



**Intervention**

**of**

**H.E. Mr. Mohammad Al Machnouk  
Minister of Environment**

**at the  
General Assembly**

**“Ministerial meeting on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary  
of the United Nations Development Programme”**

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**Check Against Delivery**

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## **What are the measures taken by [your] governments in order to stop environmental degradation while pursuing developmental efforts**

The Lebanese Government has adopted a three-fold approach to prevent environmental degradation while pursuing developmental efforts:

- 1- Intensifying communication with the various stakeholders to increase awareness about environmental challenges and related health effects. Means of communication have included: layman press releases about key studies and findings; technical workshops and seminars; environmental awareness campaigns for school, children,...
- 2- Developing economic and moral incentives for environmental compliance, such as the Lebanon Environmental Pollution Abatement Project which offers technical assistance to industries free of charge and 0% interest loan for implementing interventions based on the principles of Sustainable Consumption and Production, along with environmental compliance certificates.
- 3- Reforming the existing legal framework to (1) emphasize key environmental principles including prevention, precaution, polluters pay, environmental mainstreaming, etc.; and (2) strengthening the inspection and enforcement procedures.

This being said, when faced with *force majeure*, such as the ongoing Syrian conflict since 2011, or the 2006 Israeli war, all such actions fail; and this is why:

- The UN General Assembly acknowledged that the value of the damage to Lebanon from the 2006 Oil Spill amounted in 2014 to 856.4 million USD.
- The Lebanon Environmental Assessment of the Syrian Conflict and Priority Interventions highlighted the extensive incremental impact of the conflict on several environmental sectors and indicated that the needed priority interventions exceed 3 billion USD.

## **What are the measures taken by [your] governments in order to facilitate partnership between the public and private sectors as well as CSOs, such that sturdier policies in environment and development would ensue?**

Public participation in the decision-making process in Lebanon has been a key feature of the Lebanese governance system since the first constitution back in 1926. When environmental started emerging as a priority, the country witnessed a sharp increase in the number of environmental non-governmental organizations, which are more than 300 now – for a country whose population does not exceed 4.5 million.

Means of cooperation between the Government and these NGOs, as well as the private sector are many; examples include:

- public participation in strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of policies, strategies and plans, and environmental impact assessment (EIA) in development projects
- consultation in legislation drafting
- involvement in the preparation of sustainable development and environmental related reports, such as the Government of Lebanon's report to the Sustainable Development summit in June 2012 (RIO+20) and Lebanon's commitments to Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

More recently, in March 2015, the Government of Lebanon embarked in the preparation of National Sustainable Development Strategy, using a participatory approach, centered around 7 strategic objectives:

1. Providing a world class human capital
2. Strengthening social cohesion
3. Providing the citizens' daily priorities
4. Enhancing economic growth
5. Conserving the natural and cultural heritage
6. Promoting good governance
7. Repositioning Lebanon on the Arab, Mediterranean, and international map

**What is the optimal way to push forth such initiatives within the existing governmental and institutional frameworks and given available funding?**

Coordination between the various stakeholders is indeed challenging, particularly in times of political instability and fragile security, which is currently the case in Lebanon. This is the reason why Lebanon, in its 2012 report to the Sustainable Development Summit, highlighted some pre-requisites to development, which include stability and security among others.

Under the prevailing circumstances, a balance has to be struck between consultation and moving forward with implementation. The best example is what Lebanon has been experiencing recently with the solid waste management issue, where we have failed to implement any of the adopted plans as a response to the requests of civil society and local population.

So yes, public consultation is important, but the scope and time-frame should be very clear from the beginning. Detailed documentation and intensive communication are extremely important throughout the process.

**What are the social and economic benefits that could serve as incentives to invest in environmental sustainability in the long run? And how does this reflect onto the SDGs?**

When we address the issue of environmental sustainability, we always highlight:

- the economic returns, through sustainable management of resources including energy and water, and optimizing economic opportunities to improve exports, tourism, ...
- the social gains, speaking of the health benefits, the image of the corporation, etc...

This is why Corporate Social Responsibility has been gaining ground during the past few years in Lebanon. According to the latest study on the cost of environmental degradation (COED) in Lebanon, and based on the 2008 figures, the annual COED exceeds 800 million USD, which is quite close to the net growth! Only with extensive CSR and continuous highlighting of the socio-economic benefits of environmental protection, can Lebanon enhance its current environmental performance index ranking (94 out of 180) and thus be better prepared to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are addressed in the National Sustainable Development Strategy being prepared.