



Security Council

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Implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

Thirty-second semi-annual report of the Secretary-General

I. Background

1. The present report is the thirty-second semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). It provides a review and an assessment of the implementation of the resolution since the issuance of my previous report on the subject, on 24 April 2020 (S/2020/329) and covers developments up to 2 October 2020.

II. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

2. Since the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004) by the Security Council on 2 September 2004, limited progress has been made in its implementation. A number of provisions, including with respect to the existence and activities of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, remain pending.

A. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon

3. Through the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council sought to strengthen respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout the country, in accordance with the Taif Accords of 1989, to which all the political parties in Lebanon had committed themselves. That objective has remained the priority of my efforts.

4. During the reporting period, Lebanon continued to face a deep economic and financial crisis. On 30 April 2020, following consultations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, Hassan Diab, adopted a financial recovery plan. Discussions with IMF subsequently stalled, amid disagreements between political and financial stakeholders over the scope of and responsibility for the country's financial crisis. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, Nassif Hitti, submitted his resignation on 3 August, stating, "I had pinned high hopes on change and reform; but the reality aborted every hope".



5. Intermittent protests occurred throughout the country, some of which turned violent. The protestors denounced the dire socioeconomic conditions, the frequent power outages, the price hikes, the fluctuating exchange rate and the lockdown measures. On 27 April 2020, clashes in Tripoli between demonstrators and the Lebanese Armed Forces led to the death of a demonstrator. On 28 April, the Lebanese Armed Forces issued a press release in which it expressed regret for the death and stated that it had “opened an investigation into the incident”. Later that night, demonstrators vandalized banks, attacked police vehicles and hurled stones at soldiers. From 27 to 29 April, 77 civilians and 159 soldiers were reportedly injured. In reaction to a further devaluation of the currency, violent demonstrations occurred in Beirut and Tripoli on 12 and 13 June. Some 123 persons, including 26 Lebanese Armed Forces personnel, were injured. The Higher Defence Council met on 15 June, following which the Lebanese Armed Forces arrested 36 people for acts of vandalism, damage to public and private property and attacks on security forces.

6. On 4 August 2020, a massive explosion at the port of Beirut caused mass casualties, widespread displacement and large-scale infrastructural damage to areas close to the blast site. Material and property damage extended for several kilometres from the blast zone. According to initial statements from authorities, a large stockpile, estimated at 2,750 tons, of highly explosive ammonium nitrate stored in the port exploded after a fire broke out in an adjacent storage facility. Overall, 192 people were killed, 7 remain missing, more than 6,500 were injured, including 1,000 children, and hundreds of thousands were left in need of shelter. The World Bank estimated the value of physical damage between \$3.8 billion and \$4.6 billion, losses in economic flows between \$2.9 billion and \$3.5 billion and priority recovery and reconstruction needs for the calendar years 2020 and 2021 between \$1.8 billion and \$2.2 billion.

7. Following the explosion, Beirut was declared a “disaster city” by the authorities and placed under a state of emergency, initially until 18 August, granting the army exceptional powers over civilian and security matters. On 5 August, the Cabinet mandated a commission to conduct a five-day “administrative inquiry” into the Beirut port explosion. The case was subsequently referred to the Judicial Council. The judicial investigator has since detained 25 individuals. The Lebanese investigation is ongoing. Four former Prime Ministers, the Patriarch of the Maronite Church, Béchara Boutros Rai, and several political parties and Lebanese civil society groups have called for an international investigation into the explosion.

8. In the aftermath of the explosion, protestors accused the Government of having allowed the explosion to occur as a result of criminal negligence, corruption and incompetence and called for the resignation of the political class. From 8 to 11 August, large-scale, anti-Government protests took place in Beirut, resulting in violent clashes between protestors and security forces. The protest of 8 August was especially violent, resulting in the death of 1 soldier of the Internal Security Forces and 281 protestors, 108 soldiers from the Lebanese Armed Forces and 136 soldiers from the Internal Security Forces injured.

9. Following those incidents, several ministers and members of Parliament resigned on 9 and 10 August, and, on 10 August, Mr. Diab announced the resignation of his Government. He stated that the disaster, which had hit the Lebanese people “at the core”, had occurred “as a result of chronic corruption in politics, administration and the State”. He added that “the corrupt system [was] bigger than the State, and the latter [was] constrained by this system and [could not] confront it or get rid of it”.

10. In order to shore up international support to Lebanon in the aftermath of the port explosion, on 9 August, the United Nations and France jointly convened an international conference on support for Beirut and the Lebanese people. The United

Nations pledged that it was “committed to helping the people of Lebanon in every way we can”, called on everyone to “rally together, and provide all the financial, material and political support [possible]” and emphasized the need to “focus our support on four priority sectors: health, food, the rehabilitation of buildings and the rehabilitation of schools”. The Deputy Secretary-General reaffirmed the commitment of the country’s partners to the well-being of its people. After the conference, France announced that €250 million had been raised. On 10 August, at a briefing for Member States on the humanitarian situation in Lebanon, I called for robust international support for all people in need in Lebanon, especially women and girls, and reiterated the importance of implementing reforms to address the needs of the Lebanese people for the longer term.

11. On 27 August, 44 women’s rights organizations and feminist activists in Lebanon released a charter of demands for a gender-sensitive disaster response plan. The signatories demanded “that aid be channelled to civil society organizations and delivered in an equitable and just manner for all. Aid must also be distributed in a manner that takes into account the disproportionate effect and impact, both short and long term, of the most vulnerable and historically excluded groups.”

12. On 31 August, the then-Ambassador of Lebanon to Germany, Mustafa Adib, was appointed Prime Minister-designate. On 1 September, during a visit to Lebanon, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, called for the formation of a Government within two weeks and proposed a roadmap for reforms, which secured commitment from political forces across the spectrum. On 26 September, after the parties were unable to agree on the composition of a Government, Mr. Adib, informed the President of Lebanon, Michel Aoun, that he was unable to form a Government and stepped down.

13. On 23 September, the Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, Jean-Yves Le Drian, and I co-chaired a ministerial meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon. Members of the Group urged the leaders of Lebanon “to unite in support of the timely formation of a Government able to meet the legitimate aspirations expressed by the Lebanese people and committed to addressing [the country’s] multiple and acute challenges, notably its humanitarian, socioeconomic and financial crises, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the reconstruction of Beirut and the restoration of [the city’s] heritage and historical buildings”. The Group “strongly urged Lebanese political leaders to undertake critical reforms”.

14. Regrettably, the economic crisis in Lebanon has been further deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns, as well as by the explosion of 4 August, leading to a spike in unemployment and poverty. Over 150,000 workers are estimated to have lost their jobs, either permanently or temporarily, as a result of the explosion, further compounding the 30 per cent unemployment rate already registered in June 2020. In the *Beirut Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment* of August 2020, prepared by the World Bank in collaboration with the European Union and the United Nations, it was noted that “[p]re-disaster estimates of general and extreme poverty rates were 45 and 22 per cent, respectively”. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), those combined challenges are estimated to have reduced women’s participation in the economy by 14 to 19 per cent.

15. Findings from assessments and research conducted by the National Commission for Lebanese Women, UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization in April and May 2020 indicate that the COVID-19 lockdown has contributed to an increase in different forms of gender-based violence, in particular as experienced by women and girls. Prolonged periods of isolation, income

insecurity and restricted access to medical and social services have created the opportunity for violence against women and girls to continue.

16. As at 31 August 2020, 896,182 refugees and asylum seekers were registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon, including 879,598 Syrian refugees and 16,584 refugees and asylum seekers of other nationalities. Surveys of more than 20,000 refugee households conducted by UNHCR since the beginning of 2020 revealed that refugees are increasingly unable to cover their basic needs.

17. In its resolution [1680 \(2006\)](#), the Security Council strongly encouraged the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to respond positively to the request made by the Government of Lebanon to delineate their common border. Such delineation remains critical in order to enable proper border control and management, including with regard to the movement of people and the potential movement of arms.

18. The delineation and demarcation of the boundaries of Lebanon remain essential to guaranteeing national sovereignty and territorial integrity. While border delineation is a bilateral matter, progress on the issue remains an obligation for Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, in accordance with resolution [1680 \(2006\)](#). On 16 July, marking the first incident of cross-border fire from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon since 2018, clashes took place in Qasr, in Biq'á Governorate, between smugglers, who reportedly fled to Lebanon, and Syrian security officers at the border. The Lebanese Armed Forces sent patrols to the area in support of Syrian security personnel. One Syrian officer was reportedly killed and another injured in the clashes.

19. Israel continued to occupy the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon and resolutions [1559 \(2004\)](#) and [1701 \(2006\)](#).

20. There was no progress on the issue of the Shab'a Farms area. Furthermore, neither the Syrian Arab Republic nor Israel responded to the provisional definition of the area contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#) of 30 October 2007 ([S/2007/641](#)).

21. Unmanned aerial vehicles and fixed-wing aircraft, including fighter jets, of the Israel Defense Forces continued to make near daily overflights above Lebanon during the reporting period, in violation of Lebanese sovereignty and resolutions [1559 \(2004\)](#) and [1701 \(2006\)](#). In identical letters dated 30 April 2020 addressed to the President of the Security Council and to me ([A/74/836-S/2020/349](#)), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, on behalf of her Government, stated that, on 27 April, "four Israeli warplanes had violated Lebanese airspace" and "fired missiles towards Syrian territory". She added that Israel had "escalated the nature of its violations by using Lebanese airspace to carry out missile attacks against a third State". In identical letters dated 1 July addressed to the President of the Security Council and to me ([A/74/938-S/2020/642](#)), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon, also on behalf of her Government, stated that, on 4 June 2020, "four Israeli enemy warplanes flying at low altitude and a speed of 550 knots violated Lebanese airspace, entering over the sea off Sidon". She added that "Israeli enemy interference caused other targets to appear on the radar screens of Rafic Hariri International Airport in Beirut as missiles were being fired towards Syrian territory". She noted that "Israel not only violated Lebanese airspace" but "could have endangered civilians and Lebanese territory had fire been opened on the source of the missiles".

22. On 27 July 2020, the Israel Defense Forces fired mortar smoke grenades and some tank shells across the Blue Line in the Kfar Shuba and Bastrah area. In a public statement issued that evening, the Israel Defense Forces stated that it had "thwarted an infiltration attempt by a Hezbollah terror squad in northern Israel" an hour earlier.

Soon afterwards, Hizbullah issued a statement denying any involvement in the incident and asserting that retaliation for the killing of a Hizbullah member in the Syrian Arab Republic on 20 July, which it attributed to Israel, was yet to come. In speeches made on 14 and 30 August, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, reiterated that pledge. In identical letters dated 17 August addressed to the President of the Security Council and to me (S/2020/806), the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations stated that, on 27 July, Israel Defense Forces surveillance had “identified a squad of armed Hezbollah militants travelling in a tactical manner towards the Blue Line in the Har Dov area. Three armed militants then crossed the Blue Line and infiltrated Israeli territory in an attempt to carry out an attack.” In identical letters dated 29 July and 19 August addressed to the President of the Security Council and to me (A/74/979-S/2020/762 and A/74/996-S/2020/819), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon, on behalf of her Government, indicated that, on 27 July, the Israeli army fired artillery shells from inside the occupied Shab‘a Farms at Kurum, Wadi al-Jawz, eastern Kfar Shuba, eastern Halta, Jabal Shamis and Jabal al-Sidanah, which are in Lebanese territory.

23. On 18 August 2020, the Trial Chamber of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon pronounced its judgment in *Prosecutor v. Ayyash et al.* The Trial Chamber “unanimously found the accused, Salim Jamil Ayyash, guilty beyond reasonable doubt of all counts against him in the indictment.” However, according to the Trial Chamber, the prosecution did not prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt in relation to Hassan Habib Merhi, Hussein Hassan Oneissi and Assad Hassan Sabra. The Trial Chamber found those individuals not guilty in relation to all counts charged against them. The Trial Chamber was satisfied with the evidence that the Syrian Arab Republic and Hezbollah “may have had motives to eliminate” the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafik Hariri and “some of his political allies” but that there was “no evidence that the Hezbollah leadership had any involvement in Mr. Hariri’s murder”, “no direct evidence of Syrian involvement in it” and “no evidence that either Mr. Ayyash or [Mustafa Amine] Badreddine were directed by the Hezbollah leadership to arrange logistical support for Mr. Hariri’s assassination”. Following the announcement of the ruling on 18 August, Mr. Hariri’s son, Saad Hariri, stated to the press that, “for the first time in the history of the many political assassinations that Lebanon has witnessed, the Lebanese [people] know the truth, and, for the first time, true justice has prevailed”. He added that “Hezbollah must cooperate on” handing over Mr. Ayyash. The Trial Chamber is continuing with sentencing proceedings against Mr. Ayyash.

24. On 10 September 2020, Trial Chamber II of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon confirmed the jurisdiction of the Special Tribunal to try Mr. Ayyash in relation to the attacks on Marwan Hamadeh, Georges Hawi and Elias El-Murr, carried out on 1 October 2004, 21 June 2005 and 12 July 2005, respectively.

25. Several States objected to the reservation and statement made by Lebanon upon its accession to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism. They noted, however, that those objections would not preclude the entry into force of the Convention between each of them and Lebanon.

B. Extension of control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory

26. The Government of Lebanon continued its efforts to extend the authority of the State throughout all the Lebanese territory, as called for in the Taif Accords and in resolution 1559 (2004).

27. On 20 August 2020, 1 individual was reportedly killed and 10 others wounded in armed clashes between members of the Amal Movement and Hizbullah in the southern village of Lubyah, over a banner commemorating the Ashura' festival. On 26 August, the Internal Security Forces arrested a suspected member of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) who was allegedly planning to target the Lebanese Armed Forces. On 27 August, two people were reportedly killed and three injured after armed clashes in Khaldah, south of Beirut, between the Sunni residents of Khaldah and local supporters of Hizbullah and the Amal Movement. Calm was restored after the Lebanese Armed Forces intervened. On 7 September, one person was killed and two injured in clashes among armed youth in Tariq al-Jadidah, in Beirut, involving machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. The Lebanese Armed Forces contained the situation and arrested those behind the clashes.

28. On 21 August, four unidentified assailants opened fire in the village of Kaftun, in northern Lebanon, resulting in the death of three individuals. The following day, security forces in the Beddawi camp for Palestinian refugees detained an individual in connection with the fatal shooting. A second suspect in the incident, a Syrian national, reportedly detonated himself on 24 August, as the Internal Security Forces raided his apartment in Akkar to arrest him. On 5 September, the Lebanese Armed Forces reportedly arrested individuals linked to ISIL in relation to the incident in Kaftun. Those individuals were allegedly planning to conduct several terrorist attacks in the country. On 13 September, the Lebanese Armed Forces conducted raids in Jabal al-Biddawi, reportedly in search of suspects related to the Kaftun incident, during which four members of the Lebanese Armed Forces and one militant were reportedly killed, and one member of the Lebanese Armed Forces seriously injured. On 26 September, the Internal Security Forces stated that they had raided the house of alleged members of ISIL, killing nine of its members. On 27 September, unknown assailants reportedly opened fire from a vehicle at a post of the Lebanese Armed Forces in Minniyah, in northern Lebanon. Two soldiers of the Lebanese Armed Forces and one assailant were reportedly killed.

29. On 13 May, the Higher Defence Council reviewed existing measures to combat smuggling along the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Council requested that steps be taken to intensify monitoring, prosecute violators, smugglers and their partners and shut down illegal crossings. The Council decided to establish new security points for customs and devise a comprehensive plan to establish military, security and customs control services. Subsequent efforts by security forces to close illegal border crossings yielded results, with several small crossing points and bridges closed or dismantled in the Hirmil area along the border. On 29 May, Mr. Diab, who was then still Prime Minister, pledged to "pursue efforts to stop the smuggling business" by closing those crossings, as it caused "great damage to the State" and benefited only "a handful of smugglers". During the reporting period, security forces arrested several individuals on charges of smuggling, including of diesel, liquified petroleum gas and food products.

30. In a speech made on 13 May, Mr. Nasrallah stated that, "when facing smuggling", the two countries concerned, namely, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, "have to cooperate to solve the issue". He added that "all factions have called for addressing the issue of smuggling. I am not talking about the movement of resistance combatants and weapons, which is another matter." He also called again for Lebanon to normalize its relations with the Syrian Arab Republic, calling the delay in doing so "harmful" to Lebanon in the context of the economic crisis. He stated that, "even if troops are deployed along the entire Lebanese-Syrian border, they cannot prevent smuggling because [the Lebanese] towns and families are interlinked" with those in the Syrian Arab Republic.

31. The situation in Palestinian refugee camps remained calm overall during the reporting period. However, personal disputes in the Rashidieh camp near Tyre, in southern Lebanon, escalated into heavy shooting on 8 and 25 May, resulting in two fatalities. On 28 July, in Ein El Hilweh camp, near Sidon, a personal dispute at a security checkpoint inside the camp escalated into a shooting, resulting in one fatality. The next day, demonstrations took place in the camp to protest the shooting.

C. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

32. In its resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#), the Security Council called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, a key provision of the resolution that has yet to be implemented. The provision reflects and reaffirms a decision to which all Lebanese committed themselves in the Taif Accords.

33. Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias within the country continued to operate outside the control of the Government, in violation of resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#). While several groups across the political spectrum in Lebanon possess weapons outside government control, Hizbullah is the most heavily armed militia in the country.

34. There has been no tangible progress made towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as called for in the Taif Accords and resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#). Since the adoption of that resolution, no specific steps have been taken to tackle that crucial issue, which lies at the heart of the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon. The maintenance by Hizbullah of a military arsenal outside a legal framework and its involvement in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be denounced by a number of voices in Lebanon, who consider those issues to be destabilizing factors in the country and ones that undermine democracy. Many Lebanese people view the continued presence of such arms as an implicit threat that those weapons could be used within Lebanon for political reasons.

35. The self-acknowledged maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups and the alleged increase by Hizbullah of its arsenal pose a serious challenge to the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory.

36. On 29 May 2020, protesters staged a sit-in outside the Justice Palace in Beirut, demanding the full implementation of resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#) and [1680 \(2006\)](#) and the disarmament of militias. Another group expressed support for the demands of the protests of 17 October but rejected calls to disarm Hizbullah. Members of Parliament from both the Lebanese Forces and the Kata'ib Party reiterated their call for holding a dialogue with Hizbullah to address the issue.

37. On 5 June, two opposing demonstrations reportedly took place in Tripoli, one to call for the full implementation of resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#) and reject the possession of weapons outside State institutions, and the other to reject those demands, saying that the focus should rather be on socioeconomic issues. The Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces separated the two groups.

38. On 6 June, protesters reportedly travelled from different parts of the country to join an anti-Government demonstration in Beirut. Disagreements over the main demands, including calls for the implementation of resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#), prompted some groups to boycott the protests. Amal Movement and Hizbullah loyalists staged a counter-protest. Demonstrations reportedly deteriorated rapidly into clashes along sectarian lines. Tensions between protesters on opposite sides mounted as the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces tried to separate the two groups. The security forces used tear gas to disperse the protesters. A total of 25 soldiers and 48 civilians were reportedly injured during the protests. On 7 June,

Mr. Aoun reportedly stated: “Let what happened last night be a wake-up call for everyone”.

39. Mr. Nasrallah, commenting on the above incidents in a speech made on 16 June, said that “demanding a solution” to socioeconomic issues was “normal and acceptable”, but that adding calls for the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) to those demands was “negative because it leads to divisions”. He added that it was “wrong and unfair to the revolution of 17 October, because many who joined the 17 October protests, including parties and people from different areas, do not believe [in] this aggressive position towards the resistance”. He called for the “legitimate socioeconomic demands” of 17 October not to be conflated with demands for the implementation of the resolution.

40. In other sporadic gatherings during the reporting period, protestors also called for the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004).

41. In his aforementioned speech of 13 May, Mr. Nasrallah stated that “Hizbullah and other resistance factions” had been decreasing their presence in the Syrian Arab Republic “for more than two years” and had been “reducing the number of troops” because that country had “won the war and started recovering”. He added, however, that Hizbullah still had “one or two bases” in Qalamun and Zabadani.

42. In a speech made on 26 May, Mr. Nasrallah responded to a question on whether Hizbullah would “transform all the missiles to precision missiles” by stating that “the resistance should have such an objective”. In identical letters dated 28 June addressed to the President of the Security Council and to me (S/2020/608), the Permanent Representative of Israel stated the following: “[W]e have witnessed in Lebanon the acquisition by Hizbullah, a terrorist group and Iranian proxy, of more than 150,000 missiles and rockets that have the ability to attack the entire State of Israel. The vast majority of these rockets have been transferred from Iran, in violation of not only Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), but also resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 [(2004)].”

43. In a speech made on 16 June, in which he referenced the dire socioeconomic situation, Mr. Nasrallah said that, in a situation in which “to be able to buy bread, Hizbullah has to hand over its weapons: arms for bread, arms for food”, but “in our equation, we do not agree to hand over the arms”. He added the following: “[To anyone] who gives us two choices: either we kill you with weapons or [you die of] hunger, I tell them the arms will remain in our hands and we will not go hungry. We will kill you, we will kill you, we will kill you.”

44. On 22 September, an explosion took place in the village of Ayn Qana, near Nabatiyah in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces stated that it had launched an investigation. On 26 September, Hizbullah stated that one of its fighters had died. According to unconfirmed media reports, the death was linked to the explosion.

45. On 29 September, Mr. Nasrallah stated: “It is important for the Lebanese [people] to know clearly that we do not place missiles at the Beirut port or next to a gas station. We know very well where we should place our missiles.” Earlier that day, at the General Assembly, the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, had stated that Hizbullah kept “a secret arms depot [adjacent] to a gas station” in a civilian area in a residential neighbourhood of Beirut. The Permanent Representative of Israel reiterated those points in a letter dated 2 October addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2020/968).

46. On 17 August 2020, the Maronite Church released an official memorandum urging the adoption of “active neutrality” for Lebanon. In the memorandum, the Church noted that positive neutrality was rooted in the Constitution of Lebanon, in

the Baabda Declaration of 2012, which contained a reference to the country's policy of disassociation, and in successive ministerial statements. The Church also noted that Lebanon had pursued neutrality from its founding until the signing of the Cairo agreement in 1969, which was followed by the emergence of armed Lebanese and non-Lebanese groups outside the control of the State. It contended that "the lack of political clarity" in the relationship between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon with regard to territory, authority and international borders and "the political, military, economic, social and border implications of the creation of the State of Israel on Lebanon" and the subsequent refugee influx were "historical causes of conflicts" and called for the neutrality of Lebanon to be enshrined in the next ministerial statement.

47. On 8 September, the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the United States Department of Treasury sanctioned two former Lebanese government ministers, Yusuf Finyanus, from the Marada Movement, and Ali Hassan Khalil, from the Amal Movement, for allegedly providing material support to Hizbullah and engaging in corruption. The United States Department of the Treasury stated that, as from mid-2019, Hizbullah "used its relationship with officials in the Lebanese government", including Mr. Finyanus, as Minister of Transportation and Public Works, "to siphon funds from government budgets to ensure that Hizballah-owned companies won bids for Lebanese government contracts worth millions of dollars". The statement added that, as Minister of Finance, Mr. Khalil "was one of the officials Hizballah leveraged a relationship with for financial gain".

48. On 3 September, for the first time in nearly a decade, the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization held its first meeting together with the heads of all Palestinian factions. Speakers focused on the need to restore unity and reform the Organization. Leaders of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad joined the meeting by video link from Beirut. The leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, met with several Lebanese officials, Hizbullah and Palestinian faction leaders. Some politicians from the Lebanese Forces and the Kata'ib Party, as well as some Sunni representatives, criticized Lebanese authorities for allowing Mr. Haniyeh into the country and emphasized the need for disassociation.

49. The presence of Palestinian armed groups outside the camps continued. Notwithstanding the decision, taken in 2006 in the context of the national dialogue and confirmed at subsequent sessions, to disarm Palestinian militias outside the camps within a six-month period, no progress was made during the reporting period with regard to dismantling the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada in the country.

50. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continued to deliver essential services for health, education, the improvement of the camps, relief and social services to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in the face of a serious Agency-wide funding shortfall, currently at \$200 million, for the programme budget. As at 4 October 2020, 1,343 Palestine refugees had been infected with COVID-19, with 154 people requiring hospitalization and 30 fatalities; approximately half of those who had contracted the disease were from the refugee camps.

III. Observations

51. The loss of life, the impact on the lives of survivors and the material damage resulting from the tragic explosion of 4 August are considerable. I am heartened by the immediate solidarity of the international community with the Lebanese people in these difficult times and call on donors to ensure the prompt disbursement of their pledges. Conducting a credible and transparent investigation to determine the cause

of the explosion and bring about the accountability demanded by the Lebanese people continues to be paramount.

52. The deterioration of the socioeconomic and financial situation, compounded by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the port explosion of 4 August, remains of grave concern. A call for reforms has been echoed in the past few months by prominent members of the international community, including during several high-level visits and meetings focused on Lebanon since the explosion. The onus is now on the Lebanese authorities to urgently enact reforms that respond to the demands of the Lebanese people, including calls for accountability, transparency and an end to corruption. I especially welcome the role of civil society organizations and women and youth activists in addressing the needs and aspirations of the population.

53. I urge Lebanese leaders to rise above partisan considerations and personal interests and to form a Government as a matter of urgency. This is necessary to turn around the Lebanese economy and reduce the negative impact of the current socioeconomic situation on the Lebanese population.

54. I remain concerned about the outstanding provisions of resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#). The continued and self-acknowledged involvement of Hizbullah in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, which is not only in breach of the disassociation policy and the principles of the Baabda Declaration of 2012, but also carries the risk of entangling Lebanon in regional conflicts and undermining the stability of the country and the region. Furthermore, it demonstrates the failure of Hizbullah to disarm and its refusal to be accountable to the very State institutions that the implementation of resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#) was intended to strengthen. It is also concerning that Hizbullah readily acknowledges the movement of resistance combatants and weapons between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and places them outside the scope of efforts to combat smuggling. I call upon the countries in the region that maintain close ties with Hizbullah to encourage the transformation of that armed group into a solely civilian political party, as well as its disarmament, in accordance with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#), in the best interests of Lebanon and of regional peace and security.

55. I again call upon Hizbullah and all other parties concerned not to engage in any military activity inside or outside Lebanon, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#). It is critical that the Accords be preserved and implemented by all, in order to avoid the spectre of renewed confrontation among Lebanese citizens and to strengthen the institutions of the State. All parties concerned must contribute to efforts to reinforce those institutions. The State should increase its efforts to achieve a monopoly over the possession of weapons and the use of force throughout its territory. I continue to urge the Government and the armed forces of Lebanon to take all measures necessary to prohibit Hizbullah and other armed groups from acquiring weapons and building paramilitary capacity outside the authority of the State, in violation of resolutions [1559 \(2004\)](#) and [1701 \(2006\)](#).

56. The widespread presence of weapons outside the control of the State, combined with the existence of armed militias, continues to undermine security and stability in Lebanon. The maintenance by Hizbullah of sizeable and sophisticated military capabilities outside the control of the Government of Lebanon remains a matter of grave concern.

57. Calls from sectors of the Lebanese population for the full implementation of resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#) and rejecting the possession of arms outside State institutions indicate that the maintenance of weapons by Hizbullah remains a divisive issue within Lebanese society.

58. I strongly condemn all violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, as they undermine the credibility of Lebanese security and State institutions and generate anxiety among the civilian population. I renew my calls for Israel to adhere to its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions and to withdraw its forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and the adjacent area north of the Blue Line, as well as to immediately cease its overflights above Lebanese airspace. The alleged use of Lebanese airspace by the Israel Defense Forces to strike targets in the Syrian Arab Republic is deeply concerning, owing to the risk it poses for regional stability.

59. The judgment rendered by the Trial Chamber of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in *Prosecutor v. Ayyash et al.* reflected the international community's commitment to justice for the terrible crimes committed on 14 February 2005.

60. I continue to encourage donors to provide funding to UNRWA, including in support of its request for cash assistance to address the deteriorating economic situation in Palestinian refugee camps, exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, so that it can continue to perform its essential role and deliver services, which are vital to the dignity and security of Palestinian refugees. Such efforts are without prejudice to the need for a just resolution of the Palestinian refugee question in the context of a comprehensive settlement in the region.

61. In other concerning developments, there has been an apparent increase in security incidents related to ISIL. I welcome the sustained support provided by Member States to the Lebanese Armed Forces and renew my calls to donors to support the State institutions of Lebanon, including the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces.

62. I am counting on the continued commitment of the Government of Lebanon to its international obligations, and I call upon all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions [1559 \(2004\)](#), [1680 \(2006\)](#) and [1701 \(2006\)](#). The United Nations will continue its efforts towards the full implementation of those and all other resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.