

# **Together for the Salvation of Lebanon Together for Defending our Right to Live Together for Living in Peace in a Sovereign, Democratic and Modern state**

*Manifesto*

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*(Translated from Arabic)*

The Lebanese Republic is 64 years old.

Thirty two of them were peaceful and safe years with some tension and crisis.

The other thirty two were years of war and occupation with some periods of calm.

Today we are at a decisive moment:

- Either to return Lebanon to what it was in the last three decades; a place of senseless violence for regional and foreign powers, fulfilling the delusions of some who believed that their future still needs more blood, suffering and destruction.
- Or redefine Lebanon as a country good to live in, and a state capable of shouldering its responsibilities.

Today, our choice is clear: we will continue the march you launched in Martyrs Square the moment Premier Rafik Hariri was martyred. And today, we are launching a workshop to determine the course that should be followed to complete what we started in 2005.

We will depend on ourselves and on our strength:

## **First**

We have our freedom, which we have always struggled to defend. The freedom of speech, of belief, of expression, of decision and the freedom to fight injustice so that no one can marginalize us. And we refuse any constraints on our political, intellectual, cultural and social affiliations and on our diverse interests and sensitivities, and on our openness and interaction with others. We have anchored in this country a democratic regime that is not ruled by religious racism or guarded by a police state, and we practiced democracy in an undemocratic environment and upheld diversity in an area that rejects what is different, and we made progress in a world ruled by struggles and apprehensions of the past.

## **Second**

We have great potential to act and make a difference in Lebanon and the whole region in the areas of development and progress due to our continuous emphasis on the value of knowledge and education. These values are an important cornerstone in our world because of the decisive role that the economy of knowledge plays today. We were at the forefront of the renaissance in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. We are capable today of launching a second revival through our youth in Lebanon and in the diaspora, which possess great potential in the fields of creativity and intellectual work.

### **Third**

we are open to the world, and we possess an exceptional ability to communicate. The Lebanese people are a “globalized” people, even before globalization, and they are capable of benefiting from their expatriate network to place Lebanon at the heart of the world and place the world in Lebanon’s heart. We have a special position inside the Arab community and a unique role recognized by all our brethren, which is opposed only by those who want Lebanon to be an arena for their tutelage and influence.

- More importantly we have, in this age of clash of identities, religions and civilizations, which is a unique experience in coexistence. We are the ones who created this formula of coexistence and practiced it. Although coexistence was abandoned during the war, we returned to it in the end after the failure of all other formulas. Coexistence is a way of life that offers people the chance to interact and communicate with each other, to enrich their personalities by accepting the other, and vice versa. It is a way of life based on respecting the others in their uniqueness and differences without trying to obliterate or subjugate them.

The renewal of the vision and orientation starts with a revolution in our cultural concepts. Lebanon has never seen in its modern history this degree of sharp division. This division is not sectarian in nature, as both camps include Muslims, Christians and secularists. The division is also not political, because it transcends the governing of the state by a majority and an opposition. It is a cultural division with two opposing views of the world:

- The first is based on the culture of peace, coexistence and interaction with the other who is different.
- The second is based on the culture of violence and separation that sees the fulfillment of self as only attainable by excluding the other who is different, and even by eliminating or subjugating that other.

#### **The differences between these two cultures are fundamental:**

- The culture of peace and interaction with the other sees that the citizens should have equal rights, and that the Lebanese sects are communities which should enjoy equal guarantees, and their protection is guaranteed by the state, which is entrusted with the protection of all. Meanwhile, the culture of violence and division sees the sects as minorities constantly threatened in their existence and free presence; therefore each must protect itself separately from the others and mostly in opposition to them.

- The culture of peace and interaction is based on diversity, interaction and cultural openness. While the culture of violence and division believes that the world is divided into two: good and evil, believers and apostates, pushing people to be afraid of living with others and to adhere, unconditionally to the most radical factions in their communities. This culture utilizes fear and frustration to drive different sects to seek “foreign protection,” in an effort to change the internal balance of power with external support on their own terms.

- The culture of peace and interaction sees that the condition of living in a pluralistic and diversified society is the rule of law and justice for all factions of the society including the ruling elites. This culture is based on respecting the victim as a victim without any discrimination between one and the other. On the other hand, the respect of the victim by the culture of violence and division depends only on the political identity of the perpetrator of the crime. That led to having “good” perpetrators and “evil” ones, and “good” victims and “evil” ones!

- The culture of peace and interaction is based on erasing the memories of the war and turning a new page, on the basis of admitting collective and personal responsibilities of the sins of war, and considering all the victims as martyrs of the nation, so the Lebanese- including the victims- will not remain divided as heroes and traitors. This is an effort exerted by most Lebanese over the last 15 years to put the war behind them and wipe its memory. But the culture of violence and division is based on “selective memory,” recalling crimes and forgetting others, to prevent the connection with the others.

- The culture of peace and interaction sees religion as a common bond that links all Lebanese, through their belief that religion is for God while the nation is for all of us. Meanwhile the culture of violence and division seeks to monopolize the sacred and give itself the right, in the name of this sacred, to define good and evil, and to excommunicate its opponents, labeling them as traitors. This monopoly of the sacred is the basis of religious radicalism.

- The goal of the culture of peace and interaction aims to convince the opponent and present its arguments in search for common ground. While the culture of violence and division uses political rhetoric to symbolically and morally “assassinate” its opponents by lying, insulting and labeling them as traitors. This paves the way for those who are willing to physically assassinate them.

Our national future is related to our ability to consolidate the culture of peace and interaction in our national life, and this requires decisions:

### **First**

A decision to consolidate our independence through ensuring national unity, which is a condition for independence. This requires overcoming the sectarian battles which bloodied our country for more than half a century, and to move, on the basis of the Taef Accord, to build a civil, modern state based on separating the rights of the citizens, which is the duty of the state to ensure without any discrimination, and the guarantees which should be ensured by the state regarding the existence of the sects and their presence with freedom. The establishment of a democratic, modern and civil state free of sectarian restraints and of ensuing clientelism which hinders the work of its institutions cancels the principle of competency, hinders the effectiveness of economy and ensures social justice, will free sects from the “complex of fear of the other” which lies at the heart of all sectarian politics. Thus, the other will not remain an adversary whom we should always confront because he constitutes a constant existential danger, but he becomes a necessary and complementary element of the self. Thus, all fears and apprehensions, according to this new perspective, will cease to be the prime mover of Lebanese history.

### **Second**

A decision to safeguard our sovereignty by accelerating the reorganization of the state’s institutions and entrust the state and the state alone, with the mission of ensuring security for all of us, individuals and groups. This is why the state should have the exclusive right to have armed forces, and not to have two armies that are subject to two different authorities: the Lebanese state authority and the authority of a foreign state.

### **Third**

A decision to protect our independence by giving impetus to the idea of resistance, which is the right of all the Lebanese people to defend their existence, land and freedom as a supporter for strengthening the state’s power. The resistance is based on the strength of the people and not on their weaknesses. It is stronger in confronting the external dangers if the society is united; the state is efficient, the army is strong and the economy is vibrant. A resistance cannot thrive in a country on the basis of classifying its people as a “traitorous” majority and a “patriotic” minority. A resistance will not thrive on making people dependent on aid and subsidies. A resistance cannot exist by confiscating the right of self determination of its people for the benefit of external interests. The ultimate goal of the resistance is to build a free and sovereign state. This accomplishment defines its success or failure.

## Fourth

A decision to guarantee our independence by ensuring the suitable Arab circumstances through:

1. The commitment to the ongoing battle in our Arab world to get out of the political and intellectual alignments which were imposed by the Cold War for more than half a century, and to regain the right to decide our fate and future. The Arab world is facing, in its effort to reconstitute itself politically, regional powers – Israel and Iran – which are trying to keep it in its former state and to replace the great powers in controlling its destiny. These regional powers are tied in a relationship of collusion and enmity at the same time: collusion in confronting the Arabs and enmity in defining their regions of influence and control. Terrorism, which is directed against the Arab world whether through regular armies or by secret groups is, a result of this objective collusion, which brought down the “Mecca Agreement” between the Palestinians and is working hard to derail the Arab peace initiative. The most prominent factor of this collusion is the international protection which Israel is providing to the Syrian regime in its war on Lebanon.

2. Meet and support the ongoing change in the Arab world, where a new and modern Arab regional order is taking shape away from the previous demagogy. This transformation was confirmed by the “Riyadh Declaration” issued at the end of the Arab summit in March 2007, which laid, for the first time, the “Arab foundations” for the culture of interaction in the face of the culture of separation, which is still dominating the region, by stressing that “Arab is not a racist–ethnic concept but a cultural identity (...) and a common civilized framework based on spiritual, moral and humane values enriched by diversity and openness to other human cultures, and accompanying all the technological and scientific developments.” The “Riyadh Declaration” also gives priority to the “choice of a just and comprehensive peace as a strategic choice for the Arab states,” stressing the necessity to “spread the culture of moderation, tolerance, dialogue, openness and the rejection of all kinds of terrorism and extremism.”

3. Turn the page with Syria and normalize relations with it. This starts by the Syrian regime’s return to the Arab fold because it had become a Trojan horse for external interests; and by announcing its recognition of Lebanon’s independence, the respect of its sovereignty by establishing embassies and demarcating the borders with Lebanon. The basis in this position is to stop considering Lebanon as a “province” that was detached from its motherland during colonial times, and the recognition by the Syrian state that the legitimacy of the Lebanese entity is equal to the legitimacy of all Arab entities, including that of Syria. On these bases, it is possible to achieve a “historic settlement” which allows the formation of a common project that will make the two countries an axis for renewal in the Arab world. This settlement was outlined by an elite of Lebanese and Syrian political and intellectuals in the “Beirut-Damascus Declaration/ Damascus-Beirut Declaration” (May 2006) which had a critical review of the history of relations between the two countries, thus laying the foundations for correcting them.

4. Turn the painful page between the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples on the same grounds that were defined by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the “Declaration of Palestine in Lebanon” (January 2008). This represented a first critical review of the past Palestinian experience in Lebanon, paving the way for an in-depth Lebanese – Palestinian dialogue. This declaration voiced the “full commitment without any reservations to “Lebanon’s sovereignty and independence under the Lebanese legality and without any interference in its internal affairs,” adhering to the “right of return and the refusal of settlement and displacement,” and stressing that the “Palestinian arsenal should be under the sovereignty of the Lebanese state and its laws according to the needs of the Lebanese national security which are defined and ruled by the Lebanese legal authorities.” In return, the Lebanese state should support the Palestinian National Authority

and its right in establishing its independent state and ensuring honorable living for the Palestinians residing in Lebanon awaiting their return to their homeland.

Why did Lebanon become a target for this continuous ferocious attack?

Is it to ensure the participation in the authority as the other party demands, or is it to adopt a new electoral law, or improve the electricity?

Does the killing of leaders, inducing war with Israel, occupying Beirut's Central District, carrying out an armed uprising against the government and an assault on the army, seeking to establish an Islamic emirate in the North, killing soldiers from UNIFIL and other violent acts, aim at achieving these demands? Or is the objective to transform Lebanon again into a Syrian province and an Iranian bridge head on the Mediterranean?

We stretched our hand to everyone after the martyrdom of Premier Rafik Hariri to participate in folding the page of Syrian hegemony and establishing a new era with no winner or loser. We reiterated this call after the Israeli aggression in the summer of 2006 and then after the approval of the international tribunal in the spring of 2007.

Today, we as a parliamentary and popular majority reiterate our call to everybody to overcome our differences and participate in defining our common destiny because Lebanon's salvation is for Lebanon as a whole. This participation should be based on the national constants agreed unanimously by the Lebanese and defined in the Taef Accord, the results of the national dialogue and the resolutions of the international legality in order not to have anymore an external partner in internal decisions.

This vision is the result of the joint reflection and the common struggle of those participating in this conference today. It is also for the public opinion outside this auditorium.

We will build on this vision, and we will seek to develop its contents and details through dialogues and extensive workshops that will lead eventually to their adoption at the end of the conference, which we launched today.