



**Statement of Lebanon**

by

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**Permanent Representative of Lebanon**

**to the United Nations**

**at the General Debate**

**of the**

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***Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations  
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Madam President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

Allow me first to thank the President of the Economic and Social Council for the excellent organization of the virtual High-Level Political Forum this year, as well as for her leadership and commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda.

As we commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations and embark on the decade of action and delivery for the SDGs, Lebanon reaffirms its strong commitment to multilateralism and to the 2030 Agenda in its entirety, whose universality underlines the importance of common and coordinated actions. We truly believe that in addition to its central role in supporting the implementation of the SDGs, the United Nations' role in catalyzing and coordinating global responses must be strengthened and preserved to face and prevent global threats, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impacts of COVID-19 have reinforced pre-existing challenges to realizing the SDGs, and exacerbated existing poverty, inequalities and vulnerabilities within and among countries, reversing development gains of the past decades. We note with deep concern that for the first time in decades poverty reduction is being reversed as stated in the Secretary-General's SDG Progress Report.

Since 2015, Lebanon has adopted and engaged constructively to implement the Agenda and its 17 Goals. To deliver on its commitment, the Lebanese Government adopted the SDGs as part of its ministerial declaration.

The National Committee on SDGs, headed by the Prime Minister and composed of representatives from all relevant ministries and public institutions, as well as representatives from civil society and private sector, is tasked with integrating SDGs in our national policies and plans and to develop a national database encompassing SDG indicators for follow-up and assessment purposes.

In the same vein, the Lebanese Parliament has formed a specialized commission to ensure coordinated policy support by the Parliament to the advancement of the 17 Goals; Laws have been reformed to provide all children with education, including refugees and displaced persons, empower all women and girls and curb domestic violence and violence against women. Moreover, youth and women were integrated within a number of ministries' projects to enhance their skills in entrepreneurship and pitching innovative ideas, in order to participate in the implementation of the SDGs, in close cooperation with ESCWA and UNDP.

Our engagement in the VNR process in 2018 consolidated our close collaborating with the UN System to raise the level of ambition to enhance sustainable development policies. Lebanon is currently working with UNDP and UNRCO to elaborate an action plan for Sustainable Development that would aim at putting the national efforts back on track, based on a bottom up approach and a whole of government approach.

The said plan would preserve the achievements that have been realized in terms of SDGs and mobilize sustainable and affordable means of implementation to tackle the country's new priorities and avoid further indebtedness. These priorities have emerged following the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenging economic, financial and social circumstances, which are triggering a humanitarian crisis.

The country's food security is being undermined by this crisis, exposing thousands of people to further vulnerabilities, including the refugees and displaced people Lebanon has been hosting since 1948 and 2011.

As a matter of fact, Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees and displaced persons per capita in the world, which form a huge burden on Lebanon's overstretched limited resources and infrastructure. In this context, we support the call on the international community to recognize the burden that large movements of refugees and displaced people place on major hosting countries and communities, as well as their national resources, especially in the case of developing countries, and support the call for a more equitable sharing of the burden, urgently addressing the needs of refugees and hosting States.

On a national level and to overcome the aforementioned difficulties, the Government's trajectory was set on a path of reforms to address the economic challenges and protracted problems by applying the rule of Law, good governance, transparency and accountability.

Two main decisions illustrate the Government's approach:

- 1- The adoption on April 30, 2020 of a recovery plan aimed at resolving deep-seated macro-economic, financial and institutional problems, restoring confidence, boosting economic growth, promoting a healthy financial system and achieving debt and financial sustainability.
- 2- The official launching of a negotiation process with IMF on May 13, 2020 to develop a comprehensive program of assistance to Lebanon.

The lockdowns due to Covid-19 pandemic have exacerbated an already bad economic situation, leading to the closure of many institutions, factories and the dismissal of their workers while employment opportunities became a scarcity.

The education sector is one of the most impacted by the refugee crisis and the economic crisis, which were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Public schools are overcrowded and suffering from a capacity problem due to the large number of Syrian displaced students, at a time when many schools need to be urgently rehabilitated and maintained. The health sector has also been under considerable strain because of the impact of the pandemic and the challenging economic circumstances.

Madam President,

Our world is not on track to achieve the SDGs and, as ESCWA warned us, the Arab region in particular will not achieve the Goals by 2030. Lebanon is not an exception.

The collapse of remittances resulting from the pandemic has had a significant impact on fragile and conflict-affected states in the region, as this accounts for 14% of their GDP according to the IMF. Further investment is needed to provide people with quality and inclusive education at all levels, including remote learning, as well as universal and affordable health services, social protection and safe housing. More investment is also needed to provide people with energy, safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, and sufficient and nutritious food, while protecting the environment.

Special attention needs to be given to closing the digital divide, including the gender digital divide, to cope with the world's new realities, as it is not always possible to telecommute in all countries.

In this context, Lebanon stresses that accelerated progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda should be our collective roadmap to respond and build back better and achieve a sustainable, resilient and prosperous future for all, while respecting, protecting and fulfilling all human rights. To that end, we urge the international community to further mobilize and effectively use all available means of implementation to fully implement the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the agreed conclusions and recommendations of the ECOSOC Fora on Financing for Development follow-up.

Recovering and building back better will require cooperation, collaboration and dialogue among multiple stakeholders to ensure that no one is left behind, especially people in vulnerable situations. Lebanon supports the call on the international community to respond to the economic and social shocks, by properly and urgently addressing developing countries' financing challenges, without excluding middle-income countries, home to 62% of the world's poor. Those countries are highly vulnerable to a debt crisis, limited market access and capital outflows. We believe that debt relief programs would rather be based on the level of vulnerability of affected countries, and not on their simple GDP indicator.

In this regard, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General in organizing a global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in solidarity with affected countries, and the debt relief initiatives as a first step towards a more ambitious and global action to overcome debt distress and achieve debt sustainability, especially in heavily indebted developing countries.

I thank you.