

# Presidency of the Republic of Lebanon

## Address by the President of the Republic of Lebanon, His Excellency General Michel SLEIMAN On the occasion of the launching of the National Action Plan for the Eradication of the Worst Forms of Child Labor at the Presidential Palace November 7, 2013



07/11/2013

Honorable assembly,

The painful and emotional scenes of Lebanon's children whose destinies were swept off by the waves of the Indonesian sea are engraved in my memory. I cannot stop recalling the images of children who were killed by the hand of terrorism on the streets of Tripoli and Ruweiss. I see the faces of children who suffered from deep fears and injuries during armed conflicts as well as others, homeless, wandering through the streets beseeching charity from passers-by or doing the toughest and ugliest types of tasks, the worst of which are street fightings.

These are children of ours, our pride and joy, whose lives were reduced by the series of events to hours of suffering and subjugation. Thus, they were turned into victims of perversion that replaced a mother's care and a father's compassion while we remain oblivious. We are all fathers; we are all responsible for any harm, sorrow or plight that might take hold of any child of our society.

Our sons and children are not asking for much. They simply want to enjoy a quiet life in an environment where they feel protected from injustice and safe from domestic violence. They want a school where they feel safe and learn about the principles of good ethics away from any digressions or physical punishment. They only need a society run by presidents who do not confiscate authorities or abuse power and responsible and constitutional institutions that respect the separation and complementarity of powers. They need leaders who respect the Constitution and the rule of law, and who make of the interest of our nation and citizens, not theirs in other countries, their ultimate priority without bidding on this axis or that to win in these countries. Our children dream of a homeland where its sons unite in solidarity to promote their nation instead of being a herd divided behind their own leaders brandishing political slogans that feed no hunger while those leaders remain indifferent to people's suffering, social crises and living difficulties.

However, reality cannot be farther than their dream and they do not know what reasons or justifications lay behind this ongoing reality. While reasons may be numerous and intertwined, the result remains the same and the victims are young boys and girls and innocent children, whether because of poverty, ignorance and retardation or because of arbitrary fighting or the outbreak of vice and the decadence of ethics.

The program we are launching today to combat the hazards of child labor is one in a series of programs that we have planned for to combat all plights that have infiltrated in the recent years our society that has become governed by concern. Presently, our society is going through its most inextricable crisis after that dialogue floundered and all results achieved by the parties to that dialogue were disavowed as some have also denied the Baabda Declaration. Thus politics may have reached its limits in finding a way out of the current deadlock.

Things got even worse as chaos and instability prevailed in our Arab surrounding and as the global conflict between east, west, north and south grew stronger amidst economic and financial crises that swept over the entire world. A situation that intensified by the phenomenon of globalization which created new realities that surprised in its challenges the developed countries which are unable to ignore them or face them arbitrarily.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The problem of child labor is a global phenomenon from which suffer the industrialized countries and developing countries alike which incited the International Labor Organization to exert an exceptional effort to contain this phenomenon. As such, it succeeded in 2000 in reducing the number of those affected by child labor to approximately the third and is seeking through its new program to eliminate the worst forms of child labor by 2016.

Lebanon has given this issue the necessary attention. Thus, it has ratified all international and Arab conventions related to children rights and combatting child labor. The State's responsibility did not stop at the ratification of these documents and the issuance of the necessary legislations to implement them. As a fact, the state did all it could to implement them and provide the necessary resources for their execution in cooperation and partnership with the relevant international organizations and in coordination with the local CSOs and private sector.

The problems of children were never born in a vacuum, they were the imminent result of the effects of economic, social, pedagogic, security and political factors on the components of our society, starting with the entire family: the father, the mother, the brothers, the school, the university with all its components, the labor market and the different development programs as well as our political choices that made it impossible to agree on a new unifying government and for the extended parliament to resume its legislative action.

Facing these problems starts by establishing the solutions for the relevant factors within a comprehensive and integrated national socio-economic plan because the concept of social policies goes, in its dimension and scope, beyond the issues of social benefits and their ramifications in spite of being one of its main pillars. Social policies are first and foremost planning for societal progress within an exhaustive national development plan stemming from the development of the political, economic, pedagogic and youth systems and promoting the concepts of statehood, citizenship, comprehensive human development and developing human beings primarily.

Honorable assembly,

The responsibility of state administrations and institutions is great in terms of designing such plans and implementing their contents by adopting some kind of decentralization in approaching societal and humanitarian issues through the active coordination and cooperation with the state administrations and the components of the civil society.

Such responsibility is not restricted, as its name indicates, to the Ministry of Social Affairs. It engulfs almost all ministries namely the ministries of Health, Education, Industry, Commerce, Labor and other administrations, especially the socio-economic council that bears the responsibility of fostering dialogue between the different components of our nation and guaranteeing the participation of the economic, social and vocational sectors in the decision making process in order to formulate the general policies of the state in all fields related to economic and human development.

The most important practical translation of this plan lies in promoting the social protection networks in order to deal with the difficulties of great proportions of our people as well as understanding people's demands that were made even more urgent by the plight of poor living conditions and the limited social benefits. We also need to finalize the legislations and regulations that provide for women's political, social and economic rights as well as to establish direct assistance programs for those with special needs.

As a matter of fact, the government implemented numerous programs in these fields, including most importantly "the national program for the support of the poorest families" which we launched last summer, from this place, with the Ministry of Social Affairs and which has achieved until now reasonable results and became a beacon of hope in the combat against misery and need.

Furthermore, we launched in December last year, in cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, "the Youth Policy Document" aiming at meeting the needs of the youth and the young generation as well as their aspirations in a future dominated by the spirit of openness and progress away from reclusion and partisanship in order to reduce youth migration. We also launched with the concerned ministries and competent international organizations the Lebanese Excellence Award, the Tree Day, the National Report of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the opening of the Women Heart Health Center, the national awareness campaign on breast cancer, as well as other health, educational and social programs and campaigns.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we are convinced that social benefits are a right for all citizens based on the principles of solidarity and care, and that they are also a right for all workers and employees being a wage component in their social concept, I call

everyone to move forward, with the same resolve and motivation, on the path of generous social solidarity in order for social issues to remain a top priority on the national agenda.

I would also like to call the Parliament and relevant ministries to speed up the adoption process of faltering draft laws, while the citizen falls under the burden of high costs of living and livelihood requirements, namely:

- To adopt the salaries chart and the law on domestic violence as well as the law on exempting the disabled of personal passport fees and the fees of recruiting domestic labor to assist them in all stages. I also call them to finalize the legal and organizational procedures related to the elderly insurance and to work on implementing the elective insurance law in a more efficient manner with the best possible level of solvency. This would pave the way for the implementation of a comprehensive health insurance project. I also exhort them to work on amending the law on juveniles to accommodate the provisions and principles of the relevant international conventions in order to replace the prison with correctional and rehabilitation centers for victims of exploitation to allow our children to have a brighter future and a decent life.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sovereignty, freedom, independence, as well as security and social stability all stem from a society where individuals lead a life free of need and want, where they are independent from people of influence and capital owners. In such a society, youth unemployment and child labor are contained, the phenomenon of school dropouts is successfully eliminated and gender equality is guaranteed. This requires the state institutions to work extensively on achieving economic and human development and the political class to reduce tensions and distance Lebanon from all crises and polarization for the sake of our children and their future.

Long live Lebanon and long live our children, happily and safely.

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