

*The Speech of the President of the Council of Ministers
Mr. Rafic Hariri, at the ceremony held to grant him the
2004 Special Citation of the Habitat Scroll of Honor Award
of the UN-HABITAT
“Lebanon Rebuilt”
Barcelona, Spain*

Mr. Pasqual Maragall,
Mr. Joan Clos,
Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka,
Mrs. Mervat Tallawy,
Former Presidents,
Ministers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel very proud and honored today to stand before this respectable audience that represents the United Nations, this organization that symbolizes the world's aspirations for peace, security and cooperation.

I am happy to be here and to receive this award for several reasons:

First, because this award belongs to the People of Lebanon and to all its officials, but most importantly, the UN is honoring with this prize, the sacrifices and determination of the Lebanese people, who dared to dream of rebuilding their country and realizing their dream against all odds.

Second, I am proud that Barcelona was chosen as a venue to present the award. This city is a symbol of partnership among the Mediterranean countries, especially between those in the Middle East and Europe, through the Barcelona Process.

Third, allow me to thank all my family especially my wife Nazek for sharing with me this happy occasion after living the difficulties, the challenges and the sacrifice during these long years of official and public life. My family's support and encouragement, and, most importantly, their constant love contributed greatly to my perseverance in my work, even when I felt frustrated in the face of what some people considered impossible.

This award belong to Lebanon's Arab brothers and its friends who believed in Lebanon during the darkest hours. In particular we are grateful to Syria, without its help we would not have had achieved what we have of stability, and to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and all our Arab brothers. Also our thanks go to France and other European countries who understood that Lebanon's importance is in its message of tolerance and coexistence not only to the region but to the whole world.

Lebanon's message is also about protecting the oldest democracy in the Arab world. Lebanon believes that democracy is our only hope in building modern states, preserving human dignity through protecting man's right to free expression, free opinion and freedom in determining his own future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we started the reconstruction process, challenges were big, but our determination and will were bigger. We had many choices regarding the method to follow in reconstruction; we chose to rebuild everything at the same time and pace. We did not give priority to any sector. Everything was a priority, including water, electricity, hospitals, schools, roads and living standards.

Lebanon's reconstruction can be divided into two stages:

The first stage witnessed the beginning of the reconciliation process and ended with the Taif Agreement; the political results of this agreement are still being enjoyed by Lebanon, today.

The second stage started 1993 when we formed our first government. The reconstruction of Beirut's Central District was at the launching stage. Yet, the challenge at the time, was to carry out comprehensive reconstruction processes all over the country in the middle of other and bigger problems.

The National Accord, signed in Taif, called for balanced development.

We had to bear the burden of rebuilding the basic facilities and prepare them for future challenges, rebuilding the private sector to take part in reconstruction and revival, and winning the confidence of regional and international institutions in the country's future. At the same time and in parallel to that, we had to gain the Lebanese people's will and hope in support of their regime, state and future.

In fact, we succeeded in realizing the primary goals of the plan, but saying that we succeeded does not mean that our mission is complete. We still have to do a lot to make development as balanced as it should be. In spite of all our efforts, certain regions in Lebanon still suffer from lack of equal opportunities in education, healthcare and many other services: roads, water, etc...

The current situation in the Middle East causes despair and concern, not just about growth and prosperity but also concern about stability. All future projects and visions proposed by influential international parties focus on reconstruction and democracy. These are great and beautiful goals, but how can they be achieved without freedom, stability and suitable political and security conditions.

However, how can there be security and development while the Arab man does not have hope in the future or in peace? The despair felt today by the Arabs because of their suffering from occupation of their land and lack of their freedom and dignity, leads to more violence and widens the gap between the Arabs and the world. Our duty today is to uproot despair and make peace a reality in Palestine and in Iraq, so that confidence, not suspicion, once again characterizes our relations and ties.

We want peace and an independent state for the Palestinians.

Moreover, we want Iraq to regain its freedom, independence and unity and its state to work again for its people who suffered irrespective of their religious or ethnic background.

We want pressures on our peoples and states to cease so we can work normally for growth and progress and for active participation in the present and future of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Construction is civilization. Our nation has a rich and important cultural experience, which was a basis among the foundation of the world's modern progress in Asia, Africa and Europe.

UN-HABITAT,

You chose to celebrate Lebanon's reconstruction experience as an exemplary solution for countries that suffered, learned the lesson, sought to build their future depending on their citizens and succeeded in doing so.

In front of this distinguished world leaders and intellectuals, in this prosperous country that is friendly to Arabs and Muslims, I want to thank you for this appreciation, on behalf of the Lebanese state and myself. I would like to call on your behalf for saving the civilizations of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Gaza, Baghdad, Mosul and Najaf.

Finally, I would like to salute the United Nations. This organization represented for more than half a century the ambitions of the world's peoples for liberation, equality, development, security and peace.

The United Nations by granting this award to Lebanon means that the door of this organization will always be open to countries that seek to improve its life and the lives of its people.

Lebanon will always be a gate, wide open to democracy and freedom, knowledge and all the noble things on this Earth, mainly the mission of peace tolerance that is being championed by this organization and those who believe in it.

The UN will always be a basis in our life. It is through dialogue, openness and understanding that we will succeed in making the world and the UN understand our causes more, consider and adopt our views.

Peace is our fate. Let us work together on achieving this fate. Let us always work for peace.

Thank you.