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Remarks Before the United Nations Security Council

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

UN Headquarters
New York City
October 31, 2005

(11:15 a.m. EST)

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, fellow members of the Council, by passing Resolution 1636 this morning, we in the United Nations have declared our support for the Commission's search for truth, which is being ably led by Mr. Detlev Mehlis. We have also affirmed our just demands of the Syrian Government and made it clear that failure to comply with these demands will lead to serious consequences from the international community.

There is a close link between these two actions. For the past 30 years, Syria's occupation of Lebanon penetrated all aspects of its society. Beginning last year, however, Syria's interference became so corrupt and unbearable that it began to galvanize opposition against itself both within Lebanon and among the international community. Late last August, the Syrian Government dictated the extension of Lebanese President Emile Lahoud's term of office. In response, the international community acted, though some on the Security Council did not want our actions to single out Syria by name.

Hence, in Resolution 1559, this Council called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon and summoned all states to respect Lebanese sovereignty. When the Syrian Government met none of these demands, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, a respected leader and admired philanthropist, resigned his post in protest. Now, not four months later, Prime Minister Hariri was assassinated in a terrorist bombing that claimed the lives of 22 other people as well. After mourning their murdered leader, one million Lebanese citizens united in downtown Beirut to publicly call for truth and justice and freedom from Syrian domination.

Again, the international community acted. We supported the aspirations of the Lebanese people, and helped them to compel Syria to withdraw its military forces from the country. The Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1595, which established the UN International Independent Investigation Commission to examine the crime and to identify the guilty.

We have now received the Commission's interim report, and its findings are deeply disturbing. We're told that there is converging evidence pointing at both Lebanese and Syrian involvement in this terrorist act. And we're told that it would be difficult envisage a scenario whereby such a complex assassination plot could have been carried out without the knowledge of senior Syrian officials. We've also learned that Syrian officials have sought to impede this investigation by intentionally misleading the Commission, including by providing false testimony.

Syria has offered no truthful explanations to these serious allegations. Instead, it has chosen, until now, to dismiss the Commission report as politically motivated.

The Syrian Government has actively and consistently worked to break the will of the Lebanese people and to thwart the will of the international community. At this important time, with this unanimous resolution today, the United Nations is taking a step to hold Syria accountable for any further failure to cooperate with the Commission's investigations and to consider further action if necessary.

The Chapter 7 resolution that we are passing today is the only way to compel the Syrian Government to accept the just demands of the United Nations and to cooperate fully with the Mehlis investigation. With our decision today, we show that Syria has isolated itself from the international community through its false statements, its support for terrorism, its interference in the affairs of its neighbors, and its destabilizing behavior in the Middle East.

Now the Syrian Government needs to make a strategic decision to fundamentally change its behavior. Until that day comes, however, we in the international community must remain united and we must remain resolute in our pursuit of truth, our defense of justice, and our support of liberty for the brave and courageous Lebanese people.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

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[↑](#) [BACK TO TOP](#)

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