



The Economic and Social
Council of Lebanon

Speech of

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President of the Lebanese Economic and Social Council

during the Dialogue Session on

“The Economic Crisis Facing Lebanon and the Need for Urgent Reforms,

” July 25, 2017

Our gathering today is the fruit of a partnership between the state, represented by His Excellency the Minister of Labor Mohamad Kabbara, to whom we are deeply grateful for his cooperation and participation; the European Union (EU) represented by Ambassador Christina Lassen, whose role in supporting this event is a testimony of the EU's commitment to progress and development; and last but not least the Lebanese Economic and Social Council, whose mandate is to serve as a forum for social dialogue between the public sector, the private sector, and civil society.

This session is chaired by His Excellency Minister of Economy and Trade Raed Khoury, who is working on multiple fronts to lift Lebanon out of an economic crisis into a path towards sustainable reform. We are confident that through his leadership, this session will conclude with practical recommendations for achieving economic and social advancement.

I would like to also thank His Excellency Yassine Jaber, who brings to this session his depth of knowledge, expertise, and clear vision, as well as Dr. Gaspard, Dr. Nasr, and Mr. Menassa for their cooperation. And I salute all of our honorable guests and participants – from public officials, to economic and social figures, experts, academics, and media professionals.

Welcome and thank you all.

Your excellencies, honorable guests, and distinguished participants,

Three weeks before the election of General Michel Aoun as President of the Republic, we launched – in the Grand Serail – our initiative titled “Emerging Lebanon: Towards Economic Growth and Social Welfare,” during which we promised to organize a series of workshops aimed at contributing to progress and development under the new era. In this vein, today's session marks the beginning of a series of workshops to be held in the coming months with officials and experts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are discussing the crisis not to remain in it, but to come out of it – this is the intended meaning behind the “need for urgent reforms.”

The urgency is clear if we look around us. HE Minister Raed Khoury recently launched a conference centered on strengthening small and medium enterprises. The Free Patriotic Movement unveiled its economic plan in a press conference led by Minister Gebran Bassil, in which he presented both immediate and long-term measures.

In between and even before these initiatives, President Michel Aoun stressed the need to revive the economy and bolster social welfare, and called for the participation of civil society in efforts to spur progress and development.

In the same vein, we have witnessed repeated calls for economic revival launched by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Saad Hariri, and in all of the public statements issued by the economic organizations, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL), political parties, unions, syndicates, associations, the private sector, and civil society.

Through today’s session, we aim to bring together all stakeholders in an inclusive and participatory dialogue to help Lebanon make the transition from crisis towards progress.

This too was the goal of our Emerging Lebanon initiative launched ten months ago, when we proposed an evidence-based, practical vision with a group of experts, officials, and academics, considering that economic revival and social welfare is not the sole responsibility of the state, nor of the private sector alone, but requires cooperation, solidarity, and complementarity between the state, the private sector and civil society. We view our Emerging Lebanon initiative as the starting point of a dialogue with all concerned parties in order to refine, further develop, and build consensus around a shared vision.

This is the role of the Lebanese Economic and Social Council. We look with confidence to its reactivation under the new government so it can help mobilize the necessary talents, resources, capabilities and skills – from individual initiatives, to domestic pillars of our economy, to the Lebanese diaspora energy, to investments from brotherly and friendly countries.

In this context, the Arab League of Economic and Social Councils, which I preside, has confirmed its support to Lebanon, especially with regard to the displacement of our Syrian brothers, recognizing that it is beyond the capacity of Lebanon to shoulder this burden alone.

We are also in discussion with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) to organize a seminar here in Beirut with the participation of Arab and European countries, particularly those of the Mediterranean, to assist Lebanon, Jordan, and other states affected by the Syrian crisis.

Your Excellencies and honorable guests,

Dialogue is the only choice before us to facilitate the transition from crisis towards real reform.

This period requires a simultaneous emphasis on revival of our internal institutions as well as capitalizing on our external relations with Europe, brotherly nations, and friendly countries – for which we have helped lay a foundation over the past 17 years through the European Union's Economic and Social Committee, the International Association of Economic and Social Councils, and those of the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can only succeed through our solidarity because economic revival is revival for everyone, and economic collapse is collapse for everyone – just as social welfare is a critical pillar of economic and national stability.

Allow me to thank GOPA Consultants for its assistance to the Economic and Social Council in organizing this gathering.

Thank you all, and welcome.