

Dissent and Reform in Lebanon: Together—Equal and Different

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Today, for the first time in more than thirty years, we are masters of our own destiny.

- We are able to control the fate of our success and hope
- We are also able to make a fate of disappointment and failure if we squander the rare opportunity before us to restore our rights to live freely in an independent country.

The subject matter here revolves around our concept of co-habitation, and on the answer to the question: How do we live equally...and different?

The Concept of Co-Habitation

1. The equilibrium of “living together, equally and different” is not limited to national life in a country; rather, it is a comprehensive humanitarian equation that extends to the relationship between individuals, and from the smallest social entity (the family), and includes the relationship between groups, countries, peoples, and cultures. The difference, which is diverse, is based on all levels of human presence and manifestations, because it naturally serves as an impetus for free thinking. Equality is desired on all levels because it is the basis of justice...it is the equilibrium of reconciliation and harmony between the values of freedom and justice in human interaction.
2. Living together in the Lebanese nation is not solely defined by co-habitation or the proximity of neighboring communities, but is also characterized by an environment of human interaction that accommodates diversity and produces an “added value” that serves as the basis for the meaning of Lebanon and its role...There is no justification for a nation’s existence without a meaning or a role.
3. This desired equality is not equated with numbers or sizes; nor is it equated with similarity in most cases. Rather, equality concerns human dignity, openness, and prosperity. Equal opportunity rejects any discrimination, whether it is ethnically, culturally, socially, or numerically based. Such discrimination classifies people by ranks and degrees, minorities and majorities, and thus draws dividing lines between people that can quickly ignite.
4. The choice to “live together equally and different” opposes, in essence, the “self-centered” view of the world which makes truth and righteousness an exclusive vision, one that considers the “self” to be the absolute good, while the “other” is the absolute evil. This choice is also contrary to the mentality of narrow-

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- mindedness which controls the behavior of many forces and groups in the world, and is manifested by: the denigration of civilization in culture, culture in religion, religion in politics, and politics in violence.
5. The choice to “live together equally and different” is only predicated on a noble settlement which is the basis of the social contract. Social contracts guaranteeing civil peace in societies are, in essence, fabricated settlements which require continued maintenance and care from the people, and creativity for renewal. Thus, this is a position of great initiative and courage, witnessed during the rise of partisanship, because it inhibits extremism, negativity, and ethnic seclusion. The purpose of this endeavor is to succeed in managing differences, not eliminating them, as well as to succeed in preserving the system of public interest, while not eliminating special interests. It is the hardest decision in our way of life! Yes! But is the best choice!
 6. “Living together equally and different” is the basis of the social contract between and for the Lebanese, a contract which is strengthened by the maturity of the desire for co-habitation with renewed agreements at critical junctures. The last pact was a pact of national agreement in 1989 at Taif. This contract was not created by a deal between religious representatives, and thus this deal did not result in co-habitation as many believed; rather, a “state of quotas” was built based on the Taif Accords. Instead, co-habitation resulted from the fact that each sect could not exist in isolation after the creation of the Lebanese state in 1920...It is the way in which different sects have lived together after losing their individuality, but not the fabric of their existence. They are not able to return to the status quo ante. This is what made the individuality of Lebanon in a region whose nations are based on the ideas of national partisanship and fusion, the latter of which attempted to eliminate diversity.
 7. Finally, the keenness of the Lebanese to live in co-habitation does not form a guarantee for their future in their own country only, but it will also return Lebanon to the heart of the Arab world. It will become a useful model for all societies characterized by their strong diversity—especially at this stage which has witnessed disturbances resulting from the collapse of the former global system and rapid changes stemming from globalization. This turmoil extends beyond the Arab world to a broader world, and has repercussions for the future of relations between the East and West, North and South. In the countries of the North, there is a growing and continued Southern presence because of successive waves of immigration to these nations suffering from an identity crisis. The only solution is a new concept of the social contract based on “living together equally and differently” instead of “pure, homogenous societies.”

The Conditions of Living Together

1. Restoring the Sovereignty of the State on the Nation

The Lebanese people are not able to live together except in a sovereign, free, independent, state. A state is sovereign only if it is the master of the entire state and has a monopoly over internal and external security, regardless of its compliance with justice. The state—without a decision-making partner—undertakes the task of confronting all those who violate its sovereignty, such as during the occupation of its territory, the violation of its borders, or external interference in internal Lebanese affairs. In this regard, the state works:

- 1) To liberate the occupied Lebanese territory of Sheba'a Farms with all appropriate and available means, after international law has recognized it as Lebanese land, and to continually abide by the cease-fire agreement between Lebanon and Israel until a agreed solution is reached in the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative at the Beirut Summit and related U.N. resolutions.
- 2) To establish normal diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, delineate their borders, and remove the sources of tension between the two—reconsidering all the signed agreements after 1990 following the Taif Agreement—on the basis of sovereignty and independence for each party. Addressing these thorny issues between Lebanon and Syria forms the necessary prelude to a historical settlement, and strengthens the bonds of neighbors, brothers, and solidarity. This allows for serious reflection in shaping a forward, joint-vision for the two countries along with Palestine and Jordan—an axis for renewal in the Arab world whose horizon is one of modernity, development, democracy, openness, and “living together equally and different.”
- 3) To resolve the issue of the Resistance's weapons and the strategic national defense. The role of the Resistance in the 2000 liberation contributed to the nation's sovereignty and amounted to a major achievement. This is why it deserved, and still does, the honor and recognition of all Lebanese who did not spare them support before the liberation. But this Resistance was born and raised outside the state. This issue is an issue for all popular Lebanese resistance movements facing the Israeli enemy since 1969. The duality of the state and the Resistance was born with the Cairo Agreement in 1969 and continued during the civil war as well as after the Taif Agreement because of Syrian guardianship. The Israeli withdrawal in May of 2000 and the Syrian withdrawal in April of 2005 were absolutely necessary for exercising the state's sovereignty, necessitating the elimination of this duality, and incorporating the Resistance into the state in an

appropriate fashion. Furthermore, the ethnic composition of this Resistance, in the event of a continued duality, is a source of great concern for the vast majority of Lebanese. However, this concern is not diminished by the [Resistance's] good intentions or promises of not transforming itself into an internal militia. Thus, any national defense strategy, in its military aspects, must be based on the sole right of the state—within the state—to use force.

- 4) To resolve the issue of Palestinian weapons inside and outside the refugee camps. There are two bases for this issue:
 - Sovereignty of the Lebanese state and the elimination of Palestinian military formations as stated in the Taif Agreement and after the annulment of the Cairo Agreement
 - The absence of any role for Palestinian weapons outside Palestine, as stated by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) after 1993.

These two considerations, which were adopted by the Palestinian and Lebanese governments, make the issue of Palestinian weaponry in Lebanon an issue resolved in principle. The practical steps in this regard should adhere to the following:

- Rejection of any functional linkage between Palestinian weaponry and weaponry of the Lebanese Resistance
- Rejection of any linkage of Palestinian weapons with an outside state
- Rejection of any conditional relationship between eradicating Palestinian weaponry and Palestinian humanitarian rights in Lebanon, which they should enjoy completely
- Solve the current problems on this matter with a direct agreement between the Lebanese authorities and the leadership of the PLO

2. Restoring the Sovereignty of the Citizenry Over the State

It is necessary to live together in order for the state to protect the citizen. It is a civil state, free from domination by sectarian representatives, that is focused and based on the difference:

- Between the rights of the individual citizen, and it is the duty of the state to secure them without discriminating between its people, and the text of the constitution confirms that Lebanon is a “democratic, parliamentary republic based on the equality of

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rights and duties among all citizens without discrimination or preference.”

- Between the guarantees and rights which the state gives the sects to secure their existence and freedom. This was embodied in the constitution’s introduction with the famous phrase: “No legitimacy for any power contradicting the pact of co-habitation.” This pact only required the creation of a Senate, which would deal with major issues concerning the preservation of co-habitation, and nothing else.

The establishment of a civil state requires decisive steps:

- 1) Reform the judiciary to purify the image of justice that was tarnished by the experience of past years and to enact the necessary legislation establishing an independent judiciary that is considered to be:
 - A condition for a democratic system that includes the rule of law, accountability, and the extension of the law to all segments of society, including those in power.
 - A condition to guarantee citizens’ rights by enshrining public freedoms, human rights, and justice for all.
 - A condition to protect co-habitation by preserving the constitution, general political rights, safeguarding religious freedoms and the rights of sectarian groups, guaranteeing political participation, and ensuring that there are no feelings of exclusion or alienation.
- 2) Terminating the sectarian clientele that is based on distributing authority and its resources between politicians who claim to be representative of their sects. They take in the name of religion—and for themselves—rights and services which are partly distributed to the citizens on the basis of: “services for loyalty.” As a result, the state and its institutions become a tool to produce to sectarian leadership and re-elect the same ruling elites. By providing services, the sectarian leadership will enable itself to legitimize its position and consolidation of power.
- 3) Reforming the administration which is the main link between the citizen and the state by rebuilding it on the basis of merit and modernizing it after having liberated it from ethnic control, and giving watch-dogs considerable immunity that would allow them to play a complete role.
- 4) Guaranteeing the participation of citizens in managing their affairs by participatory mechanisms as stated in the Taif Agreement. The security

system rejected most of the mechanisms' application and misapplied others. This participation is crucial for the country's future, as it would help bridge the gap between the state, saddled with bureaucratic weight, widespread corruption, and sectarian clientele, and the vibrant Lebanese society.

3) The Reconciliation of the Human Being with his Past and with Others

After thirty years of internal wars, occupation, and guardianship, the Lebanese people are in urgent need today of a sincere effort to purge their collective memory, in order to finally turn the page on the past, so that they are able to strengthen the internal Lebanese situation. This requires:

- The completion of national reconciliation in a comprehensive fashion, based on the recognition of collective and personal responsibilities for the sins of war, the recognition of all of the nation's victims and martyrs, so that the Lebanese people—including the victims—do not remain fractured: with one group considered a traitor and the other a champion. This action should be based on the slogan, "Truth and verification for the sake of learning, forgiveness, and the overcoming of obstacles."
- The rejection of internal violence in all its forms and pretexts, and to strengthen a "culture of life" which is based on dialogue, moderation, compromise, and difference of opinion. This contradicts the "culture of death" which leads to the elimination of the "other" as well as the "self."
- The condemnation of any inclination toward sectarian or regional separation, as well as any tendency by sectarian alliances or external coalitions to project power on other groups. This condemnation should be accompanied by the consideration of alliances on a political basis that are truly democratic for all, and not on sectarian or religious fault lines.
- The recognition that the destiny of all is associated with the destiny of the other in good times and bad. All of the attempts to search for special solutions were doomed to fail, and have had catastrophic effects on all Lebanese, without exception. The salvation of Lebanon is for all, and it occurs in all of Lebanon. This is so because there can be no solution for a faction without the "other," just as there can be no solution for a faction at the expense of the "other."
- The recognition that the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon are contingent on Lebanese unity. Any fissure in this unity opens the door for foreign intervention which usually leads to the loss of sovereignty and independence.

4. To Restore the Citizens' Right to an Honorable Life

Co-habitation cannot flourish in an environment of economic and social malaise, because its pillar of strength is a middle class that is robust and open, by nature, to compromise and moderation—thus creating a solid foundation for general stability. Comprehensive development in Lebanon is a major national undertaking, especially after the recent war, to solidify our co-existence and civil peace. Perhaps the “economy of knowledge”—in addition to what was mentioned in the Taif Agreement regarding global growth and balance—forms a key lever for development. Lebanon in particular has a wealth of knowledge in the following fields: higher education and scientific research, linguistics, the written press, printing, publishing, literature, and art, as well as in advertising and marketing. It also possesses a special network that is represented by the large number of Lebanese diaspora communities scattered throughout the world. These qualities, which are inter-related due to the nature of Lebanese society, guarantee that the Lebanese people will confidently enter the age of globalization, and such qualities will allow them to play a significant role in developing the Arab world, as they did previously when Lebanon's ingenuity ushered in the Arab renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th century.