.

"The government adheres to the Al-Ta'if Agreement and its implementation, in the letter and spirit and in all its clauses, as the basis for national entente endorsed by the unanimous will of the Lebanese people. Resistance "natural expression of right to defend land"

"The government also considers the Lebanese resistance and its weapons as a truthful and natural expression of the national right of the Lebanese people to defend their land and dignity in the face of Israeli assaults, threats and ambitions in order to complete the liberation of the Lebanese territories. The government further stresses the importance it attaches to the issue of prisoners and to demands that the international community pressure Israel to release Lebanese captives and detainees it holds in its jails.

"The government considers that one of its principal functions is the unravelling of the truth about the terrorist crime that targeted and led to the assassination of martyrs former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and Deputy Basil Fulayhan and their comrades and a number of citizens and caused a terrible earthquake in Lebanon and the world.

"In this context, the government reiterates its full adherence to UN Security Council Resolution 1595 on the formation of an international investigation committee to investigate the assassination of the martyr former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and his comrades. It confirms its full commitment to facilitate the mission of the committee in line with the articles of the said resolution, including hearing all those whose interrogation is required by the investigation in order to reveal the facts and apprehend and try the culprits.

"The government will also be committed to facilitate the investigations that will be undertaken by the international committee by placing at disposal the leaders of the security bodies who have not taken the initiative yet to place themselves at disposal, and to adopt the arrangements required by the ramifications resulting from the assassination of former Prime Minister Al-Hariri and his comrades. The government will also adopt the required decisions and measures against all those shown by the investigation to have been involved or to have colluded or been negligent in this horrendous crime.

"The basic mission of the government is to conduct the parliamentary elections within the constitutional and legal deadline on the basis of an election law that ensures the sound political representation, to supervise the staging of free and fair elections that express the real will of the Lebanese people and to promote the participation by citizens, especially new generations, in the making of their future. It calls for broad participation in these elections and urges the Lebanese to shoulder their national responsibilities in this sphere so that the elected council should express their aspirations and wishes.

"Out of its commitment to respect the sovereignty of the law, and in compliance with the constitutional rules, and since there are different drafts proposed for the election law, specifically the draft law referred to the Chamber of Deputies by the previous government, the government proposes the formation of a joint parliamentary-governmental committee in which it is represented by the ministers of justice and of the interior and municipalities, that is assigned to draft a new election law ensuring the sound political representation within a deadline not exceeding 10 days. To allow the committee room to carry out its mission and in particular to ensure acting within the legal deadlines and to avoid the constitutional responsibility that could arise, the government calls immediately for the adoption of an urgent, duplicate law entitling it to call the electoral bodies within a period of 15 days instead of one month. In the event the law on shortening the period is not adopted, the government will resort to conducting parliamentary elections within the constitutional deadline in line with the election law currently in effect.

"As for the judiciary authority, it represents the fundamental guarantee of the rights and liberties of the Lebanese. Thus there is a need to concentrate on security for the judiciary, out of the government's concern for independence of the judiciary and for providing all constitutional and legal guarantees for magistrates and litigators, so that that the judiciary become the focus of trust and respect of the Lebanese. This is because the judiciary is not only a fundamental factor of stability in society but also a principal factor in the confidence the world has in Lebanon and consequently in encouraging foreign investments that push the wheel of the economy and raise the standard of living of the Lebanese and protect their social security.



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"The government will not neglect, despite the preoccupations of this difficult stage for the country and the region, to preserve monetary stability, pay attention to the economic and social situation and seek to provide a suitable climate to enhance confidence in the Lebanese economy and invigorate the economic cycle in a way that ensures maintaining a dignified standard of living for the Lebanese people.

"In presenting this ministerial statement, the government asks your honorable Council to grant it confidence on this basis.

"Long live yourselves and long live Lebanon."