

TRANSCRIPT OF e-POLICY CIRCLE 14

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RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:

HE Michelle Bachelet;

HE Peter Maurer;

Baroness Valerie Amos;

HE Ferid Belhaj;

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9JGWLdVLZw>

Raghida Dergham: Good morning Washington DC, and good afternoon Oxford, Lucerne, Geneva, and I am in this very wounded city, this beautiful city called Beirut that has suffered since October, well since a long time, since October and beyond, but August 4 was really a big day for the Lebanese because of the extent of the suffering. We at Beirut Institute, you used to join us from the Skyline building, the iconic building that is the black building in front of the port and that is now totally destroyed. It is iconic because it has to be the expressed pain of, you know, young people who are building their lives, and decided to go places, and then suddenly, the explosion comes and interrupts their lives. Beirut Institute team and myself luckily we were not there, luckily we had stopped on July 29, had we have been there, it would have been a disaster, with my two beautiful team members here and young ladies who God looked after them, and after me. I am here because I want to show you something, this fantastic painting that has been with the 13 episodes of Beirut Institute Summit e-Policy Circles, 52 guests from 22 countries, was at the Skyline, at where we were doing the e-Policy Circles. I rescued it but you know it's missing parts as you could see, and even the name of the artist is gone, so I decided to mount it on a canvas to say to the world, you know what, we can we rebuild, we can, you know, pick up our pieces and say "we'll make it work somehow". It's not the original, it doesn't have the signature, but it has the presence, and that's Beirut and Beirut will come back again with your help, with your attention, and the whole country needs your input. You are incredible leaders of incredible institutions and I know the Lebanese people are appealing to you to see how you can help because there is a violation of the Lebanese people that's going on, multiple violations.

I won't take any more of your time and I won't get any more emotional, but I want to start by welcoming you. You are personal friends and you honor me repeatedly by accepting to be together for this very special e-Policy Circle that is a tribute to Beirut. I want to start with President Michelle Bachelet who is a very good friend from many many years throughout the United Nations and before and beyond and after she has become President of Chile. Each of you will have four minutes to tell me what you think, we always take the conversation forward and we look forward to what you are going to tell us, how to say, what to do, and how to hope. Michelle Bachelet, four minutes to you.

Michelle Bachelet: Thank you for the invitation Raghida, but I will focus my remarks today on the situation in Lebanon, however before I do, I would like to frame my remarks within a wider context that is affecting Lebanon but the rest of the world as well as I said when addressing the Human Rights Council earlier this week. The world has rarely experienced a simultaneous global shock as complex as COVID-19 and no region has been spared, there is not less true for the Middle East and North Africa region which has also continued to be impacted by situations of armed conflict and related violations of international human rights [inaudible] in some states. And the impact of the pandemic on the region has been significant because in the addition to the loss of life, lockdowns and other restrictions imposed have had a significant impact on people's daily lives and the overall economic impact of the pandemic has also been unprecedented and will likely follow those in the most vulnerable situations. For many, it has meant as well restrictions on the field of opinion, expression, religion or belief, assembly and association in some space, it has also had a negative impact on civic and digital space and have generated serious concerns particularly in the context of some state's responses to protests. So in this context of this sharply escalating suffering and turmoil, I believe that human rights principles, norms and actions offer effective solutions to build strong resilience to shocks and counter despair by preventing social, economic and political instability. And of course, I think that the current situation in Lebanon clearly illustrates this. Before I elaborate however, I would like first of all to reiterate my deepest condolences for the loss of life and injury in Lebanon, and to also reiterate my personal solidarity with the people of Lebanon following the horrific explosions last month. And I also reiterated the Secretary General's statement following the explosion which he emphasized that the United Nations will stand with the country in such challenging times.

So, my central message today is that the new government of Lebanon when established, the international community and the United Nations must collectively place human rights at the center of the short-term response and the long-term recovery. It is critical that human rights is integrated into the emergency response to address the needs of all affected population. The United Nations will issue the flash appeal and is working together to support the population on the ground, and my office in Beirut is supporting such efforts.

Furthermore, as protests continue in Beirut, the authority must ensure the protection of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, expression and opinion. There is also an equally urgent need for all political stakeholders in Lebanon to come together to agree on a way forward including through implementing an economic and institutional reform agenda to address the grievances of the people. And this reform should realize, and not undermine the rights of the population. I think it's important to note that the explosion has exacerbated the pre-existing socio-economic rights crisis in the country. I remember last year when Lebanon started, people on the street young people on the streets, I remember this impressive image of a girl sitting and standing in front of like tanks and security forces. I think we already have, I mean, there are pre-existing condition needs to be addressed. There is of course sovereign debt default, a collapse in the national currency, increasing prices of food and medicine and of course add now the economic shock of the COVID-19 lockdown measures that already undermine the realization of people's economic and social rights and the situation has now deteriorated further and further with the impact of the explosion.

Accordingly, the government will need to pay particular attention for those in the most vulnerable situations including those living in poverty and displaced by the explosion. Thank you again and I look forward for the discussion.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Michelle Bachelet. You spoke about human rights and that must be placed at the front and center of the issues in Lebanon. How do you feel human rights are being violated of the Lebanese citizens? I mean is the citizen of Lebanon, are the Lebanese people suffering from the violations of their human rights by a click of politicians who are not allowing it, government included, all kinds of people in and out of government, that are not allowing the country to receive aid or a rescue package from the IMF, the International Monetary Fund? Is this a violation of my right as a Lebanese that I can't get that I can't get that rescue?

Michelle Bachelet: Well I think that government should do anything possible to diminish the grievances of the people. And of course, if there are adequate, and of course maybe our colleague from World Bank would talk more about that, if there are some solutions under, I would say, reasonable conditions, because sometimes there are offers that are not under reasonable conditions for a country to receive, that should be received of course. But I think there can be different ways of violating human rights if there is, I mean I know that sometimes there are violence, some protesters do commit violence and I understand also a policeman died, but if there is any violence, it's the state who violates the human rights and it should be protected the peaceful assembly and the peaceful participation. And lastly, I think when you have problems this main thing first of all, a freedom of information, transparency in information and also people's participation because it's that what people feel, that they don't have probably the spaces to hear their voices heard, to be the voices heard, and to really be able to influence the process.

Raghida Dergham: Right I'm going to leave you with a thought and I really would like to push you on that a little later. How is it not a violation of the human rights of the Lebanese citizens if its government, the presidencies, the first and second and third presidencies, are not doing the right thing by the people in the sense of accepting international aid, accepting international intervention, accepting a rescue package? How is that not the violation of the human rights of the Lebanese citizen? Please think about that while I go to Peter Maurer, and four minutes to you Peter Maurer about the International Red Cross and where shall we go from here? I know that the local Lebanese Red Cross is doing a great job and so are you, but I really need to know where do we go from here given the devastation and given that the the magnificent incredible downfall of this country with no way forward? Peter Maurer, four minutes to you.

Peter Maurer: Thanks a lot, Raghida and colleagues. I would limit my remarks to four brief points. My first is really an element of pride to the Lebanese Red Cross, as well as to the partnership within the Red Cross and Crescent movement for fast and accurate reaction to the blast but also for the reaction over the last years and decades in the context of Lebanon. I think if you have such a stellar national society in Lebanon it is also because you have gone through civil war in Lebanon and it has built capacities and I was immensely proud about the speed and accuracy of the reaction helping hospitals, helping people, helping ambulances, organizing and building the support within a couple of hours to at least mitigate the worst and I think the

Lebanese Red Cross and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement including the ICRC stand in that sense for the importance of humanitarian law and principles, here I would join just from my angle Michelle's comments.

My second point would be that I look at what happened in Lebanon a little bit as an emblematic turning point for humanitarian action today. We all remember, we have been used to look at humanitarian either as induced because of natural disaster or of man-made conflict and violence. I think what happened in Lebanon draws the attention to governance weakness and failures as an origin of humanitarian needs and I think that Lebanon in that sense is not a singular case but emblematic. I come home from trips to Libya to Niger to Burkina Faso, to I have been in the Lake Chad Basin and Somalia at the beginning of this year, I think in many places of the world we see that humanitarian needs emerge when we have serious governance problems and this is of course an additional challenge, I think, to the UN system because it is constituted by governance, but also to the Red Cross system, in which national societies are the auxiliaries of governments. And so we have to think profoundly on how we can respond and what the accurate framework for responses when we are not in a clear-cut system of conflict, war and violence, or of natural disaster, which what was our usual template.

My third remark is one of frustration. I mean how many times have humanitarian actors, development actors, many others, drawn the attention over the last 20 years to the strategic neglect of Lebanon, in particular in the last decade, of strategic neglect of Lebanon and the Lebanese people given the extraordinary power competition in the region with its conflictual impact and with unbearable impact on the social fabric of the neighboring country? And I think it is a little bit out of frustration also that it needed a blast to get attention of the international community and just recognition that what the international community has allowed to be created in Beirut and in Lebanon is unsustainable in terms of what the international system should do in order to prepare and prevent.

And the last point, let me just say that our action with the Lebanese Red Cross with the Lebanese people, our work on some critical humanitarian issues have strengthened my conviction that it is one of the promised most promising countries but it needs the potential to be unlocked. So what does it need to unlock this potential? I think we should have a solid discussion on these issues.

Raghida Dergham: We definitely will, Peter Maurer this is incredibly helpful because you took me to the place where I want to go, about the governance failure, and accountability. Governance failure if it goes on without accountability, then what is the value of the international community if it's there watching and reading from the textbook? There has to be accountability for the governance and government's failure, and particularly in light of what you call "strategic neglect of Lebanon", which is I find this a very powerful framing of the issue.

Peter Maurer quickly can you tell me, is it the failure also of the international community that just lets them get away with it while the people suffer?

Peter Maurer: Well I do believe that the international community always needs interest and motives to get engaged and I do believe that the focus was on the conflict dynamics in the neighboring countries and not on the impact on Lebanon, and I think it is this situation of lack of

focus and lack of acceptance of the reality also that are created through conflict. We have seen it in Lebanon and we have seen it in many other places. Let's remind ourselves that the most fragile context are [inaudible] bringing countries at war.

Raghida Dergham: We're going to discuss that at length, and I want to bring in back Michelle Bachelet into this discussion, but I want to go right now to Valerie Amos. Congratulations at Oxford, we are very proud of you, and we remember you from the UN, again you're a good old friend and I remember how strong you are on these issues and I know that you are still strong on the issue of ending impunity, accountability. I'm not going to put words in your mouth now but I want to get back to you after you four minutes to just take those two points forward. Valerie Amos, four minutes to you please.

Valerie Amos: Thank you, and can I join others in giving condolences to the people of Lebanon and the people of Beirut. It has been a terrible few weeks and my heart goes out to everyone. My comments pick up absolutely from where Peter left off, particularly in relation to these issues around governance failure and accountability. I saw many times at the UN, and I've seen it since, the way in which governments have responded to crises, particularly humanitarian crises. And I'm extremely concerned that over the years I think we are seeing two particular things which are happening.

One is a response which in many ways is ideological and political by governments so they frame who gets the help, why they get it in terms of those who are as it were on their side but there is a lack of care for the people in the country in the way that they do this, I saw this very often with Syria but also elsewhere. But increasingly, and this is what really concerns me, we are seeing incompetence in the way that governments are responding to these crises, so it is not an ideological response per se, but it is also incompetent because quite often the ideological response has eroded key elements of a state response, so a state is no longer able to respond in an effective way. And the COVID pandemic, I think, has really shown a light on this. We saw in the United States for example initially the denial that COVID was serious, we've seen the way that the communications have gone from one side to another in my own country here in the United Kingdom, we have seen in the procurement and also in the way that we have put a testing regime in place, a lot of people complaining about the length of time that has taken and the incompetence that is at the heart of that. Don't get me wrong, I know that any government would be challenged in relation to responding to COVID but this is about elements that demonstrate incompetence. And both of these, I think, were very evident in Lebanon when we saw the response to the explosion, a slow response a refusal of international help with a history of a country with a toxic political environment, the continuation of the conflict in Syria, and that impacting in a very negative way on Lebanon we know about the refugee flows but in other areas as well, but also in terms of the region, significant geopolitical shifts, recently the impact of diplomatic normalization deals between Israel the UAE and Bahrain, all taking attention away from particularly what is happening in Lebanon and the international community holding Lebanon to account.

And this brings me to my final two points. One is in relation to the importance of multilateralism and what the current context tells us about the importance of that multilateralism. The pandemic response is one element of that but the report that came out yesterday from the UN in relation to

climate change and biodiversity and the impact of that on our countries going forward. We need multilateralism now more than ever before. So where is the positivity, and I know you want me to stop, but where is the positivity? I'm really encouraged by the citizens of those countries across the world and what they're doing. If we look at the response to black lives matter for example, if we look to the response to climate change, if we look to the response of the people in Lebanon, in Belarus and everywhere, other countries where their governments have become increasingly authoritarian and where their governments are incompetent, that I think is where the positivity lies.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Valerie Amos, you know you spoke of, and I want you to be very quick on this because we're already almost half an hour in, you spoke of the ideological versus the, what did you call it now I wrote it down...

Valerie Amos: Incompetence.

Raghida Dergham: Right. Well, lucky us, we have both. We have totally both in this country, and so probably Ferid Belhaj is going to tell us how we failed in both because he's been based here before and they've been doing some work on it, and I'm sure it's about the total incompetence but the ideological is driving this. Is it wrong that the international community, Valerie Amos, has been quite accommodating rather of the regional players interfering in this country, and you know taking it as if it's their own? You know, there are regional players who have decided that they will run the course in this country, and this is the ideological part I'm talking about, and of course I'm talking about Iran. What is to be done about this sort of saying Valerie Amos?

Valerie Amos: So I think I would say two things, one is that I think the pandemic has allowed a lack of accountability in the sense that it has taken the eyes off the ball of many things that are going around going on in many parts of the world, including in Lebanon. So we are not seeing that the overarching scrutiny which comes not just from the international community but also from the media as a whole. But I think the second thing which is very important in relation to this is that we are seeing countries that are members of the Security Council, I'm thinking particularly for example of the United States which has stated very very clearly not only an America-first policy, but has been scathing in its criticism of a multilateral approach, so it's enabled other countries to stay very quiet in the face of these attacks on accountability and on multilateralism.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Valerie Amos. I need to go to you Ferid because a lot of Lebanese are waiting to hear what you've got to say because, as I said, not only because you've been here, but also or you're the World Bank and you also know, you work closely with the IMG and I'm sure you're going to tell me something beyond what we know in as far as the good work that you've done with the Bisri dam, and the report that you have done and the assessment of damages. Please take it beyond because people are eager to hear what you have to say, how do they get out of this mess, what help are you bringing, is it possible that we can do anything if there are no reforms? Ferid Belhaj, four minutes to you.

Ferid Belhaj: Thank you very much I'm very pleased and honored to be with this distinguished panel, thank you for the invitation. Let me join in stating how emotional the whole Beirut blast was for all of us and for me personally, I lived five years there, not very far from where this happened and I have colleagues, friends, who have been, you know, affected by this. You talked about the Skyline building, you know, I have friends and colleagues living there and some of them badly hurt so, it is personal for us. But let me take a step back just a bit and talk a bit about the Middle East and North Africa region and how much, you know, what's happening there is actually a reflection of what's happening in Lebanon and vice versa...

Raghida Dergham: Ferid, can I ask you to do it the other way around? I'll tell you why, because a lot of television stations are waiting for you to say what you have to say on Lebanon with the broadcast is being prepared so we can't get into...if you don't mind, forgive me for imposing on you but God knows that they want to hear from you on Lebanon right away, otherwise I'm fired.

Ferid Belhaj: No, we don't want that. Look what's happening in Lebanon, let me say, is a result of years, of what I would say in Arabic, "la moubalat", carelessness. Peter Maurer said "neglect", this is what's happening, and it is a neglect that cannot continue. When we looked at what happened on the 4th of August, a day after that we moved ahead with the rapid damage and needs assessment and what came out of it is not only a number that, you know, how much this is costing, not only a number that is how many of these buildings were shattered and how many people, but also frankly the need for this country to move beyond what happened to it, because this is self-inflicted, this is self-inflicted, and I think this is what's very very important. For once, we cannot turn left, up, down, and saying this somebody else and why is it? Because there is no governance, because there is no accountability, because there is no contestability, because the social contract between the citizen and the state has been shattered, and this is not new, you know. So this is this where we are coming from and that's why I wanted to bridge it with MENA because unfortunately in all of the countries in MENA, we have the same issues of lack of accountability, lack of contestability, and a lack of transparency. I'll finish with this.

At the end of this report we say we need a strategy, we need to do something, you know, we cannot just assess, and we have put together a plan that we are, you know, working on with the UN, with the EU, and with others to look at a three Rs: Reconstruction, Recovery and Reforms. For me, it is three Rs, Reforms, Reforms, Reforms, because if you look at the situation today, of course, tomorrow we can rebuild and, of course, tomorrow we can recover but nothing will be sustained and sustainable if you don't reform your judicial system, if you don't reform your procurement system, if you don't reform your governance system, if you don't take another look at your financial system because all of these are converging into one thing: the disaster that happened on the 4th of August in Beirut.

Raghida Dergham: Ferid Belhaj, if they, *they*, "kellon" we say in Arabic, which means 'all of them', if they are refusing to reform, what's going to happen to this country?

Ferid Belhaj: They have been refusing to reform, *they*, for four years. When you look at the electricity sector, for instance, you know you live there you know it, between 1.5 and 2 billion a year of money that is going down the drain. Why? Because the place is managed in a less than rational way, so we have been pushing electricity reform for years, we are pushing water reform,

we are pushing connectivity reform, and again overall contestability, transparency and governance. And these are not empty words because there is something behind that, there is something called a 'new procurement law' that would allow people, that would allow this state to be able to contract in a transparent way that would allow civil society to take a look at what's happening. You mentioned earlier the issue of making sure that we do something beyond this assessment, we are here and we will do something behind it, but the condition is that reforms move forward, We had Paris I, Paris II, Paris III, we have said and nothing happened.

Raghida Dergham: You can put conditions as much as you want and they're not doing them, they're not meeting them. This question is to all four of you, when the clique that runs a country political and otherwise, they refuse to listen to all of what you're saying, all of you said reform, pay attention to your citizen and, you know, I'm not going to put words you know what you said. When they all refuse, and they are refusing and there is no government today and there might not be a government, what is the response? What can be done? I don't want to lay the blame on you obviously, you tell the Lebanese people you do something about it, every time the Lebanese people go out on the street they got beat up. What is it that, you know, that can be done? Should we go to the Security Council? Should we go to you Michelle Bachelet and say "listen, there is a Magnitsky human rights accountability act in the United States, why shouldn't it apply to Lebanon?" Michelle Bachelet?

Michelle Bachelet: I think first of all that the main problem is the political one, I mean they don't have, they are not, I mean I'm not an expert on Lebanon's politics, but what I do know is that for example the IMF for months has been negotiating a lot of a package of reforms but they have not been accepted by some people in the government, maybe some are pro reforms and some or not, but when I think on how the governments are conformed in Lebanon with that multiplicity, the solution, the formula who came after the conflicts in the past, I have been in government and I'm not sure that you can be in a government when you have people who think so differently. How could you advance when you have people that are so completely separated in terms of some people who can't speak and say "we need to fight corruption" through many of the reforms that Ferid was mentioning, and some other people don't want to lose the privileges?

Raghida Dergham: Then why Michelle Bachelet, then in that case what is wrong with the Magnitsky, the global Magnitsky human rights accountability act, which allows in the case of the United States, the US government to sanction foreign government officials implicated in human rights abuses anywhere in the world? These officials are abusing our human rights by using accountability by refusing reform
Michelle Bachelet, why can't that be what can this be take up by the Human Rights Commission?

Michelle Bachelet: Well, I mean, do you mean the Council?

Raghida Dergham: I mean whichever you want. Can I hear from you on that, should the government officials be sanctioned because they're not allowing us to get relief?

Michelle Bachelet: Well I think first of all we need, I mean I think we need to work with the government to engage them in a solution because of course they are not respecting the rights of

the people when they permit that grievances exist and that and we need, the population is suffering and the rights are diminished, so the government must honor its commitment whether that it is a package from the IMF or another. Of course, the problem of this is that it's a sovereign decision, but if it's sovereign decision I think we have to urge them for a peaceful resolution and of course countries can use other kinds of actions but on the Human Rights Council, and I want to mention of something that was discussed by Valerie Amos before and also by Peter, I mean on the accountability on the commitment on the international community, today the world is very polarized and Valerie I'm not going to repeat what they said, but it's very difficult to get any decision, for example, in the Security Council because there will be countries who are not going to accept it, and in the Human Rights Council it is the same, when there are certain delicate situations on controversial situations and they vote, not every time those votes really can represent what everybody wants so I think something can be done, but it will be needed to have some countries who propose that actions and because that's a member state issue, not an issue for my office we cannot act on this regard so it's a very complex.

Raghida Dergham: Then maybe it's time in cases like this to think out of the box probably. Let me go to...

Michelle Bachelet: Sorry I can't think out of the box but I represent the UN, I don't represent myself.

Raghida Dergham: That's why we need the globalization, the talk of globalization and forget about unilateralism when the UN is really failing and thinking out of the box, we need to, I mean I'm the daughter of the UN, as you all know, I spent 40 years...

Michelle Bachelet: Yes, but the UN are not the bureaucrats, us. The UN is the 193 member states.

Raghida Dergham: And I'm against this upholding the issue of sovereignty above all because there is really something important that we have to listen to. Valerie Amos, and then I am going to go to Peter Maurer, go ahead Valerie Amos.

Peter Maurer: Thanks a lot Raghida, can I just inject two thoughts. If states and international institutions fail and mechanisms which were devised are not functioning, from my modest Red Cross perspective I say that's the moment of civil society to get organized and to do the best it can to deliver services and I think that's what we try to do in a limited space of humanitarian action and basic needs and social services as we have done in the past but let's never forget that accountability mechanisms, international mechanisms, pressures, sanctions, legal accountability, will only work if there is a broad movement and willingness to make them work, and it seems to me we are not there yet despite all the difficulties. What I would envisage in contrary is that we have to strengthen further institutions of the civil society in order to be able to deliver services. I think, again, the Lebanese Red Cross is a good institution, there are a couple of other institutions which can deliver services. We need to recast the capacity of the Lebanese society to take basic needs into their hand and basic social services into their hand, which doesn't mean that I'm against everything which have you have said and put on the table Raghida, but we seem in terms

of the power reality, as I read it, not there, to make these mechanisms work. So pending a broader movement that's probably what I can offer.

Secondly, I think we need to inject into any discussion on the accountability power reality. I don't know any place in the world where accountability works without taking into account what the power balance in a country is you can't discuss a way. Those who have the power, you have to engage at least. This is the recipe which the Red Cross Crescent movement uses in order to deliver services.

Raghida Dergham: I'm going to have to go to Valerie Amos, but please I mean, you know, when you see that there is a total dysfunctional entity in this country that, actually they are very functional it is that they made this country dysfunctional, and you see it in your own eyes and you know what's going on including refusing the an IMF package, including resisting what the World Bank was to say, including juxtaposing the priorities of regional states on the Lebanese individuals, you can't just go to the traditional equation, Peter Maurer, I want to get back to you on this but I want to hear from Valerie Amos and then from Ferid Belhaj.

Peter Maurer: I'm not going to the traditional equation, I'm just saying you have then to strengthen civil society organization to get organized.

Raghida Dergham: Valerie Amos, they are shooting of protesters. Please, I know you would have something to say about that. Should that not be, you know, something that governments are held responsible for, when they're shooting protesters? Valerie Amos please.

Valerie Amos: Of course, government should be held responsible for it, but I think the thing that we are all grappling with here and it's a very very difficult thing to accept is that we have reached a kind of impasse. We all recognize that multilateralism is key, that accountability is key, that the structures that we have in place at the moment in the UN, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council are key in all of this. But because of the power, which is being exercised by individual powerful member states, because of the proxy wars which are going on across the world, multilateralism has increasingly become impossible. So, what we need to look for and you yourself talked about, you know, the importance of thinking about outside the box, what we need to look for is how can we create some opportunities out of the crisis, the different crises which we have on the table and one of the things that Peter Maurer talked about was strengthening civil society, and in that sense I am talking about the same thing but in a slightly different way. We are seeing these important protest activist movements around the world, it is absolutely appalling the way that we are seeing individuals and groups of people being shot down, and not just in Lebanon, in testing against their governments, they are protesting against authoritarianism. We have seen over the years the ways in which humanitarian workers themselves...

Raghida Dergham: In the case of Lebanon...

Valerie Amos: So, a couple of things. First of all, we need as much as possible to support those who are making the case against that form of authoritarianism. We need human rights advocates for example who are making sure that they are recording what is going on, because I am a firm

believer that over time, this will change. I think we also need to be forming alliances, and here I agree with Michelle who said that essentially this is a political problem in Lebanon, we need to be forming alliances with those who want change, who want to bring about positive change, who care about the people of the country. It's going to be a slow, long, hard process and none of us thinks it's going to happen overnight, we know the history, we've seen what's happened. I mean Raghida you are wanting immediate change and I understand that, you are living right in the midst of it...

Raghida Dergham: Valerie Amos, let me say something to you and I'm sure Ferid Belhaj will help me there. This is not that I'm dreaming of an immediate change, there is a horrible collapse happening, horrible collapse. Ferid Belhaj will help me go through this, there will be no return to rebuild this country if there is no immediate action, it's not a luxurious thing that "oh yes, I would like to have an immediate result".

Valerie Amos: I do not, don't get me wrong, I do not see it as a luxury, but we all know, and we have seen it time and time again, we have seen countries as it were fall through the floor and think they may cannot fall any further, and indeed they have. And I very much fear and this is not a great message, but I very much fear that Lebanon may have to get worse before it gets better. That is not that is not the message that I want to say to everyone, you know, I know how appalling and awful it is, but we are at a place in the world right now where there is so much that is collapsing around us that we have taken for granted that there is a rebuilding job that needs to be done, rebuilding in a different kind of way that takes on board a lot of these challenges.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you. Ferid Belhaj, a couple of quick questions, three quick questions, one at the time. First one, who failed the IMF, here in Lebanon, who failed them?

Ferid Belhaj: Look it is a tough question, who failed them. I guess there was clearly not enough willingness on the part of the government to reach an agreement with the IMF, you know, we are in touch with our friends from the IMF and clearly they came with a very clear set of suggestions, by the way something that we discussed with them at all times through the IMF, and clearly there was no responding power on the other side of the table so this is where we are. Now, let me say something, what I see happening now in Lebanon is an acceleration of history. I said that earlier, you know, this is self-inflicted, and it is important. Because it is self-inflicted, Raghida just a second, because it is self-inflicted, you know, whomever is in charge now cannot turn and say it's not my fault, you know, so this is where I believe that the reforms are on the right path.

Second point quickly, the rDNA, this report that we produced was worked, put together basically, and discussed with civil society, with a large array of activists around Beirut and the greater Beirut and it is important because that allowed us to get more of a reality check above and beyond how many buildings were destroyed.

And the third point is, because of this new dynamic, you heard it you are there, the President, the President of Parliament, the Prime Minister, all of them are talking about the need to rejuvenate the political system and it is absolutely fundamental that this is, you know, it's important that we

recognize that something happened with this blast, it's not business as usual and a couple of bombings down in the south.

Raghida Dergham: Who's failing you now as the World Bank, you're extending some very interesting... Okay you succeeded with the Bisri Dam, right? Tell me about the success story, how much flack did you get for that?

Ferid Belhaj: Look, this is a very long story, it is a good project that at some point got derailed because of the, you know, the political wrangling around it, so as the World Bank, as us people, we listen to the civil society and we listen to those who are telling us "look, at this particular juncture, this project does not have this necessary political and social platform that is needed", so we withdrew from it.

Raghida Dergham: So, quickly, a very quick one to you again because that's being written to me, what about the electricity priority that you have been emphasizing? How much are you going to put for that? How much are you going to hold their feet to the fire on this one?

Ferid Belhaj: Well to be very clear, it's been 20 years that we've been holding the feet of this government, of many governments, to the fire because of this, because this is something that has, it is not only one basic service that is not rendered to the population, it is also what is making the Lebanese economy sinking day after day. It is also what is making Lebanon the record country, in a way, in total indebtedness you know more than 150% of GDP is the level of debt, because of what? Because of the failure.

Raghida Dergham: Then what happens to us, with such a debt?

Ferid Belhaj: Well the debt needs to be managed, but before managing that debt, you need to manage the "why this is coming about?" and it's coming about a total failure of managing the electricity sector, because of all the subsidies and because of the total disconnect between the rational economy of it, and frankly what the citizens are getting. You are living there, you are paying twice, you are paying the EDL, and you are paying the private service provider, and you are paying way more than anybody around the whole region is paying for very bad service and for what? Seven, eight hours max of electricity a day. Yeah, it's a shame 21st century Lebanon.

Raghida Dergham: Michelle Bachelet, see you heard it from Ferid Belhaj, this is where I want to come back to you too for the original point I wanted to make to you when it is a situation that is so dark that, you know, you have people in government who are leading the corruption, you have people in playing the sectarian card, they're playing the regional card, actually not only corruption, they are greedy, they're just greed on top of everything else, and then you see the failure of the system of the electricity, of food, of money, you have no idea how bad things are here. They are so bad. And the people cannot do anything because the clique is controlling, and they won't let go. How come we cannot hold them responsible? Why can't we hold them responsible please?

Michelle Bachelet: Oh no of course they are responsible. Of course, they are responsible because every government is responsible when they act in an inadequate way and when they

don't act and do what they should do, so of course they're responsible the thing is, what can you do about it? And it's about what Peter Maurer mentioned and Valerie Amos, about power internationally but also about the national power, I mean, I believe in my case and in COVID-19 again I show that, what I believe always, I think to provide services, state has the responsibility to provide the health, I mean of course you can have private providers, but the responsibility is on the state to ensure the rights of the people and that's why COVID has shown that. It has shown the lack of preparation of all states to respond to that, to that thing.

So of course, you have to hold them accountable, but to hold them accountable and to say that they're responsible is not enough, because what you need is complete solutions and that's where I would have thought, for example, talking about multilateralism, that the COVID-19 would create a sensation that “look, yes multilateralism is fundamental, and we all got to change, we're not going to start working only alone, or differentiate us, but let's see what unite us and how we can push together because we're dealing with something so big”, but that was not what happened so in Lebanon I'm not going to give recommendations to countries when I don't know them in the details, but how can we, not only, I mean they spoke about civil society providing services, yes but that's not the solution at the long term. You need to have a state to respond, and how can you change then the politics. I think Valerie was mentioning, to support the people on the street, to support the people's movements. But one of the things, that really I don't have the solution, sorry Raghida because when you have people who don't trust the authorities and they don't trust because they have good reasons to not trust and you have certain structures, political structures I have been thinking to myself, what a difficult situation it is, and I guess that's why Valerie said, it might go worse before it goes better.

But I have to say, we need to support, I mean people need to be supported so they continue making their voices loud and I guess I cannot imagine there's no political party or political movement that has the right to move.

Raghida Dergham: Michelle Bachelet, there is a very important political movement, several political movements here, but they get, the crackdown is incredible, it's a predetermined decision to fail them and they are disorganized, I will give you that, I'm not telling you that they're perfect, but that's why there are groups who have written to the Secretary General, I have the letter here, to say “help us”. There was no push for an independent investigation for the blast, fact-finding mission, nobody pushed. There's no a push for, I mean at the UN, and people are saying “How do we get your attention Michelle Bachelet? How do we get you to think of violations of our human rights, as citizens, by the practices you have heard by officials ?” that you can say, you can leave this program, and put out a very strong statement and say “that is unacceptable”, because the facts will stun you when you go into the details. Michelle Bachelet.

Michelle Bachelet: I did that on Monday when I presented the global situation of human rights in the world, I had a statement particularly on Lebanon, on people's rights and sufferings and the need of reforms, and the need to for governments to respond putting a human rights approach centered.

Raghida Dergham: Yes I guess I'm talking about accountability much more than just that this, I mean if it is a violation of my human rights, do we go again to the Magnitsky act option, which I

think works? Do we go that way should? Should people start to think that way instead of killing a country, instead of killing us?

Michelle Bachelet: To be honest, it has been used in a very political way as well. When you like governments you don't use it, and when you don't like governments you use it, so it's not necessarily the best solution. I'm not sure it's the best solution because I have seen it used only for governments that are not the friends of some government.

Raghida Dergham: Wait a minute, wait a second, this is not the case in Lebanon. I think maybe you're thinking Latin America, South America, this is not the case here.

Michelle Bachelet: No, no, I'm talking about Lebanon, I'm talking about when I have seen that actually. In Latin America as well. I mean, what I know is that in the next week there will be a discussion on the situation of the Human Rights Council and probably there will be a resolution that again, I'm telling you, I can have my opinions on Monday, but this is the decision of member states and that finally is a political decision.

Raghida Dergham: Well we hope that we got your attention Michelle Bachelet so that would be on your radar as a country.

Michelle Bachelet: Oh we have it, because also my deputy, she's Jordanian, but her family lives in Lebanon so we always are sort of sharing the...

Raghida Dergham: I guess we're asking you for more, so I'm going to just consider this almost a closing statement because everybody's going to get a minute after this, and before I conclude and introduce the e-Policy Circle for the next one. I just want to thank you Michelle Bachelet for, stay with us, do not leave yet please, for thinking of this country, putting it on your radar and we hope that you can think further of how when this case is new, it's a one of a kind. When you see that case, what can we do to make sure that the collapse is not final that it's, that it's not detrimental.

I want to go to Peter Maurer, I'll give you one minute to conclude please, Peter Maurer, with what you are walking away. What are you taking away from this discussion, what do you want us to learn from you, where do we go from here?

Peter Maurer: Well Raghida, what I learned is that of course the questions you put so strongly about accountability and legitimacy are issues we encounter in many places of the world, and we look at fragile contexts and breakdowns of systems. And when systems are breaking down and we do not immediately know how to establish accountability, how to establish legitimacy, then the strengthening of the resilience of people is sometimes a super modest underwhelming recipe that we are offering, but sometimes the only one. And I fear a little bit that Lebanon while we are not used to think about a 'failed states' about Lebanon, we think about other contexts we do see failure of having legitimate accountable political systems built, and this brings us back and draws us back to what humanitarians sometimes are and where

we can work, but of course I know this is completely unsatisfactory in terms of a response and it is no response to the accountability question, it's just a realistic assessment for where I think we are when other mechanisms fail.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Peter Maurer I think, you know, you've heard me for years at the UN always fighting for ending impunity. It did not start with Lebanon, It's always, I've been fighting, this has been my urging for every Secretary General I've met, and guess what, it's been like how many of them, five or six I covered. So I've been around for many years, but please keep in mind how much we have to do for ending impunity. Peter Maurer, thank you very much.

Valerie Amos, I know you're strong on this one, I remember you. What can you do now in your capacity, I mean, you're a great institution we need your thinking out of the box, can you help us think about do we step out of...

Valerie Amos: So I think we need to do both, we need to work to reform and strengthen our multilateral institutions, but we also need to think outside the box, and your point about impunity, we should be absolutely strong on that. And I think we should do more, I mean, that is part of the pressure that we have to put on.

Secondly, we need to maintain the pressure, we need to build alliances with those who want to bring out about positive change. And I think that we need to have a good long global these issues are around accountability and legitimacy. They are the thread that hang through every single one of these issues that we are talking about in terms of the importance of multilateralism, so let's present that.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you Valerie Amos, Ferid Belhaj, I'm going to inject a question for you that again, sorry, do you really believe that the issues they have in Lebanon ... (electricity cut).

I told you this is a dysfunctional country, there we are, no electricity, but maybe Ferid Belhaj will fix it, hopefully. They keep emphasizing that electricity is not the property of one party and the electricity is not the property of one man, so I mean basically people are asking you as the World Bank, are you going to give money to go to officials who are, they're calling them 'the thief who has stolen the money', are you going to go on or are you going to give hope? Will the World Bank give differently?

Ferid Belhaj: You know, this is a very good question and it's very timely because we have, as we speak, 200 million dollars that are ready to go for poverty alleviation as a social safety net, and as late as yesterday, we had a meeting to look at the details of how this money would be channeled directly to its beneficiaries, making sure that all fiduciary barriers in a way are looked at very carefully. So, it's a very good question.

Now let me conclude by saying two things. One is that, you know, it is true that Lebanon is resilient. Resiliency is part of your DNA, which is absolutely great. This being said, many of my colleagues are telling me "we are fed up with being resilient, we need something else". So, this is

one. Second, look at how many people are gathered around this particular panel, but in general, talking about Lebanon. Lebanon is not by itself, it's not alone and the Lebanese people have tremendous, tremendous sympathy around the world, so you know, I don't see it about [inaudible], I see the people of Lebanon being badly served by their governance right now, but things will go, we will evolve. Last but not least, in 2014 the President of the World Bank came to Beirut, and his message was "help us help you", and I believe this is what Valerie, this is what Michelle, and this is what Peter are saying, 'help us, help you', we cannot bring, you know, an army to invade Lebanon and to impose order. We need the Lebanese people to do what they need to do and we are here, ready, willing and able to help Lebanon move forward.

And thank you again for the invitation.

Raghida Dergham: No thank you all so very much, you just honored me as friends, as incredible leaders, as important institutions.

Valerie Amos, you have to come back to Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi when we, you came to the first one and then we need you for the fourth edition, hopefully in March, if COVID allows. Peter Maurer you were with us the last time and you're hooked, you have to come back and this is the family of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi. And Ferid Belhaj, you wanted to come and you couldn't so would hold you responsible for that. And you know, Michelle Bachelet we want you with us, we would love to have you, you are a strong force, and you are a force of a person, of a woman and your important voice is very important for us.

Michelle Bachelet: I will be there for the Arab Spring meetings, but I would love to go again.

Raghida Dergham: Please, we want you with us. Let me announce to you who, some of them are your colleagues, who will join us next Wednesday, at the same time for another fabulous e-Policy Circle. You are the first one for the second season, which is of course, the Fall/Winter season, thank you for the honor. And the next one would be e-Policy Circle 15 on September 23rd. We have your friend, I'm sure, his Excellency Danilo Turk, the former President of Slovenia, he's the current, he's currently the President of the club of Madrid, you all know that. We have Nabil Fahmy, the former Foreign Minister of Egypt and, of course, he's the founding dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo. We have Richard Grenell., many of you would know as the spokesman for the US mission at that time but he's now Former Director of the National Intelligence and Former Ambassador to Germany and Envoy for Possible, he's been in the news quite a lot recently. And we expect that we have Andrei Fedorov, who is the Chairman for the Fund for Political Research and Consulting, he was also previously a Deputy Foreign Minister for Russia.

So you honor me, love you all, thank you for joining me, help Lebanon, this is for Beirut, Beirut needs you. Skyline will hopefully welcome you back again, but only when we can rebuild, we cannot rebuild now, we cannot rebuild a home. I cannot rebuild my little home, because the building has to be rebuilt, so until next time.

This is where it was before, and this is what it is now. This is the Skyline, the iconic Skyline that where Beirut Institute was coming to you from, pray for the day that we will join you from there. I thank you, I thank you very much. And thank you for supporting us.

Lots of love, thank you.

Michelle Bachelet, Valerie Amos, Ferid Belhaj, Peter Maurer: Thank you.