Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary addresses inaugural International Support Group for Lebanon

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The Foreign Secretary William Hague today urged the international community to send a clear, united message of support for Lebanon's stability. Addressing the first meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon, held in New York during the UN General Assembly's ministerial week, the Foreign Secretary said:

The United Kingdom supports strongly the launch of the International Support Group for Lebanon and I welcome the Secretary-General's comments. I also want to pay tribute to the leadership that has been show by President Sleiman during what has been an extremely testing period for his country.

Today we have come together because we share a vital interest in supporting the efforts of the Lebanese Government and people to maintain the country's hard-won peace. Our objective is to ensure that Lebanon does not become the next victim of the Syria conflict.

To achieve this, Lebanon needs and deserves international assistance in three key areas.

First, the international community must assist the Lebanese authorities in coping with the ever growing numbers of refugees from Syria, which is now the largest refugee influx in the world. The hospitality shown by Lebanon – just as it has by Jordan, Turkey and Iraq - has been extraordinary. But the international community must also ensure that our collective humanitarian response also reaches this same level of generosity, and that it provides the relief that is needed.

For this reason, Britain has brought our total support to the crisis response in Lebanon to £69 million, in addition to our contribution through the EU and international organisations. This response includes not only essential assistance to the refugees, whether Syrian or Palestinian, but also addresses the effects that the presence of hundreds of thousands of refugees is having on host communities.

No country can cope with this level of refugee influx, and with a conflict in a close neighbour and critical trading partner, without it having a profound economic impact. So we also welcome the discussion on the creation of a Trust Fund through which donors can provide support for Lebanon.

Second, the international community must support the Lebanese security forces in their courageous efforts to maintain Lebanon's security, and we welcome the Armed Forces' five-year development plan. To respond to the growing challenges, Britain has this year trebled our funding assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces, which includes enhanced training support and £10 million for equipment to control and protect Lebanon's eastern border.

Third, as well as financial support, the international community has to send a clear, united message, to Lebanon's people, its parties, and its neighbours. That message is that we support the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, that we will resist any efforts to drag Lebanon into a sectarian conflict, and that we will not allow it to become the arena for other people's wars.

But, while the International Support Group can provide assistance, the Lebanese must lead. We know that the vast majority of the Lebanese people want peace and prosperity. They, like we, are now looking to Lebanon's politicians to embrace the politics of consensus and coexistence, so that Lebanon's proud heritage of democracy and tolerance is maintained. They, like we, want all of Lebanon's political forces to have an open and urgent dialogue, to abide by the Baadba Declaration - including the agreed policy of disassociation from the Syria conflict, and, above all, to agree without delay on a consensus government that is able to meet the pressing challenges that the country faces.

There is no doubt that Lebanon's stability is in all of our interests, but we must invest in that stability. We have heard today about the support that Lebanon needs from the international community – whether it's humanitarian, economic, security or political. I can assure you that the UK will play its full part.

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@WilliamJHague

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Media enquiries

Email

newsdesk@fco.gov.uk

Telephone

020 7008 3100

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