

Lebanon: The Siniora government must resign

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O great people of Lebanon!

We are full of hope as we live these historical moments and we have no worries. Our conscience is clear with regards to our national choices and the objectives we seek to achieve in such a way to guarantee the security, the independence and the sovereignty of Lebanon.

Today we represent the national and ethical principles that were never just fake rhetoric but have become a reality lived daily in every house and in the every heart. Today we revive national coexistence and reinforce our national unity not in words but this has become a way of living we adopt as a basis for the future.

Our values and principles are not founded on a political discourse. There may be others who speak better than we do. But in reality we respect our commitments before the Lebanese people better than anyone else. We are not at a crossroad as they claim but we are on the right path we have decided to take leaving the troubles and the rumors behind.

I greet those present among us here today and those absent too. And we would have loved that the ministers in Grand Serail [1] be present with us here today. We do not seek to isolate them and we do not seek to monopolize power. Nor do we seek to obtain personal or even sectarian interests.

But today we seek to reinforce the foundation of the country on the main pillars without which Lebanon cannot exist. And we have enough determination, patience, and wisdom to always seek the return of the prodigious son to this loving people eager to embrace everybody.

Even though we warned of these dangers that we consider as momentary, we thank the television stations that seek, even in such national events that happen under the Lebanese flag, to have confessional counters to count thousands of Christians and hundreds of thousands of Muslims or Shiites! [2] It is a shame and a disgrace to separate between a confession and another as we have met under the Lebanese flag and we are proud of this; in front of the entire world we are not ashamed of our national principles.

Yes we are extremists: extremists in preserving the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon, in safeguarding the free decision making, in leading moderate lives. Moderation is in the coexistence and reaching out to the other. Moderation is not sacrificing one's rights and independence. Moderation is not the search for a lost decision in close and far capitals of the world. Today we seek to liberate the free decision making. The decision is here when we meet as united Lebanese and agree on our internal, external and defense policies. Thus

we make our free decision. A free decision does not change according to geography from a Lebanese area to a non Lebanese area. That's why we will always seek to maintain our friendships and we want to be friends with everybody in the East and the West provided they respect our national will and let us deal with our problems on our own. We consider that any factional support to the government coming from any country whatsoever is not a friendly support but it is a support that creates confrontation in the society as conspiracy looms over the nation and its unity.

Today we do not seek power just to occupy posts, be it the third plus one, or ten or 9 ministerial seats, but to be part of the national decision making so that this decision is right to the Lebanese people and not to block it or hamper it as some officials claim.

We do not seek to block any decision but we seek to make righteousness the foundation that embraces the entire country and all the Lebanese people.

But when I talk about the prime minister, I refer to the prime minister of Lebanon and not to a Sunni prime minister or a Maronite president of the republic or of a Shiite house speaker. I refer to a prime minister that represents me as a maronite as it represents the Sunnis.

There should be no confessional favoritism in dealing with public affairs and there is no qualification of the prime minister except that he is Lebanese and that he represents all the Lebanese people. As we criticize him today, we do not criticize, as some like to claim, the entire Sunni community. But our criticism and demands are directed towards the prime minister who made a lot of mistakes and must step down and be replaced by another Sunni who is more qualified and who has more expertise and knowledge of the Lebanese social fabric and its national issues.

We suffer from many vices in our society and they have made of corruption our destiny. But we refuse corruption to be our destiny; we refuse to turn a blind eye to it and we know that we can reform this community and free it from corruption [3].

This is your will and we are here to express this will in front of you and all the Lebanese people who are listening. Lebanon is a free country and will remain free for all its people. Coexistence does not need to be defended because we are living it every day and it is not just rhetoric emptied of meaning.

I call on you to support our mission of change and reform and the preservation of free decision making and of the rights of the Lebanese people, all the Lebanese people. The rights of the Lebanese people should not be subjected to favoritism and confessionalism or political affiliation. These are absolute rights that all the governments should safeguard and for all the people, supporters and opponents.

At the end of December 1st demonstration, the opposition settled a camp in the center of Beirut. The occupants want to maintain the camp until the resignation of Siniora's government. Today we are suffering from an isolation campaign waged against us as if those in power intend to create a confrontation. But we do not want this confrontation. We seek openness in order to reach a national unity in which all the Lebanese people take part. We cannot believe that the current government is one of national unity. We consider that this government is in an abnormal position because the Constitution was repeatedly violated and we call on the prime minister and the ministers to read the texts of the constitution so that they acknowledge in front of all these people that they have become unconstitutional

[4]. And we all know that perpetrators of the violation of the Constitution can be subjected to legal proceedings.

I wish our prime minister and his ministers were here among us today rather than hiding behind army tanks and barbed wires [5]. The one who has the support of his people does not need a barbed wire. He might need a few men for personal security but should not get protection against his own people.

I urge the prime minister and his ministers to step down and become like their outgoing colleagues finishing up their duties until the end of the crisis so that we can come up with a government of national unity that has the capability to deal with national issues.

We are not here to discuss solutions, but we consider that the only way out is the resignation of the cabinet.

Today we initiated an open sit in [6] and I call on all the people to persevere in the same enthusiasm and participate in this sit in until we achieve our aims.

General (Ret.) Michel Aoun is Spokesman for the Lebanese opposition.

NOTES

[1] The Grand Serail is the government head-quarter.

[2] The demonstration was broadcast by numerous channels. For CNN, there was no more than 200 000 persons, mainly Shiites, certain Christians and Communists. The United-States channel presented static shots limiting the vision field of the crowd. The images were commented by a Lebanese Prime Minister's adviser. For Al-Jazeera, the demonstration gathered 800 000 Lebanese citizens of different confessions. The qatarie channel presented aerial views to show the demonstration dimension and permitted various personalities and anonymous citizens of diverse communities to comment the event.

[3] The Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora, is the former authorized agent of clan Hariri's companies. Its founder, Rafik Hariri, made indispensable by participating in the civil war solution (Taef Agreement) and benefited from the situation to accumulate a personelle fortune of 16,7 billion dollars while making of Lebanon the most indebted country in the world (38,6 billion dollars before the last Israeli attack).

[4] Since the resignation of all the Shiite Ministers (two Hezbollah members, two Amal members, an independent personality) on November 11th, 2006, then of the orthodox Greek community representative, the government is no more representative of Lebanon diversity as required by the article 95A of the Constitution.

[5] For his own security, the Prime Minister has just established a praetorian guarding, completely financed and equipped by the United States.

[6] 5 000 volunteers take turns night and day to block the access to the Grand Serail.

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