

AMINE GEMAYEL

Former President of the libanese republic

The incidents of Nahr el-Bared from May to September 2007 between the terrorist movement Fatah al Islam and the Lebanese army revealed the urgent need for a serious treatment of the issue of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Without concerted action by the international community to resolve this issue, the other eleven refugee camps in Lebanon may turn into a second Nahr el Bared. Such an outbreak of extremism in the country of the Cedar is in the interest of no part of Lebanon, threatens sustainable internal balance, will harm the Palestinian Authority, will export instability throughout the region, will impact Europe and will weigh heavily against any prospect of peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The approach adopted so far obeys a logic of improvement of conditions for refugees pending a final settlement of the Palestinian question. It is humanly necessary and should be further strengthened. It remains inadequate because it ignores the political and security dimension of the issue. Without such a courageous and historical face-to-face with the problem, the proposed solutions will only produce transient effects that will themselves generate perpetual conflict.

From this rostrum of the World Policy Forum I seize the international community to propose the following plan:

1. To improve the human condition of the Palestinians.

A. The strengthening of the “Camp Improvement Initiative” launched by the Lebanese government and UNRWA in 2005 and the appealing to donor countries to honor their commitments. I also advocate the implementation of decisions of the Congress of the Lebanese National Dialogue in 2006 to grant civil rights to Palestinians.

B. Reconstruction of the camp of Nahr el Bared: this reconstruction should be concomitant with a return of all internally displaced Lebanese in the North as well as in the Mountain. Without a real effort to give back to Lebanese their rights at home, one will create tensions between Palestinians and Lebanese and will make rebuilding even more difficult. At the conference in Vienna of 23 June 2008 for the reconstruction and aid to Nahr el Bared, donors pledged up to \$ 125 million out of the 445 million requested, and the Arab countries to the tune of \$ 200 million in a later stage. But the return of internally displaced Lebanese costs some \$ 200 million and no funding plan is provided for it. From this rostrum I wish therefore to launch the Initiative for the internally displaced Lebanese (Idil) in order to quickly finance their return home. The detailed plan of this Initiative will be announced in the Lebanese Mountain.

2. Integration of political and security issues

A. The disarmament of Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority itself calls for such disarmament both outside and inside the camps. Disarmament should be achieved through a permanent coordination between the Lebanese government and the Palestinian Authority. The problems caused by extremists at Ain El Helou, a large Palestinian camp located in southern Lebanon, intended specifically to prohibit such cooperation between the Palestinians and the Lebanese people. However, international action on the part of Friends of Lebanon and Palestinians must be conducted with courage and determination to tell Syria and Iran and all other actors to ease up. Cooperation between the Lebanese State and the Palestinian Authority is not directed against any particular faction, but it is in the interest of all Palestinians and all Lebanese people.

B. The right of return (resolution 194). To await the conclusion of a peace agreement to settle the issue of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon is no longer acceptable. The Lebanese people have erected as a constitutional principle the refusal of the implantation of the Palestinian people. The risk of a certain normalization of the situation on a human and civil level as a prelude to the gradual naturalization of Palestinians worries the Lebanese people. The demographic balance in Lebanon cannot bear in any case such a naturalization. Lebanon has long supported alone the repercussions of the Palestinian cause and it is time that the international community assume from here forward its full political responsibilities towards refugees. Thus, a multilateral international action should lead to a facilitation of the



naturalization of Palestinian refugees present in Lebanon, in countries lacking population. Such action should obviously not prejudice the right of return. The naturalized refugee will keep his/her refugee status but will be freed of the effects of this statute with respect to the Lebanese state.