

Lebanese Religious Leaders Unite In Call To Stop Israeli Aggression

On Aug. 1, shortly after the tragic deaths of the civilian families of Qana from Israeli bombings, the Christian and Muslim religious leaders of Lebanon met in Bkerke, the seat of the Maronite Patriarchate, at the invitation of Patriarch Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir, to issue an appeal to the world, to stop the Israeli aggression against Lebanon. The meeting has barely been reported in the United States, and the statement of unity has been virtually blacked out by the English-language press. A Lebanese contact told EIR that ours would be the first publication to print the unity statement in English.

Patriarch Sfeir told the English-language Lebanese newspaper the Daily Star, that the summit came in response to Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's repeated calls for such a meeting. The Patriarch stated that, "considering the tragic circumstances, we had to convene to strongly condemn what happened and is happening here, to encourage our children and brethren not to lose hope despite the difficulties, and to urge them to pray to the Lord who brings comfort and good news."

The Muslim and Christian attendees, organized by the National Christian-Islamic Dialogue Committee, included Maronite Patriarch Sfeir, Grand Mufti Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Qabbani, Higher Shi'ite Council Vice President Sheikh Abdel-Amir Qabalan, and Druze Spritual Courts President Judge Nohad Hreiz, reported the newspaper.

The conclave, referred to as the Religious Leaders Summit, issued a powerful statement of unity. EIR presents here a translation of the final statement issued by the clerics, in a translation done by Catholic Center for Information in Lebanon. Subheads have been added.

At a time when Lebanon is still tending to wounds generated by a series of internal wars that had ravaged the country for 15 years; and at a time when Lebanon was busy rebuilding its socio-economic structure destroyed by senseless wars financed and nurtured by different foreign powers; and at a time when Lebanon was still suffering being used as a theater for the wars of others on its land; and at a time when Lebanon has succeeded in asserting its national unity and its absolute commitment to freedom, sovereignty, independence, and conviviality among all its religious families; at this time,

Lebanon is being exposed to a new Israeli aggression, a brutal aggression reflecting much more hatred and revenge than a pretended reaction to the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers. The latest unacceptable crime committed by the Israelis in Qana, which exceeded in its atrocity every imagination, is nothing but a living proof of that hatred against Lebanon and the Lebanese.

The Christian and Muslim religious leaders convened in a religious summit—at the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkerke—to talk about the repercussions of the criminal Israeli aggression, pay tribute to the Lebanese army and its martyrs, salute the resistance and its martyrs along with all the innocent civilians who offered their lives for Lebanon, and pray God to accept their souls and shower His mercy and kindness upon them, and they ask Him to have compassion on the country of Lebanon against the abomination of the Israeli enemy. They assert the following common positions:

1. They denounce the Israeli aggression against Lebanon, considering it a war crime against all Lebanese: people, institutions, and government. They call on the international community to halt the aggression immediately and put an end to it for good, and to lift the unjust blockade—air, land, and sea—imposed by the Israeli forces, so as to allow all displaced to return to their cities and villages and to live therein in peace and serenity under one and united national and sovereign authority.

2. They hold Israel accountable, morally and financially, for all the civilian victims and casualties (families, women, and children), and for the systematic destruction of homes, institutions, and the infrastructure of the national economy, asking to file lawsuits against Israel before international courts.

3. They affirm the commitment of Lebanese society in all its communities, denominations, and regions towards the right of all the sufferers to have proper support and help to alleviate their pain and sufferings. They consider the Israeli aggression addressed towards all Lebanese loyal to their country and keen to translate this loyalty to the state's high interest in all related decisions.

4. They express their attachment to national unity as

a sole guarantor of the state of Lebanon in its entity, society, and government. They warn all against the dimensions of the Israeli aggression which aim to infringe on that unity and to draw Lebanon and the whole Arab region into disastrous hostilities. The national unity was and still is the basis for resisting the Israeli occupation; and Hezbollah, which represents an essential part of Lebanese society, is not but one of the constituents of the Lebanese resistance.

5. They support all efforts employed by the Lebanese government, represented by the Council of Ministers, alongside the concerned international bodies, to regain Lebanon's violated sovereignty and expand it on all Lebanese territories, air, and waters, and secure the immediate Israeli withdrawal from the Shebaa farms. They adopt the operational suggestions identified and pronounced by President Siniora before the international conference in Rome and which were unanimously agreed upon by the Council of Ministers.

Seven-Step Plan

Those suggestions are defined in the seven-step plan to follow after an immediate cease-fire and they state:

- 1) Commitment to release all Lebanese and Israeli prisoners and kidnapped, via the International Red Cross.
- 2) Withdrawal of the Israeli army behind the blue line.
- 3) Return of all refugees to their towns and villages.
- 4) Commitment of the international Security Council to place the Shebaa farms and the Kfarshouba hills under the United Nations authority so their residents can return to them, and hold control over them till the final border lines are formally drawn, thereafter they will come under the authority of the Lebanese government.
- 5) Israel should deliver the maps of all planted mines in South Lebanon to the United Nations.
- 6) Bestow the authority of the Lebanese government on all its territories through the legitimate Lebanese armed forces, who will be the sole arms bearers in Lebanon under the authority of Lebanon's government, as mentioned in the Taef Accord for national reconciliation. This would require consolidating the international forces, UNIFIL, working in the South, raising the numbers of its men, upgrading its equipment, expanding the scope of its work, and making the necessary arrangements to revive the armistice agreement signed by Lebanon and Israel in 1949 under the umbrella of the United Nations.
- 7) The commitment of the international community to assist Lebanon at all level and help it face the consequences of the latest human, social, and eco-

nomical tragedies, especially in the domains of human aid, rebuilding the destroyed areas, and rebuilding the Lebanese economy.

Responsibilities of Citizens and Government

6. They insist on the right and duties of all Lebanese citizens asserting their equality under the law, that should be enforced by the government political, judicial, administrative, and security institutions in order to achieve justice and spread respect for the values of citizenship. The restoration of Lebanon's government authority and sovereignty over all Lebanese territories represents the national constant on which all Lebanese agree and find salvation and immunity against the diseases of disruption and troubles.

7. They call on all national political leaders, in both state and society, to work on finding global and final solutions to the repeated disasters that have taken place over the past three decades in a series of brutal and destructive aggressions which have killed thousands of Lebanese, by spreading the government authority on all Lebanese territories at all levels: security, politically, socially, economically, so as to implement the Taef Accord in its entirety. They also call on them to take part in the national decision-making, yet leave the final decision exclusively to the Lebanese authority, and to revive the armistice agreement of 1949 in order to deprive Israel of any possible argument to assault Lebanon and its people ever again.

8. They commend sister and friendly nations for their sympathetic positions towards Lebanon and their support for its just cause, expressing their thanks for the aid received, and inviting those countries to work collaboratively with the humanitarian organizations on a comprehensive plan to rebuild what the Israeli enemy has destroyed.

9. They call on all Lebanese to remain united, to be patient and hopeful in a better tomorrow; for Lebanon has known, all through its history, major crises and disasters, yet it has always conquered and overcome, and it must now regain its illuminating life and continue its mission as a country where freedom, democracy, and human rights flourish.

10. They consider the sessions of the Spiritual Summit open in order to face all developments.

The Muslim and Christian authorities who adhere to the sovereignty of Lebanon and its liberty, unity, security, and stability consider all spiritual families of Lebanon as one national Lebanese family, anytime one of them is affected, all assemble to assist her; they are for one another in better times and worse. National unity is not a mere motto or an emotional song; it is rather a sincere act of faith and commitment through which Lebanon reaches its greatness and glory, and realizes its salvation from disasters and calamities.