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## Press Availability With Lebanese Prime Minister Seniora

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Grand Serail  
Beirut, Lebanon  
July 22, 2005

**Prime Minister Seniora:** I would like first of all to welcome the Secretary, Her Excellency Condoleezza Rice, on her visit to Lebanon. This is the first time she ever comes to Lebanon. We are glad that she could make it during this very short program in the Middle East and she already visited the President and she already visited here, myself, and then she is going to meet with the Speaker. So I am really very glad to welcome Secretary Rice, and I will give you the podium.

**Secretary Rice:** Thank you very much Prime Minister. I am delighted to be here in Lebanon. This is an exciting time for the people of Lebanon as well as for the people of the Middle East. I think that the whole world was inspired by what took place here and I came to offer the support and the best wishes of the United States to the new government that you will head. I am certain that the friendship between the people of Lebanon and the people of the United States will only grow from here on out.

Lebanon is embarked on, what we know will be a difficult course, but is an exciting course. I was deeply moved to go to the gravesite of the late, former Prime Minister Mr. Hariri. Earlier, I had a meeting with President Lahoud. I will see the Speaker, and I look forward to discussing with all, Lebanon's future.



But this is the process that Lebanese are conducting for Lebanese. And that is what is really very exciting about this time -- so good luck to you Prime Minister, and we will stay in touch.

**Question:** (Inaudible.)

**Secretary Rice:** First of all Andrea, yes, I think it is everyone that has demanded that there be full adherence to Resolution 1559 by Syria. That means not just the removal of its forces, but the removal of its intelligence forces, and we would like to see the day when there are good, neighborly relations between Syria and Lebanon based on mutual respect and equality. But good neighbors don't close their borders to their neighbors and it is a very serious situation on the Lebanese border where Lebanese trade is being strangled. The best outcome would be for there to be free flow of commerce between Syria and Lebanon and we would hope that that would be restored very, very soon. There are obligations under 1559 that Syria undertook, that Lebanon is undertaking and we look forward to the fulfillment of those obligations.

**Prime Minister Seniora:** I just want to say here that throughout its history, Lebanon has been always respectful of international legitimacy, and of national resolutions, and Lebanon will continue to do so. But, as you know in the 1559, some parts of its have been already implemented, and the other parts we have to -- we have to understand that we have to build within Lebanon the unity among the Lebanese, and by this to create the necessary dialogue and discussion among the Lebanese so that we can really create the necessary consensus among the Lebanese.

So, I mean, as far as the 1559, Lebanon, in this respect, will carry on a strong, as well as serious discussion and dialogue among the Lebanese for that process.

As far as the support that can be extended by the United States and our friends everywhere is to really express the appreciation for what the Lebanese Government is doing in terms of its program for reform and in terms of how it is approaching the 1559 Resolution. This will require understanding and patience and this is in line of what the Lebanese are doing in this respect --- and the Lebanese Government is doing as well.

As far as the relationship with Syria, Syria and Lebanon are neighborly and brotherly countries and we are very serious about building a very good, respectful, and friendly relations and to enhance all the relations including economic relations between the two countries. This is for the interest of Syria and Lebanon and we will continue to make every possible effort in order to have an early release so that goods and passengers and people can really flow within the two countries very easily and smoothly.

**Question:** (Inaudible.)

**Secretary Rice:** First of all, we have always said that the process of politics in Lebanon should be for Lebanese. That was the whole purpose of Resolution 1559, so that Lebanese could control Lebanon's future, and the United States holds firmly to that principle. Our views of Hizballah have not changed and our policy towards Hizballah has not changed. But we have very good cooperation with the Lebanese Government.

I've just heard, in some detail, some of the reform measures that the government plans to take. I believe that we can support, both through international organizations and through direct support, the economic and political reforms that will be undertaken here. I met my counterpart the Foreign Minister for the first time today and I look forward to meeting him again and to one day welcoming him to Washington.

And so there is plenty of room for cooperation with this government and I think you will not find a more supportive partner than the United States for what Lebanon is trying to achieve -- because this is a wonderful breakthrough for the Lebanese people to have control of their own future. The United States does not want to somehow dictate Lebanon's future. That is for the Lebanese to decide just as America's future has been for the United States to decide. And so we look forward to working with Lebanon towards its international obligations and toward its reforms.

**Question:** (Inaudible.)

**Secretary Rice:** As I said, I know that Lebanon believes strongly in living up to its international obligations. This is what the Prime Minister has just said. There is a political process that is underway here in Lebanon. It is a process, not only of building a new political system, dealing with long delayed economic reforms, but also the world understands that there is a process of political reconciliation that is underway in Lebanon and that that is important.

Ultimately, the resolution is speaking only to the fact that there can be only one authority in a country, and in a democracy there can be only one authority and one authority that is armed. But we understand that there is a process that is underway and as I said, we started 1559 so that Lebanese could have control of Lebanon's future. Lebanon recognizes that it has international obligations. I've been reassured of exactly that by the Prime Minister although I would have expected no less, and the international community is going to be supportive of Lebanon as it moves forward.

**Question:** (Inaudible.)

**Secretary of State Rice:** Saul, you've known me for a long time and I do not speak in hypotheticals. I think that it does not help for me to speak in hypotheticals. The fact is that the U.S. has a long-standing policy toward Hizballah that has a history to it, that has a history of blood to it, and that has not changed. But what I am here to do is to support the new Lebanon, and the new Lebanon is one that is democratic, the new Lebanon is one that should be free of foreign influence. It is a Lebanon in which Lebanese should make decisions for the Lebanese, and it is one that does have international obligations that we fully expect to be carried out.

This is a hopeful time, and as Lebanon moves forward through this hopeful time, I think that it is going to find an international system that is very strongly committed to a Lebanon that is free of violence, that is free of terrorism, that is unified and the Lebanon where all people of Lebanon feel represented and safe. This is a country that has been through a great deal. It's been through a period of foreign influence and effective occupation. It is going to take some time to work through these things, but the Lebanese Government understands that the world will expect them to live up to their international obligations. Lebanon is, though, in a very important political process right now and we intend to support that political process.

Thank you.

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