



**Statement**

**by**

**H.E. Dr. Nawaf Salam  
Permanent Representative of Lebanon  
to the United Nations**

**at the  
General Assembly**

**“Global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migrants in the  
Mediterranean basin, with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers”**

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As we meet today, the world is still in mourning, shocked by the terrorist attacks over Sinai, in Bagdad, Beirut, Paris and today Bamako.

M. le Président,

Alors que nous voudrions commencer par présenter nos plus sincères condoléances aux familles de toutes les victimes, nous tenons aussi à dire combien convaincus nous sommes, que tant que les « Lumières », de Paris, continueront à rayonner, unis et solidaires nous vaincrons l'obscurantisme et triompherons de la barbarie. C'est un message de détermination, mais aussi d'espoir, dans le combat contre le terrorisme que nous aimerions partager aujourd'hui.

Mr. President,

How easy is it to blame it out on migrants and refugees, but how wiser is it to stress after António Guterres, the High Commissioner on Refugees that "it is not the refugee outflows that cause terrorism, but terrorism, tyranny and war that create refugees".

Today, as you know, there are more than 60 million people around the world forcibly displaced as a result of armed conflicts. And people continue to take extraordinary risks for the chance of security and a better life as witnessed by the thousands who embarked in rubber dinghies on such a dangerous journey to reach the safe shores of Europe.

However, in spite of the staggering numbers of those seeking asylum in Europe, most refugees have actually remained close to home in the hope of a cherished return in a near future. In fact over 4 million Syrian refugees are currently located in neighboring countries, the vast majority in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, in addition to more than 6.5 million Syrians who remain internally displaced within their country.

In four years the number of registered Syrian refugees has increased in Lebanon to about 1.2 million; that is 25 to 30 per cent of the Lebanese population. Lebanon, which is also host to about 350,000 to 400,000 Palestinian refugees and is the smallest country of the region, both in population and in geographical size, has thus become the one with the highest concentration of refugees per capita, not only in the region but worldwide, ranking second in the total number of refugees, only behind Turkey and Pakistan.

Needless to say that 1.2 million is merely the number of registered refugees which does not include tens of thousands of Syrians who did not register either for being taken care of by Lebanese community based organizations or for initial fear for their security, as well as more than about 300,000 Syrian migrants who were working in Lebanon before 2011 and who were gradually joined by their family members. This number does not include over 40,000 Palestinians, already refugees in Syria, who fled to Lebanon.

Beyond the humanitarian catastrophe as such, for Lebanon, if not adequately assisted, the Syrian crisis will continue to represent a huge economic and social burden and a source of serious political concern.

Public services, including education, health, sanitation, energy and water infrastructures are overstretched beyond their capacities. Economic growth has stumbled, poverty has risen by about 60%, and unemployment levels have doubled.

In fact, Lebanese workers and Syrian refugees are often now in direct competition for scarce jobs. And predictably, as the needs and vulnerability of both Syrian refugees and Lebanese grow, social tensions tend to rise.

As to the political concerns, Lebanon fears the destabilizing impact of the protracted Syrian conflict on its precarious situation and fragile institutions, let alone the risks of radicalization and militarization of parts of the refugee population in view of the growing sense of despair among them.

The Syrian crisis is indeed the worse humanitarian tragedy of our times. Let us however be clear: the solution to this crisis cannot be humanitarian. Only a political solution can put an end to this protracted conflict and pave the way to a safe return of the refugees to their country.

Meanwhile, Lebanon cannot cope by itself neither with the humanitarian rights and needs of Syrian refugees on its soil, nor with the various socio-economic detrimental effects of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. Hence, Lebanon has been calling for both burden-sharing including through relocation programs, and for greater direct assistance to host Lebanese communities.

Moreover, addressing the humanitarian aspect of the crisis through the only channel of humanitarian assistance has proven to be insufficient. Given the protracted nature of the conflict, a development approach will be increasingly needed to strengthen the resilience of, and alleviate the impact of the crisis on, both the Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host communities.

Here, we also call on the World Bank and the international financial institutions to review their policies in order to provide middle income neighboring countries like Lebanon and Jordan, with adequate development assistance to help meet their new needs.

As a matter of fact, in 2013, 71% of the amount needed for humanitarian aid – let alone the required developmental one - for the Syrians was raised; in 2014, the figure fell to 57%, and this year to 42%. In this context, let me mention that the “Lebanon Crisis Response Plan” (LCRP) developed by the Government of Lebanon and its international partners was funded at only 39% according to the latest figures of September 24, 2015.

In other words, the plan falls short of 61% of the required funds. So let me stress again that a greater show of real solidarity by the International community is urgently needed especially at a time that due to a lack of funding the World Food Program (WFP) had to cut down on food vouchers to Syrian refugees since January 2015.

Undoubtedly, it has become timely to establish a follow up mechanism to the now yearly donor conferences. Such mechanism could take the form of a high level 3+3 committee, composed of representatives of the Secretary General, UNHCR, and UNDP or the World Bank on the one hand, and Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey on the other, to pursue with donors the fulfillment of their pledges.

Mr. President,

At a time when the European countries continue to struggle over how to distribute 120,000 refugees among themselves, let us keep in mind that Lebanon a country 400 times smaller than Europe is hosting tenfold this number. Finally, allow me also to warn against the rise of xenophobia, and more particularly of Islamophobia, that has accompanied the latest wave of refugees seeking asylum in Europe. Beyond their shameful racist character, such attitudes are simply self-defeating as they feed into the propaganda of terrorist groups, such as ISIS.

Thank you.