

# The Beirut Declaration

*Petition by Lebanese Social Society, Activists and Scholars  
2004*

We have known all the wars, have believed that violence could be an instrument of change, have lived all the segregations, have imposed and undergone community purification and have made of religion a militia identity, rejecting the values of tolerance, respect for human dignity and justice.

We sought the assistance of others in the wars that we fought, thus abdicating our independence and our sovereignty. We were reduced to simple instruments in "the war of others" fought on Lebanese soil.

We have a common responsibility, Christians and Muslims, for the war which devastated our country; we believe that recognizing this responsibility is the essential condition for learning the lessons of the war so we will not be condemned indefinitely to repeating our past errors.

We have suffered much, but we have also learned much. We paid a high price for that experience: 144,240 people were killed, 17,415 disappeared and 197,506 were wounded. We paid with the destruction of our cities and our villages. We paid with the exodus of hundreds of thousands of our children; we paid with the loss of our quality of life; we paid with the decline of our standard of living; we paid with our misery. That knowledge also cost us our capacity for hope and for self respect.

We have also learned that recourse to violence can lead only to destruction and death, and that the destruction of the "other" will only lead to the destruction of oneself. Finally, we have learned, Christians and Muslims, that we are bound together for better and for worse by the same destiny.

It is up to us to make that destiny one of openness and growth:

- If we know how to rehabilitate the model of co-existence which we had created by shielding it from political bickering and the inter-communal malaise that weighs on it and has distorted it. This model can then be followed in order to exorcise the violence which has become so widespread in the world.

- If we understand that the relation with "the other" cannot be limited to neighborliness or simple existence in parallel, because it is necessary to our development and represents an essential component of our identity.

- If we know how to manage our differences by having recourse to dialogue and compromise and by developing a culture of co-existence founded on democracy and respect for humans rights.

- If we have the courage to confront the extremist currents that develop within our communities to preclude the possibility of the resurgence of fanaticisms and to prevent our society being, once again, high-jacked by fanatics.

But we can also allow this common destiny to degenerate and decay.

- If we remain prisoners of the past and its conflicts, incapable of turning the page and to assume responsibility for all the victims of the war without discrimination.

- If we remain divided on national priorities, ignoring the interdependence of those priorities, namely the liberation of our territory, the recovery of national sovereignty and the reform of the institutions of the republic.

Finally, we have learned that our independence and our sovereignty are contingent, above all, on our determination to remain united, to preserve co-existence between us -Christians and Muslims- and to create a state whose existence is no longer dependent on regional conjunctures and whose functioning is no longer hindered by inter-communal rivalries.

We no longer wish to live in shame: the shame of a state that does not respect the agreement which put an end to the war that tore it apart. The shame of a corrupt state that does not even respect the laws that it enacts. The shame of a state that does not stop denigrating our national history. The shame of a servile state that attempts to justify the tutelage imposed on us and proclaims that we are unable to govern ourselves. The shame of a State that is founded, not on legitimacy, but on the perpetuation of fear among the Lebanese- fear of each other and fear of those from outside.

We, Lebanese of all confessions and all regions, are convinced that change is now possible because we are stronger today than in the past. We are stronger because we have decided to take our destiny into our own hands and become self-reliant; because we refuse any discrimination amongst us; because we are convinced that what unites us is much more important than what divides us; because we understand that only respect for the law ensures that our differences are not perceived any longer as a factor of division, but as a source of richness; because we know now that we can live together, different but equal.

We are also stronger because our experience can help us make major contributions in bringing the Arab world out of the stagnation in which a half-century of tyranny and dictatorship has plunged it; because we are better positioned than others to reconcile the Arab world with itself and with the rest of the world; because we have a real and practical experience of democracy; because of our schools and our universities, our publishing houses and our newspapers, our hospitals and our banks; because we are everywhere in the world through our diaspora.

Finally, we are stronger because the international community, which for a long time discounted the Lebanese experiment and supported the "strong" regimes of the area, is beginning to comprehend the importance of the model of consensual democracy, which we have created, and to recognize the need for extending it to prevent a return to religious wars.

We wish to assure the Syrian state that we do not seek confrontation with it, neither alone nor in alliance with other countries. We simply want to recover our basic right to self-determination and to take in hand the management of our own affairs. We are fundamentally supportive of Syria, and our solidarity with Syria is not the result of opportunism, like that of some of our political leaders, who trade their allegiance to Syria in exchange for political support and economic privilege. The need to establish the best relations with Syria is a conviction that all Lebanese share. But this solidarity cannot be fully expressed as long as Lebanon's

independence is not recognized in practice and the country continues to be used and abused. We want to reach a historical compromise with the Syrians to put an end, once and for all, to all the conflicts, all the quarrels and all the misunderstandings that have poisoned our relations for more than a half-century. We want to live in peace with Syria in mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and independence.

We want to say to our Palestinian brothers that we have definitively turned the page of the war that has victimized us all. We want to say to them that only an independent and sovereign Lebanon can help them obtain recognition of their national rights. We want to also to tell them that the creation of an independent Palestinian state would be an essential factor of stability for Lebanon. We reject the political exploitation that is made of the conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and we demand the granting to the refugees of their human rights. But we also insist that the state should, in coordination with the Palestinian Authority, exert its full sovereignty on the Palestinian camps of Lebanon. We consider that the creation of an independent state in Palestine, taking charge of its citizens inside its territories as well as those in Lebanon and in the countries of the diaspora, will largely contribute to resolve the problem of the refugees in Lebanon.

We want to say to our Arab brothers that our membership in the Arab world was not a decision that was imposed on us, but a geographical and cultural reality that the Lebanese are fully aware of. We also want to tell them that Lebanon does not need to be "arabized," because it has never failed in its duty to Arab causes and has paid, to defend them, a much higher price than other Arab countries.

We want to say to our Arab brothers that Arabism can be used as a basis for a complementarity between the Arab countries only if it is based on mutual respect, the recognition of pluralism, freedom and openness to the world. We believe that these conditions will enable us to work together to define an Arab path toward modernity which would serve as basis for a cultural project that would extricate the Arab world from the crisis it faces and would reconcile it with itself and the world.

We are against all strategies of confrontation be they founded on cultural beliefs, on nationalist ideologies or based on projects of hegemony. We are part of the world-wide public opinion which was opposed to the war in Iraq and, since the end of the Cold War, has worked toward the establishment of a more just and balanced world order.

We refuse any external tutelage which would be exerted in the name of the principles of democracy or human rights. We also reject any vision which, in the name of religious fundamentalism, adapts the truth and divides the world into two antagonistic camps, one good and the other evil. We think that it is necessary at all costs to end the process of reductionism, which is at the origin of all these follies: the reduction of civilization to culture, of culture to religion, of religion to policy and of policy to violent action. What we want is to strive toward a world of peace and respect for democracy and justice.

Among those invited to sign this text are people who took part in the Lebanese war, in one camp or another, but learned from the experience. Among those invited to sign this text are people who suffered the war without participating in it and who, after having long awaited the re-establishment of the state, are deeply disappointed by the missed opportunities of the post-war period. Among those invited to sign this text are young people who did not know the war, but who pay its price nevertheless and who suffer the inability of having a future in their own country.

This text is addressed all to our fellow-citizens, to Christians and to Muslims, to men and to women, to the young and the old, to residents and emigrants; this text seeks to engage them in a dialogue on the themes contained in this appeal and to succeed in launching a new dynamic that provides the foundation for “another Lebanon” within the framework of “another Arab world.”