

# NAJIB MIKATI

Prime Minister of Lebanon

Your Excellencies,

Mr de Montbrial,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the World Policy Conference and Thierry de Montbrial for inviting me to speak today, in this region of the world which is so dear to me.

In times which are as unstable as ours, it is good to see decision-makers meeting regularly to discuss how to adapt governance methods to the fast-moving developments in our world. Because in a climate in which it is increasingly difficult to anticipate events, we must guide changes in order to guarantee security, economic and social development and the fundamental rights of civil liberties for all citizens.

But, rather than "changes", it would be more appropriate to speak of "upheavals", since the very foundations of the systems which organise our societies are being re-evaluated. Of course, the Middle East is a greater draw for media attention due to the troubles it is having, but, for all that, the West does not seem to escape the phenomenon.

In economic terms, successive crises have led to questions over the role banks play in the economy and forced Western governments to adopt structural reforms which increase the role of the State.

Politically, the loss of confidence in traditional parties translates into a rise in extremism which is, unfortunately, reminiscent of that experienced by Europe on the eve of the Second World War.

In geopolitical terms, following the explosion of bipolarisation which followed the Second World War, two dynamics co-exist: on the one hand a bipolarisation of the Arab-Muslim world and the Western world and, on the other hand, a multi-polarisation in which Asia and emerging countries play an ever more significant role.

But in response to economic, political, geopolitical and security upheavals come ideological changes which are greatly facilitated by the explosion of new information and communication technologies.

And yet, as has always been the case, periods of great change are also periods of major conflict and, unfortunately, the sabre-rattling is insistent, but in our region this time: the "Middle East powder keg" has replaced the "Balkan powder keg" of the start of the 20th century. In this respect, the figures of the Global Militarization Index are alarming: of the ten most highly militarised countries in the world, six are in the Near East.

Let's not bury our heads in the sand: tension has reached a critical level and all it would take is a spark for the whole geopolitical area of Western Asia and the Middle East to catch fire, with the blaze unlikely to spare Europe.

Indeed, issues relating to energy, migration flows or flows of ideas, to mention but a few, mean that the stability of the West in general, and Europe in particular, are directly linked to the stability of this zone.

However, in the face of a range of economic, social, security and strategic threats, there is a glimmer of hope which depends on both the wisdom of leaders and their capacity to use the dynamics of their society to adapt governance models to all kinds of changes.



And yet, our region is currently the scene of many conflicts, both open and latent, which range from skirmishes to open war and take place both on the military field and in the media - underpinned by political, economic, religious or social motivations - directly or by proxy.

The Syrian crisis, first of all, which began 20 months ago, is only increasing in intensity and in number of victims, and it is almost impossible to predict how it will develop, how and when it will end or who will take over.

But we can be certain of one thing: if we don't take steps to distance ourselves, it will affect neighbouring countries, first among these being Lebanon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although wars require the immediate attention of the international community, we must not neglect the post-conflict period or, in the case of what is being called "the Arab Spring", the post-revolution period, if we do not want to see it transformed into a mere "Prague Spring": a brief interlude of freedom followed by a crackdown as harsh as the hope inspired was great.

It is a known fact that after the end of an armed conflict, the international community has a short window during which important reforms can be put in place. After this period, the forces present harden in their positions and it is no longer easy to reach a consensus. The same applies to reforms relating to governance.

And yet, although experts as a whole agree on the need for reforms, they do not agree on how to implement them; some stress the necessity of establishing democracy as a priority and others, the necessity of improving education levels and promoting economic development. In reality, we have to reconcile these two aspirations, which are not paradoxical, while still keeping in mind that there is no panacea; because we must be aware that establishing real democracies in the Arab world will take a long time and require a lot of effort.

Therefore, before being able to tackle the challenges necessitated by the setting up of political or economic governance, our region must first go through a transitional phase which will force civil societies to engage in self-analysis to find the most appropriate model to ensure their stability and prosperity.

In this respect, due to its tradition of individual freedom in a multicultural and tolerant society, Lebanon could be a model for those Arab nations still searching for the way forward.

Indeed, contrary to the way things may sometimes have appeared, the Lebanese have always, throughout their history, remained loyal to the values of democracy; they have always defended the rule of law. Our constitution protects human rights and the civil liberties of all citizens. These values, to which we have historically subscribed, have helped us to promote the development of a tolerant civil society and a political system which favours transfer of power.

For Lebanon, which already had a parliament when it was still Phoenicia, is first and foremost a land of democracy and individual liberty. And these are the values which have spared us the contagion of the Arab Spring.

Ladies and Gentlemen,



For centuries, the West and the Arab-Muslim world have exercised considerable influence over one other. And since the second half of the last century we have seen a shift in these relations from the cultural and military spheres towards the economic and security spheres, a trend which has been accompanied by a rebalancing leading to close interdependence.

So it is in the West's interest for stability to prevail in the region because, in the age of new technologies, Lorenz's "butterfly effect" makes perfect sense. Yes, unfortunately, the flap of a butterfly's wing in Tehran or Cairo could set off a tornado in Asia or Europe.

Criss-crossed with ethnic, social, religious, cultural, economic, geopolitical and military fault lines, there are currently an enormous number of challenges gathered in our region.

We find ourselves at a crossroads; countries born out of revolution may become moderate States, capable of implementing the good governance rules for which their new generations are so eager, or they may fall back into political or religious dictatorship or chaos.

That is why it is vital that we urgently find solutions: solutions which are both long-lasting and just.

After the fall of the Soviet Empire, Western Europe had the presence of mind to come to the aid of the majority of the countries which had been under the yoke of decades-long dictatorships. Much investment was made in these countries with the aim of creating jobs and improving citizens' standard of living. Efforts were also made to train and educate young people, for the most part, and to prepare them to take the reins, both in the private sector and in the public administration.

Our region is packed with young people, hungry for knowledge and change. But we have to be vigilant, because no democracy can last if society does not improve its level of education and economic development.

That is why, in order to protect the gains made by the revolutions in the Arab world, to avoid civil societies falling into fundamentalism and extremism, and to lead them, instead, onto the path of good governance, a plan must quickly be put in place to increase the level of education and create jobs. Because never forget that more than half of the population of the Arab world is under the age 25, something which could be an opportunity or a calamity... depending on how we act.

Indeed, an educated society which creates jobs for its citizens is a tolerant society; that is the best remedy against extremism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,



Leaders must steer changes in the right direction, by proposing reforms aimed at economic and social development, civil peace and respect for citizens' liberties and rights. To achieve these three objectives, a certain number of pillars must be put in place, such as:

Implementation of participatory and representative electoral systems. In this respect, Lebanon can set a good example.

Reform of the civil service and implementation of principles of good governance, in particular transparency, responsibility to citizens and the eradication of corruption.

Implementation of a social and economic development plan which takes into account education and sanitation in particular and which makes the training and creation of jobs for young people an absolute priority.

Promotion of the role of women in civil society, this role being inseparable from any harmonious development process.

Separation between religion and the State, religion belonging to the private sphere.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We do not recommend putting in place systems based on those of the West, systems which would be impossible to apply in this turbulent phase of major transition. Instead, we should adapt models of governance and education based on the values I have just mentioned.

As an example, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has set up in Austria, together with the IMF and the World Bank, the Joint Vienna Institute, to train young and more mature members of civil society to take over the administration of their country.

The same thing should be done for the Arab world. Financial aid from rich countries is not enough. We need European know-how to train young people from civil society to take over their country and manage it according to the principles of good governance.

Lebanon has always been proud to be a bridge between the West and the Arab world. That is why I propose creating The Beirut Institute, combining European know-how with Arab funds with the aim of training young people from the Arab World who want to join the civil service.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly fond of something Clemenceau once said: "In war as in peace, the last word goes to those who never give in". The resilience of the Lebanese people has never failed in war. In peace, we will continue to carry the values which are so dear to us, of tolerance, democracy and civil liberties, in the hope that they also become those of our whole region.

Thank you.