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You are in: [Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice](#) > [What the Secretary Has Been Saying](#) > [2005 Secretary Rice's Remarks](#) > [September 2005: Secretary Rice's Remarks](#)

Remarks With UN and Foreign Ministers After Core Group on Lebanon Ministerial

Secretary Condoleezza Rice
United Nations Headquarters
New York City
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Press Availability with United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan; Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora; Egyptian Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit; French Foreign Minister Phillipe Douste-Blazy; Italian Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini; Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal; and United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Jack Straw

(10:50 a.m. EDT)

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: Let me apologize for the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov. He's been called away by other urgent tasks and he's not going to be here with us.

Representatives of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Italy, the European Union, the Russian Federation, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Nations and the World Bank met today at UN headquarters with the Lebanese Prime Minister Mr. Siniora. We gathered to demonstrate our support for and commitment to the new Government of Lebanon as it works to reaffirm Lebanon's sovereignty, engage in vital reforms and strengthen Lebanon's democratic institutions.



We discussed the new government's plans for political, economic and institutional reforms in Lebanon, to promote stability in Lebanon and in the region as a whole. We welcome the Government of Lebanon's response to the Lebanese people's calls for reform.

Lebanon's reform program priorities will set the stage for international assistance. We underscored both the urgent need to implement homegrown reforms and our commitment to supporting these initiatives for the future of Lebanon.

We welcomed the effective and swift responses of the Lebanese judicial system and security authorities to the request of the UN International Independent Investigation Commission and expressed our strong support for the commission's efforts to disclose fully the truth about the terrorist assassination of late Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and for bringing the perpetrators to justice.

The international community remains steadfast in its determination to ensure that outside actors end all interference in the domestic affairs of Lebanon and invite all parties within Lebanon to commit themselves to peaceful political reform and regional stability, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1559.

We call on all regional states to respect fully the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon and the sole authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout its territory.

And finally, we pledged to work together and to reach out to others who want to support Lebanon to hold an international conference before the end of the year 2005.

I now call on the Prime Minister to say a few words. Mr. Prime Minister, you have the floor.

PRIME MINISTER SINIORA: Thank you, Secretary General, distinguished ministers, ladies and gentlemen. At the outset I'd like to thank all the participants in this exceptional meeting. The Core Group meeting was called for by friends of Lebanon to explore the ways in which they can support the reform program of the Lebanese Government. During the meeting we had the opportunity to outline our economic and political program of reform. I am very delighted by the positive response that we received from all the participants. This is the beginning of a process that will lead to the convening of the international conference to support Lebanon before the end of this year in Beirut.

Today, Lebanon is at the threshold of a new dawn. With the goodwill and support of the international community and the determination of the Lebanese people, we have a real chance of achieving our goals. By achieving those goals, we will be finally fulfilling the vision of the late Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, in which I was closely involved over the past 13 years.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, friends of Lebanon: We really look forward to welcome all of you in Beirut, where we can share together the rebirth of the new Lebanon. Thank you very much.

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: Condi.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Secretary General, Prime Minister, it's very good to be here among so many friends of Lebanon. This gathering, I think, sends a powerful signal to the world that the international community is devoted and committed to the future of a peaceful, prosperous, democratic and sovereign Lebanon. The international community has in many ways never been more united, from the passage of Resolution 1559 through its implementation through our joint condemnation of the horrific murder of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and on our support for the commission of Mr. Mehlis that there can be a full and complete investigation so that the perpetrators of that terrible crime can be brought together -- brought to justice.

Mr. Prime Minister, the people of the world have been enormously inspired by the Cedar Revolution and we remain inspired by the Lebanese people as they struggle toward a better future, but now in a context of political freedom. And we call upon all in the region and around the world to continue to support a free and sovereign Lebanon that can build a better future for its people and can do so in an absence -- in which there is no outside interference, but rather in which the people of Lebanon can express their free will.

Thank you very much for your leadership. We all look forward to working with you and we indeed look forward to seeing you again in Beirut.

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: Philippe.

FOREIGN MINISTER DOUSTE-BLAZY: Yes, I should like to thank the Secretary General of the United Nations who has just contributed to the outcome of this (inaudible). It's very important because it's a milestone on the way to independence, democracy and sovereignty for Lebanon.

I should like to emphasize the remarkable determination to achieve reform that the Prime Minister of Lebanon and his government have brought to the table at the outcome of the democratic elections that Lebanon had not known for a long, long time. The program (inaudible) is based upon a deepening of democracy on the one hand and on the other hand to bring into play all the political forces in Lebanon.

We are fully prepared to support in due course Prime Minister Siniora's efforts (inaudible) has presented us with an ambitious program in things economic and political both, and Lebanon can count on our support to the extent that it will specify its priorities as well as the timetable and the modalities for their implementation.

We furthermore hope that others will join the effort and the exchange we've had today and the declaration we have adopted, a very encouraging one in this regard, such that Lebanon can count on France.

Finally, let me say, Mr. Secretary General, we are ready, together with the authorities of Lebanon, to prepare for the international conference which will set up -- which will move forward with the plan of the Lebanese Government, will mobilize necessary international support. France stands side by side with Lebanon in this endeavor.

Thank you very much.

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: Jack.

FOREIGN SECRETARY STRAW: Mr. Secretary General, Mr. Prime Minister, I endorse what my colleagues have said. The circumstances which led to the passing of 1559 were terrible -- the assassination of Rafiq Hariri. We owe it to his memory and the memory of so many other people who have been killed in Lebanon, have lost their lives or their livelihoods, to ensure that there is a democratic Lebanon and one which is fully sovereign within its borders.

Like all of us, I was very depressed after the assassination of Mr. Hariri. I now have good hope about the future of this country and I also believe that the work, sir, that you, Mr. Secretary General, have led on behalf of the Security Council shows what can be achieved by the United Nations when the international community is as united and determined as it has been.

And this morning's meeting shows that members of the Security Council and leading members of the United Nations in the Arab world are absolutely united in ensuring that Resolutions 1559 and 1595 are fully implemented, and that better, brighter, more democratic and more prosperous future for the people of Lebanon is secured.

Thank you very much.

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: Thank you, Jack.

FOREIGN MINISTER GHEIT: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General. I would like to reaffirm that Egypt, as it participates in this gathering and in this conference, and as I said during the meeting, Egypt is working on achieving success in order to take Lebanon to a stable situation that would fulfill the aspirations of all the Lebanese people and would grant them stability and prosperity.

We will work with the people of Lebanon and with the Government of Lebanon in order to achieve this goal which will undoubtedly have its impact and repercussions on the regional situation and stability in the area.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary General.

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: Prince Saud.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General. It is not (inaudible) in dealing with any crisis that arises. The evil hand that assassinated Rafiq Hariri were targeting or wanted to keep Lebanon in the instability that it experienced, but the outcome was the opposite. A new Lebanon arose, a stronger Lebanon, one that enjoys stability and prosperity.

We are happy to take part in this work and today we have heard the program outlined by Prime Minister Siniora. It is a program that we support and we will back with all our ability.

Thank you.

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: Thank you very much. Minister Fini.

FOREIGN MINISTER FINI: Italy is a country with an ancient traditional relationship of friendship with Lebanon. We have a consolidated economic and trade relationship. We are involved in guaranteeing that the peace process and of sovereignty and democracy for that much-suffering country is successful. For this reason, we stand alongside Prime Minister Siniora and are convinced that the international community must be aware that the stability of Lebanon has an enormous effect on the entire Middle East region. So to work toward peace and sovereignty in Lebanon means helping the entire Middle East to live in better conditions.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Before we open up for questions, I want to mention that also participating in the meeting was the European Union's High Representative Javier Solana, the European Commission for External Relations Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner and the President of the World Bank Paul Wolfowitz.

The first question goes to the UN Correspondents Association, Jim Wurst.

QUESTION: Excellencies, I'd like to welcome you on behalf of the UN Correspondents Association. In all of your discussions, you have not mentioned anything about funding. Now, I understand that will probably be the subject of the international conference, but you must be able to have some idea of the kind of money you're trying to raise, where it's coming from, benchmarks, the conditionalities for the release of the funds. Could one of you, whoever feels qualified to answer that, could you please elaborate a bit on that?

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: I think you heard the Prime Minister indicate that we are going to have a pledging conference, where this morning we all agreed to participate and appeal to international partners to participate. I think it would be a bit premature -- I don't know if the Prime Minister agrees with me -- to put a dollar figure on this now, but the Prime Minister may want to answer.

PRIME MINISTER SINIORA: Well, I agree with you, Secretary General. I mean, in the coming few weeks there will be ample dialogue that's going to take place between the representative of Lebanon as well as the various countries and international organizations in which we are going to really talk more in details about our program, our requirements for the coming period and the various specific programs that we will undertake in the coming period.

So I think this question we may request that it may be delayed until the next meeting, and then we'll answer you then.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Inar Ramadan (ph), (inaudible).

QUESTION: What form of aid is going to be extended to Lebanon?

PRIME MINISTER SINIORA: This is going to be discussed during the coming few weeks, so I think premature to get into the details of the nature, the size, the periods. So I mean, these are specific matters that I think will be the subject matter of the coming few weeks. And I think I may ask your patience for sometime until really discuss these matters and then we will handle them next time when we get together in Beirut.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Joel Brinkley, New York Times.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, Mr. Prime Minister, what do you think should be done if the Mehlis commission, as expected, implicates senior Lebanese security officers and Syria says, well, it's a Lebanese matter?

FOREIGN MINISTER SINIORA: Well, as you know, Mehlis has already issued the partial indictment for four of the senior officers of the intelligence and the Lebanese judicial system has already looked (inaudible) into this matter and really acted in accordance with the Lebanese judicial system and has already taken the decision to arrest.

Now, what will come out of the Mehlis report, we will look into the matter then. But I can really tell you clearly is that the Lebanese, all the Lebanese, are really seeking the truth, no matter how long would it take and no matter which personalities it's going to touch and to implicate. We want the truth so that everybody will learn a lesson not to commit such crimes in the future. It is not only of penalizing those who really committed this crime, but to give it a lesson so that not to be committed once more.

So it is too early now to tell you what -- who is going to be implicated and what is going to be done. I assure you that we are going to, in this respect, observe the laws, the respective laws that should be really observed then.

SECRETARY RICE: I would completely associate myself with what the Prime Minister has said. This is an international investigation. It needs to be taken seriously. The chips will fall where they may. But obviously, we're not going to try to prejudge what Mr. Mehlis will find.

I would just say that everyone needs to cooperate and cooperate fully, and there has been a call for Syria to cooperate and I think that -- I hope that Syria will cooperate fully.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, President Bush, according to President Talabani of Iraq, told him that United States is not after regime change in Syria. There's a lot of talk about the readiness by the United States to strike a deal with Syria. How true is this direction?

And for the Foreign Minister of France, please, also Paris has received some high-ranking Syrian officials in the last week or so. Assef Shawkat, a relative of President Bashar al-Assad, is one of them. Are you receiving any messages from the President of Syria to strike a deal, to find a way out of the situation?

Thank you both.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we're interested in only the following with Syria: first of all, that there be full and complete cooperation with the Mehlis investigation and that the truth be found, whatever that truth is; secondly, that Syria would fully and completely remain true to the letter and the spirit of Resolution 1559, which means that their forces should be out but also should any remaining intelligence personnel because Lebanon has to be free of foreign interference. This is an issue of national sovereignty for Lebanon and Syria must respect the national sovereignty of Lebanon.

Third, it is clear that Syria needs to get on the right side of the events that are going on in the Middle East. That means to cut off the routes that insurgents are using to use Syrian territory to penetrate into Iraq and to kill innocent Iraqis. That means to close off support to Palestinian rejectionists, who are the single biggest threat to progress in the Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement, and to -- again, to make certain that nothing is being done to interfere in the affairs of Lebanon. This is a Lebanese matter now. Lebanon is now in a position to have politics between Lebanese. It needs to be that way. That is what we are talking about with Syria. That is the issue.

FOREIGN MINISTER DOUSTE-BLAZY: We indeed, to reply to your question, first of all, with regard to what seems to us the most important, there is no interference in any country in another country, and in this case Lebanon, we have always pleaded in favor of sovereignty, respect for a country, for its independence, and therefore that there be no interference, neither militarily nor with regard to intelligence.

Now with regard to the Mehlis commission, I believe that this is a criminal investigation being carried out by a professional, qualified judge. He must continue to work in the greatest independence possible. All parties must accept the conclusions at the appropriate time. But we have no comments to make while the investigation is proceeding and nor shall we prejudice its conclusions. Therefore, we have just reasserted our full support to the Mehlis commission.

And I would end by saying that it seems to us important to implement Resolution 1559 on the assassination of Mr. Rafiq Hariri.

QUESTION: Dr. Rice, I have a question. You've always talked about the implementation of Resolution 1559, but what if Lebanon can not, on its own, disarm the arms of Hezbollah and the Palestinians? Would the international community help? And is it a condition for Lebanon to receive economic assistance?

SECRETARY RICE: I believe that the Lebanese Government fully intends to live up to its obligations under Resolution 1559. I have talked with the Prime Minister. I have been in Beirut. I know that this is a government that wants to make a new start based on the resolution that gave Lebanon an opportunity for a new start.

Lebanon is in the context now -- or the political context in Lebanon now is different and this must be a political arrangement. It must be a political dialogue between Lebanese. And we are prepared to see that take place.

It goes without saying, I believe, that it is eventually the case that no democracy can exist if there are some within -- particularly within the government, who try and maintain an option of violence. There has to be one authority and there has to be one Lebanese security force that reports to that authority. And I'm certain that that is well understood internationally, well understood in Lebanon. But we're at the beginning of a process and we're going to support the Lebanon Government as they move forward.

SECRETARY GENERAL ANNAN: Thank you very much.
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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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