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## **United Nations Correspondents Association press briefing with Beirut Institute on Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan**

Tuesday July 9, 2013 – NYC, USA

### **Ms. Pamela Falk, President of the United Nations Correspondence Association**

Welcome, as most of you know I am Pamela Falk President of the United Nations Correspondence Association and we are pleased today to be introducing you to an event co-sponsored with the UN Correspondence association and Beirut institute which is an independent think tank that covers the Arab world from Beirut and its Executive Chairperson is the former also UNCA president Raghida Dergham who most of you know.

We are very pleased to have with us the minister, former minister, and I have a very long bio we are going to end about 11:35 because there are some events coming up, so I won't go through a very extensive bio as we mentioned Prince Rashid El-Hassan of Jordan had to return to Amman and so we are pleased to have with us Minister Ziyad Baroud the former minister of interior and municipalities of the Republic of Lebanon. He served in two consecutive cabinets from 2008 until 2011 and was chairman of the Arab Interior Ministers Council. He was awarded many honors, one by French president Nicholas Sarkozy. And prior to his appointment as minister, Ziyad Baroud held a number of positions among which the minister of the Lebanese National Commission on Electoral Law. He was elected Secretary General of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections and he is currently on the board of Lebanese Center for Policy Studies and on the board of trustees of the Notre Dame University here in the United States. Now in addition to that he serves as an advisory board member on the Beirut Institute as well. Now here is the part I like the best, he is a court lawyer by practice and managing/founding partner of a law firm, HBDT law firm, and held a series of academic posts, has a number of publications and a graduate of College Saint Joseph- Aantoura. I am very pleased to have minister Baroud with us.

There are two attachments to the email we sent which was a Beirut Institute report on refugees, there is also a UNHCR response, and there are several addendums and maps which Melanie has if you would like to look at it before you leave and we can email it to you if you'd



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like afterword. Needless to say this morning with the bombing in Southern Beirut there is a lot of news we would like you to touch on today. Please join me in welcoming Minister Baroud.

**HE Minister Ziyad Baroud, Former Lebanese Minister of Interior and Municipalities, Member of Beirut Institute's Advisory Board**

Thank you Madame President, thank you for hosting me here. Good morning to all.

We are meeting at a time when, sadly, the Middle East, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and most recently Egypt are facing tremendous challenges. Only today, the car bombing in the suburb of Beirut sent a negative signal, bad signal for what we call in Lebanon violent prone areas. VPA's have become spread all over the country, and this is sad because what we truly need in Lebanon is a safety net that could protect civil peace and national unity and the paramount interest of Lebanon. We met yesterday upon the invitation of the Beirut Institute and we had a fruitful meeting with members of the Security Council in the presence of HE Jan Eliasson Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Nawaf Salam, head of Lebanon Permanent Mission to the UN and with the participation of HRH Prince Rashid.

Of course Prince Rashid gave an overview on the impact of the Syrian crises on Jordan and the influx of refugees to Jordan. As far as I am concerned I would like to stress that I am here in a personal capacity in my personal capacity. The Lebanese government that I served for three years is very well represented in here with Ambassador Salam and he has been reflecting the official position of the Lebanese government. So, what I am going to say is purely my personal reading of the situation. It is also, it reflects also the policy paper that Beirut Institute has prepared and it is the result of various meetings and consultations with all concerned and mainly with the Lebanese government and UNHCR. And I invite you to have a look at this policy paper which is really, which invites to reflect and to think over a crisis or a problem that is, that will be more and more into our thinking. The aim of the meeting was first to look, to have a look closer to updated figures and numbers regarding the Syrian refugees in both Jordan and Lebanon. Lebanon has a population of four million; out of this population we have already around 1.2 million Syrian refugees. Who are, most of them are registered, many are not. They are new refugees. We have already half a million Palestinian refugees.



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To that number we have to add today 1.2 million Syrians.

Now why 1.2? We have around 585,000 registered Syrian refugees with the UNHCR. We already had 200-300 thousand Syrian workers already in Lebanon and many are not registered for many reasons. Maybe some would fear on their safety, others because they wouldn't like to register. And the fact is that we don't have camps for Syrian refugees, they are all over the country. And the Lebanese government has adopted an open door policy. Some would say that's because our borders are porous, maybe, but is also because it was a Governmental decision to avoid closing the borders.

Now, I wouldn't go much into the details of the numbers and the figures, you have them in almost everywhere and it is on the UNHCR website and it is very well documented. We talked about the impact of the crisis on Lebanon, a vulnerable the environment already, a state that has its own problems to which we are adding a huge impact resulting from the Syrian crisis. The main challenges are political, security, health, social, you name it, and I would summarize what was discussed without going into the details because I am not allowed to, it was an off-the-record meeting. But I would like to say the following:

One, the Lebanese government has adopted as I said an open door policy, this policy should be rewarded. The Lebanese government will no longer be able to deal with the crisis if international community pledges are not delivered. The Lebanese government with the means and tools that it has cannot keep responding to the needs to the increasing needs of the Syrian refugees. And it is not only about the Syrian refugees, it is also the Lebanese people that are part of this crisis.

Number two, Beirut cannot be held solely responsible and therefore responsive for that. It is not a Syrian-Lebanese bilateral matter. Everybody is concerned, the international community is concerned, Arab countries are concerned, and that's why we shouldn't look to this as if it was a purely a bilateral issue or as if it is a Lebanese issue.

Number three, humanitarian aid and assistance should continue directly to refugees, yes, but at the same time the RRP5 should be accelerated in a way to insure that the Lebanese Government is able to address the needs financially. Schools and hospitals in Lebanon are financed by the Lebanese Central Government. And those schools and hospitals today are under huge pressure because of the lack of other needs. If the international community doesn't support the Lebanese government directly, the support to NGO's, to CSO's, to international organization is not enough. The Central Government should be assisted as well.



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Number four, UN agencies and international organizations presently active in Syria, on the Syrian territory should be invited to enlarge their response of relief structures in Syria. They should be able to do so in the regions the regions where, the regions that are not anymore subject to violence.

Five, host communities in Lebanon can offer direct and immediate results, but provided they get the assistance they need, infrastructure is about it is linked, the services are linked to infrastructure which is linked to the number of people who are being benefiting who are benefiting from this infrastructure. In parallel, number six, violence grown areas, which are becoming spread all over the country, Tripoli, Sidon, many areas of Beirut, this makes us believe that the Lebanese Armed Forces should be assisted as well. The Lebanese Armed Forces should have more tools to address the challenges that are becoming more and more serious. I would add also that the postponement of the elections was much unfortunate and I don't think it led to stability as some were calling for.

Stability is about elections, stability is about democracy, and democracy would lead to stability, now this is a controversial thing and I wouldn't go through the details for the time. And again, the caretaking Government we have today cannot address for long the huge impact of the Syrian crisis as well. So basically what we are calling for is an international conference for not only Lebanon. The international conference should be for Syria, for the humanitarian aid, and for this all what is all the challenges that are there. And I think we cannot but mention that the Lebanese Government institutions lack of money, lack of finance, but they also lack of support in terms of logistics, and in terms of ability and capability to address this huge influx all alone. Lebanon can't cope with it alone. This is basically what I wanted to share with you. Thank you again. I am ready to take any questions.

**Ms. Pamela Falk, President of the United Nations Correspondence Association**

Thank you very much. I would like also to acknowledge that the deputy permanent representative from the mission of Lebanon is here if you would like to say something and the representative from the UNHCR. Please let me know if you would like to comment. I know who you are, but identify yourself if you would for minister Baroud.



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### Reporter 1

Mr. Minister I was in your country in 2009 covering the US official visiting, and you said mentioned now that the Lebanese army will need more tools, assume that is arms actually. And I was there and Mr Bidon promised and somehow delivered arms to the Lebanese Army. What are the means that you need? I have a couple of questions, and what was the last census that you made in Lebanon because I understood that you did have a problem with the censuses and what are the exact numbers of the Palestinian refugees and how did you figure out the number of the Syrian refugees, Thank you.

### HE Minister Ziyad Baroud

Well the needs of the army, I wouldn't go into the details, I leave it to the Lebanese government, Ministry of Defense, they already with the concerns, they already have with the concerned they have lists of needs. I am just mentioning the need to give the Lebanese Armed Forces all what they need in order to address the challenges that are really about security and about keeping the country in a minimum required stability. Census yes, the last time we had an official census was in 1932 regarding the Lebanese people, but this is again I mean we know the numbers and the figures, but they are not being published in a census for many sectarian reasons that I wouldn't like to raise here. Census regarding refugees, Palestinians are registered before the Ministry of Interior as long as they are part as long as they have residency in Lebanon as long as they are considered they have the status of a Palestinian refugee because this is a special status. We have the numbers I am talking about around half a million but we have registries for that and this is not problematic. With Syrians it is different, because as I mentioned borders are porous, people who registered are not all Syrian refugees in Lebanon, some didn't register. They have not the obligation to register, so some went to UNHCR or other organizations and registered but not all of them. But the General Security in Lebanon which is responsible for borders and for residency. The General Security figures talk about 1.2 million. So this is an official number that comes from the General Security.

### Reporter 1

General Security it's the Government?



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## HE Minister Ziyad Baroud

Yes it is Government. It is the Central Government Agency responsible for borders and residency.

## Nizar, Reporter 2

معالي الوزير. هناك طبعاً طلب من المجتمع الدولي ليسانع لبنان. في الوقت الذي نشاهد قوى سياسية رئيسية في لبنان تتحدث عن أن الجيش اللبناني عدو وتعتبر الجيش اللبناني عدو وتهاجم الجيش اللبناني وتعتدي عليه وتقتل منه أفراداً في عدة مناسبات وتقيم مؤتمرات لهذه الغاية. كيف تنظرون لإمكانية توحيد لبنان في هذا المجال والتحدث بصوت واحد إلى العالم في الوقت الإنقسام السياسي كما نشهده في لبنان. وهل حصلتم على تجاوب من المجتمع الدولي في شأن مساعدة اللاجئين على الأقل أو الحد من تدفقهم أو إيجاد منافذ أخرى لكي يتوجهوا إليها بدلاً من أن يتجمعوا في لبنان الذي لا يتسع طبعاً لهذا العدد الهائل

I can summarize. My question was: How would his Excellency expect the international community would help Lebanon when the Lebanese have discord among themselves. They talk they attack the attack the Lebanese Army. Some major parties in Lebanon criticize and attack the government. They put many obstacles against the formation of the government and the elections as well.

## HE Minister Ziyad Baroud

شكراً. لا شك أن الإنقسام الحاد يتعاظم نتيجة ما يحصل في سورية وهذا واضح ولكن هذا لا يلغي أن شبكة الأمان المطلوبة على مستوى لبنان الرسمي هي التي يمكن أن تجنب كل ما يحصل حالياً. الجيش ليس موضع وجهة نظر برأبي. لا يمكن أن يكون الجيش أو دعم الجيش وجهة نظر. الجيش هو جزء من تركيبة الدولة هو جزء من تركيبة المؤسسات الأساسية الحامية , وهذا الجيش إذا أخطأ فلدبه محاسبة داخلية ووسائل محاسبة. وإذا تم الخطأ أو أسئى إليه فهو في وضع الدفاع عن النفس وهو في موقع الدفاع عن الأرض والوطن والمؤسسات. إذا أنا لا أرى في مقاربة موضوع الجيش وجهة نظر. هذا موضوع مبدئي ودعم الجيش هو من منطلقات المسألة السيادية ولا يمكن النقاش حوله. تجاوب من المجتمع الدولي نعم ولكن هناك ناقوس خطر في الفترة الأخيرة. لبنان يقول للمجتمع الدولي المسألة ليست فقط لبنانية، المسألة ليست فقط لبنانية سورية، المسألة تخص كل ما يمكن أن ينتج عن هذه الأزمة إن لم تعالج وبسرعة، من تداعيات على مستوى التطرف. من تداعيات على مستوى البدائل التي تطرح أحياناً. المنافذ الأخرى المطروحة هي نعم دول ثالثة عالم قادرة على إستيعاب جزء من هذا النزوح. هي أيضاً حق العودة. لا استعمل هذا التعبير. حق السوريين بأن يعود إلى مدنهم وقراهم في حال لم تعد الاشتباكات والمواجهة. على المجتمع الدولي أيضاً أن يساعد في هذا الإتجاه وهناك مساعدة يجب أن تكون للدول التي تستقبل النازحين. لبنان الأردن أو أي دولة أخرى على مستوى بنها التحتية وعلى مستوى المجموعات المحتضنة لهؤلاء إن كانت بلديات أو مجتمع مدني.



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I was saying that supporting the army cannot be just a, I mean you cannot be with or against the army. The army is part of the Lebanese state; it is part of the Lebanese institutions, if the army does wrong. I am saying if, then it has its own internal accountability process. If not supporting the army is supporting the Lebanese state and supporting the stability. The international community response to the Lebanese needs is felt because we feel that there is sort of warning that if there is no response things would escalate in a way that will not be limited to Lebanon or Syria or the region. The escalation of extremism, the escalation on many levels, security levels mainly would lead to results that are not wished by anybody. Other means yes, some countries can host Syrian refugees as well. Germany, I didn't mention that Germany already accepted to host 5000 refugees. Other countries could do the same; Arab countries could do the same.

### **Reporter 1**

But non-gulf states, they never are.

### **HE Minister Ziyad Baroud**

I think all of them should.

### **Ms. Pamela Falk, President of the United Nations Correspondence Association**

Alright. Thank you. We have quite a few questions. Margaret, Bashir, then James, then George.

### **Margaret, Reporter**

Thank you Mr. Baroud Margaret Bashir with voice of America. My question to you is as a former Interior Minister of Lebanon is what is your take on this morning car bombing in the Dahyeh.



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### HE Minister Ziyad Baroud

Well I think it's part of what will be, of what we already started having and what we could have more if we don't have a safety net on the level of the Lebanese Central Government, if we don't have a government, if we don't have the will to avoid the repercussions of what's happening around us. I see it as a very negative signal; I see it as if some would like to take Lebanese people again to what we witnessed years before as if things are in to polarization again, as if Lebanese people are fighting together. I don't see it that way. I see it as being some sort of as if we are really taking Lebanon to hostile environment. I don't have any information what so ever as in terms of who did it or and we have to wait for the police investigation. The way it happened and where it happened is very significant. It could mean a lot, and that is why we need to take this with care and I think all Lebanese fractions should be in solidarity with all those who are targeted. It is not a partisan thing when any region in Lebanon that is targeted all Lebanese should feel targeted; it is not about one region.

أعتقد الذي حصل في الضاحية الجنوبية لا يخص فقط الضاحية الجنوبية هو تعرض لكل مناطق لبنان. ولا يمكن التمييز بين منطقة وأخرى عندما تتعرض الرسالة رسالة سلبية رسالة ضد شبكة أمان نحتاج إليها ولكن أن ردود الفعل من كل الفرقا السياسيين في لبنان يجب أن تكون متضامنة مع كل من يتعرض في أية منطقة كان.

### James from Al-Jazeera, Reporter

I have two very specific questions if I can. I am aware of the context and historical background of both, but first question is, is it time for Lebanon to drop his objection to having new refugee camps. And, the second point is about the Palestinians who are fleeing from Syria, so Syrian Palestinian are being treated differently from the other refugees, is that right? And are you concerned that most of those existing refugee camps/Palestinian refugees are getting very very overcrowded?

### HE Minister Ziyad Baroud

Yes we have around 80,000 more Palestinians fleeing from Syria, around 50,000 Lebanese who live in Syria already. So yes this is an additional burden, I won't say burden but an additional number that we need to take into consideration. Refugees' camps are controversial because in



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the back mind of some Lebanese people they consider that this could lead to a demographic change and what is temporary would be for long. And the Palestinian refugee camps are already controversial and with all what comes along with the weapons and you know. Yes, I don't think that refugees' camps would be an immediate solution or something to address very soon. At the same time, it could help maybe but now that 1.2 million are already in all over the country in around a thousand municipalities I don't see how camps would help at this stage. I don't know maybe it is too late to talk about camps now.

**George, Reporter**

First a procedural question, I want to make sure I've got this math right. You've got four thousand current resident population, four million I am sorry. My error. A four million current resident population. You've got 1.2 million Syrians, about half a million Palestinians, therefore you should have about two and half million native born Lebanese. Did I get that right?

**HE Minister Ziyad Baroud**

Yes

**George, Reporter**

And a more substantive question

**HE Minister Ziyad Baroud**

This is alarming. That's why I am saying this is alarming. All these Syrian refugees are around 25% of the population.



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### **George, Reporter**

I've read through your report at least an incensory fashion and I'd like to quote here it says there are now over 30000 Syrian students in the public sector. Do I understand correctly we are taking those Syrian students into your schools and it seems to me most of those students have lost most of two and a half academic years. What are you doing to take that into account or make it up in some fashion and give those poor kids the education they haven't been getting.

### **HE Minister Ziyad Baroud**

77% of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are children and women. 77%. Public schools mainly are concerned by this and they are taking Syrian students. Two years and a half no because as soon as they get to Lebanon they are practically in the schools. There is no specific program for Syrians they are following the Lebanese program in the schools. But, this is beyond what the Lebanese Ministry of Education can afford. This is far beyond what we can afford. Public schools are already over capacity. They are over capacity. They have no room for more students.

### **Reporter 1**

Technically, when the family reunification would come in scope that probably you can get another 500 Syrians because you have 77% women and children so.

### **HE Minister Ziyad Baroud**

Yes, but this is again one of the challenges and this is one of the concerns we have. Can Lebanon afford more than what it already has?

### **Reporter**

I have a technical question, you mentioned registration. Can you tell me what does the registration entail. What kind of duties and right does it entail in Lebanon?



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### **HE Minister Ziyad Baroud**

Yes, Well UNHCR, the UN agency for refugees is present in Lebanon for years now. It doesn't work on Palestinian refugees though. Palestinian refugees have the UNRWA agency which is competent for them. Now, UNHCR tried to have this registration process in order to assess the needs and to be able to respond in a way or another with other UN agencies to the... and have the proper assistance that is needed. Now the rights, we don't have an asylum. Lebanon is not an asylum country. So practically it will not lead to have any political asylum, but it will help and it is helping a lot in assessing the needs and in understanding what could be done jointly with the international community because UNHCR is today sort of synchronizing all the efforts. At the level of the Lebanese Central Government there is a crisis group which has been created at the level of the Ministry of Interior and this crisis group is trying to synchronize as well with donors and with other people but most importantly on the ground to see how it could be addressed in terms of security and needs but the registration as I mentioned does not reflect the whole picture.

### **Ms. Pamela Falk, President of the United Nations Correspondence Association**

We are unfortunately out of time because there is a stakeout and another briefing but we are leaving few minutes for you to be able to introduce yourself to Minister Baroud if you'd like.

On behalf of the UN Correspondence Association in association with the Beirut Institute we want to thank minister Baroud for his frankness and a very comprehensive briefing.

Thank you very much