

**MISSION PERMANENTE DU LIBAN**  
AUPRES DE  
L'OFFICE DES NATIONS UNIES  
A GENEVE

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Statement by  
**Ambassador Gebran SOUFAN**  
Permanent Representative of Lebanon

First session of the  
Human Rights Council

Geneva, June 21, 2006

Mr. President,

This week, Geneva is radiant with joy. Business is not as usual, Human Rights agenda is unusual, as the International Community celebrates the launching of the Human Rights Council.

At this historic time, eyewitnesses present in this august forum are indeed fortunate and share the honor, yet the heavy duty of meeting the people's expectations, particularly the weak, the vulnerable, the ostracized, the victimized, the oppressed, the depressed, the voiceless, the invisibles in seeing Human Rights further promoted and protected.

It has been an established practice to start the address by conveying to yourself the respect and assurances of full cooperation. I wouldn't make any exception. I wish, however, beyond the ritual, to express foremost our commitment to the principles and ideals enshrined in resolution A/60/251, a major achievement whose real worth remains in its implementation, fully and indiscriminately, in letter and spirit.

Mr. President,

As resolution A/60/251 provides the terms of reference, the guidance and the parameters for the functioning of the Council, subject to completion according to o.p.p.6, I will present in snapshots Lebanon's position on this process as well as on recent developments regarding Human Rights in Lebanon.

First – The procedure and the review ahead.

Our views are the following :

- 1- Human Rights are indivisible, interrelated and should be dealt with as a comprehensive package of equal components and with the same importance.
- 2- In setting the rules of the Human Rights Council, replicating the Commission on Human Rights is an error, however disregarding its achievements is a graver one. Its positive legacy should inspire the future work of the Council, in as much the bickering, the politicization, the double standards and the selectivity of the Commission avoided.

- 3- We welcome your holistic, transparent and inclusive approach in the conduct of the work of the Council, and we trust your sincere assurances that the Council's agenda will accommodate all priorities of Member States.

We fully approve themes outlined in the O.I.C. and Asian papers, with special emphasis in the Middle East on "occupation, its implications and Consequences on Human Rights". Excluding or dismissing such pressing topics on the pretext of avoiding confrontational situations is unconvincing, unwarranted, unwanted, and will make the issues worse. In stressing our rights, the purpose is not naming and shaming but to address and redress violations of Human Rights.

We are hopeful, Mr. President, that under a new devised vision of the Human Rights Council, Lebanon will witness the return of all the Lebanese detainees and missing persons Home, sweet Home, as they are freedom fighters for the liberation of the South and defenders of a free and sovereign Lebanon.

- 4- My Government pledged support to the Universal Periodic Review based on objective, reliable and trustworthy information and through fair and transparent modalities.

In undertaking this duty, accountability is a requisite, however the Council should avert the risk of becoming a court for trying states by embracing dialogue and engagement and assisting them to overcome their difficulties.

#### Second – Lebanon and human Rights.

Mr. President,

I do not intend to anticipate the Universal Periodic Review and provide an account of Human Rights in Lebanon nor to promote a flawless picture therein. Despite shortcomings, the Lebanese people made significant strides in Human Rights. Today, Lebanon is firmly set on the course of consolidating democracy, liberty, the rule of Law, judicial independence, sovereignty and modernization. Lebanon's new Government is resolute on accomplishing these objectives.

Mr. President,

Lebanese are familiar with the resolution's ideals and principles as they are deeply rooted in their traditions and way of life and constitute binding rules in their Constitution.

Let me elaborate quickly on some of the fundamental freedoms :

- The freedom of expression: Targeted assassinations which resulted in the tragic loss of prominent Lebanese journalists did not rock the freedom of expression. The Lebanese press, in line with its tradition, remains a pillar of democracy in Lebanon. No topic is a political taboo, all matters can be discussed and debated freely.
- Freedom of belief :  
The freedom of belief is embedded in the preamble of the Lebanese constitution alongwith the freedom of expression. Lebanon is fortunate that those two freedoms are exercised in harmony, respect and synergy, and emphasizes the importance of promoting inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue as well as tolerance. Despicable acts of provocation and disrespect to religious symbols or beliefs, which hurt and incite to racial hatred and intolerance cannot be justified . We stress the urgent need for the Council to address the question of “ Xenophobia and combating defamation of religions ”.
- The right to freedom of assembly and association: A new liberal law for “ Political Parties and Demonstrations ” is being considered in the parliament to replace the old law of 1909.  
Regulations for establishing new political parties have been loosened.  
In addition, NGOs will no longer require a government approval to operate.  
Long time exiled and jailed personalities returned to political life and participate in the decision making process.
- The National Plan of Human Rights :  
An ambitious National Plan of Human Rights, which encompasses all pertinent sectors, Lebanon’s commitments and obligations under International treaties and covenants, was adopted in 2005 by the human rights Parliamentary Committee. It put forward a programmed timeline in cooperation with UNDP and the OHCHR.

- Employment and living conditions of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon :

On June 7, 2005, the Minister of Labor issued a decision allowing Palestinians residing and registered in Lebanon to work in around 70 types of jobs previously reserved only for Lebanese and special categories of foreigners.

A Government Committee was formed to – inter alia – discuss and further improve the living, social, economic and legal conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in cooperation with UNRWA and the International Community.

- Trafficking in persons and Migrant Workers :

Lebanon welcomed the visit and recommendations of the special rapporteur Madam Sigma Hoda in September 2005. Ministries concerned are committed to fight the trafficking in persons accordingly.

The Minister of Labor established a National Steering Committee to study the situation of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, and provide suggestions to assist in addressing the shortcomings related to currently implemented laws. I anticipate amendments to improve the Lebanese labor code according to international standards.

- The capital punishment :

Lebanon declared a moratorium on public executions as a step towards the abolishment of the death penalty in the future.

- The International Human Rights Instruments :

Lebanon adhered to the core international Human Rights instruments. In this regard, the Lebanese Department of Justice supports the adoption of the draft convention on enforced disappearances, and welcomes the concept of a Unified Standing Treaty Body proposed by the Commissioner on Human Rights.

Finally, Mr. President, I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to all the U.N. Human Rights Forefathers and among them Lebanon's Champion of Human Rights Dr. Charles Malek who once said :  
 “ Lebanon's ultimate raison d'être toward itself and before the International Conscience is its loyalty to freedom ”.

I thank you.