



PEOPLE'S PEACEMAKING PERSPECTIVES

MAY 2012

# Lebanon

**POLICY ENGAGEMENT WITH LEBANON** needs to prioritise conflict prevention and sensitivity to build for a more resilient future. Progress relies on empowering all Lebanese to engage in the country's politics, economy and society. The post-war model of power sharing and liberal economic growth in Lebanon has been much praised, but has failed to deliver. Repeated outbreaks of political violence show that major change is needed to transform 'negative stability' in Lebanon into 'positive peace'.

Confessional political structures agreed as part of the 1989 Taif peace settlement have allowed the extension, elaboration and entrenchment of civil war sectarian animosities and power struggles. Essential structural reforms to promote reconciliation, social justice or a shared sense of Lebanese identity have been delayed or blocked by political elites. Post-war policy – national and international – has instead prioritised economic reconstruction that has failed to benefit society as a whole. Across all Lebanese confessional groups, divisions are deepening between an impoverished majority and a minority with a hand on wealth and state power.

Internal tensions in Lebanon are highly sensitive to regional interests and instability – namely Syrian political influence, and Israeli armed threat and incursions. These are significant and cannot be ignored. But focusing primarily outside Lebanon's borders mitigates its political leaders' domestic responsibilities to move forward with political reform, reconciliation and building a national identity. Developing domestic social justice and nationhood is the country's greatest potential contribution to regional peace and security.

The European Union (EU) is Lebanon's leading trading partner – €5 billion in 2010 – and has been a significant contributor to post-war economic recovery. It is an important regional peacemaker and is a major contributor to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. Its influence on Lebanon's future economic and social development and stability would have greater impact if it focused more on the *internal legacy and dynamics of war* across all strands and instruments of its engagement.

The findings in this Policy Brief draw on perspectives and ideas from Lebanese and international actors and analysts, many of whom are engaged in Lebanese political or social life or in programmes supporting peacebuilding and development. They have contributed through reflection, discussion and articles included in an edition of *Accord*, which informs and strengthens peace processes by documenting and analysing practical lessons and innovations in peacebuilding.

## KEY OUTCOMES

- **Lebanon is not a post-conflict society.** A conflict prevention and peacebuilding approach should be built into all aspects of EU engagement.
- **Political reform is crucial to address deep-seated and growing social tensions.** It requires a gradualist and balanced approach that reaches out to all levels of society.
- **To move forward Lebanon needs to deal with its past.** Issues of truth, memory, justice, accountability and reconciliation need to be addressed.
- **Refocusing on internal challenges to Lebanese sovereignty and peace** can help build resilience to the country's external challenges.

## The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project

The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project is a joint initiative implemented by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld and financed under the European Commission's Instrument for Stability. The project provides European Union institutions with analysis and recommendations based on the opinions and experiences of local people in a range of countries and regions affected by fragility and violent conflict.

Twenty-three years after the signing of the Taif Agreement it is time for the Lebanese to move forward: to implement reforms, to build national consensus and to adopt policies that allow their state to manage its perilous environment.

# Findings and Recommendations

## 1.

**Lebanon is not a post-conflict society.** A conflict prevention and peacebuilding approach should be built into all aspects of EU engagement.

The 1989 Taif peace settlement that brought an official end to Lebanon's civil war has in fact left Lebanese political life stuck in stalemate that has lasted longer than the conflict itself. In reality, Taif was effectively a ceasefire with ambitious – but largely hollow – promises. Rather than achieving stability, it has led to a situation of precarious stagnation.

International engagement in Lebanon has prioritised post-conflict recovery activities, such as humanitarian aid, security sector reform, rule of law and reconstruction of infrastructure. But post-Taif Lebanon remains volatile and vulnerable to major violent outbreaks. In the seven years since former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated and the Syrian Army left Lebanon, the country has been through a series of dramatic events – from the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, repeated and prolonged government crises, violence between Lebanese Armed Forces and militant Islamists at the Nahr el-Nared refugee camp, Sunni–Shiite tensions, violence in May 2008, and now looming confrontation over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

Taif confirmed power sharing among religious communities according to fixed quotas, blocking democratic change. Major political reforms agreed at Taif, relating to electoral law, decentralisation and the abolition of sectarianism, have yet to be implemented two decades later. Many that have been realised have been partial and divisive. For example, the executive 'Troika' (the President of the Republic, the Speaker and the Prime Minister) set up at Taif has led to the personalisation of power and to bickering among its three components. A key Taif reform that has not been implemented is the return of the monopoly of force to the state and the disarmament of all militias.

**"Lebanon's post-Taif leadership has been more concerned with assuring its own divergent interests within state institutions than taking up the reformist spirit of the Agreement."**

*Lebanese peacebuilder*

There have been positive achievements since the end of the war: physical reconstruction of parts of Beirut; recovery of GDP; routinisation of political life – marked by legislative, presidential and local elections; return of internal security forces to their primary task of daily public security; and the progressive redeployment of the rehabilitated Lebanese Armed Forces over nearly all the national territory.

But the 'peace dividend' is highly unbalanced. Post-war policies for reconstruction and liberal economic reform have favoured the entrepreneurial class, their Syrian partners and financial elites. Social issues have been sidelined. The state has discharged its responsibilities for delivering health, education and transportation, for which provision by confessional institutions and international NGOs cannot compensate.

Inequalities and tensions within Lebanese society have deepened. The gap between rich and poor continues to grow. Its public administration is plagued by embezzlement and crony capitalism. Downtown Beirut and the banking sector have been reconstruction priorities for the last two decades for both government and international donors, but peripheral areas continue to suffer extreme poverty and lack basic infrastructure.

The EU's 2007 Lebanon Association Agreement, under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), has prioritised political, economic and social reform over addressing structural drivers of violence. Regional conflict dynamics have diverted international attention away from addressing Lebanon's longer-term needs or the structural causes of its

internal conflicts. Today, the EU, through the Instrument for Stability (IfS), is seeking to supplement recovery efforts with post-conflict prevention and peacebuilding tools geared towards conflict mitigation, analysis, dialogue and reconciliation. Yet, to be effective these approaches need to be carefully aligned to navigate Lebanon's complex social and political realities, and mainstreamed across the spectrum of development cooperation and reconstruction efforts. A much more explicit and tailored approach to peacebuilding needs to be adopted.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Mainstream conflict prevention and peacebuilding actions throughout the EU's new Action Plan for Lebanon and the related National Indicative Plan (NIP) for 2014–2020, including reconstruction efforts, to ensure that engagement contributes to reconciliation and peacebuilding. This should incorporate conflict sensitivity tools. To inform the development of appropriate policy, use participatory conflict analysis to achieve better and broader understanding of the context, key actors and conflict dynamics.**
- **Identify and respond to challenges facing marginalised social groups, and find ways to support engagement of key civil society actors, youth and women in Lebanese political, social and professional life.**
- **Integrate into the NIP the peacebuilding and statebuilding goals in the New Deal for aid in conflict affected and fragile states.**
- **Reduce tensions around economic and social inequality: ensure investment in key infrastructure gaps, such as water, energy and public transport services, and address socio-economic welfare and extreme poverty, in particular serving the needs of marginalised and peripheral populations.**

## 2.

**Political reform is crucial to address deep-seated and growing social tensions.** It requires a gradualist and balanced approach that reaches out to all level of society.

Lebanon's positive international image belies the reality of a 'cosmetic democracy' in which human rights are flouted for Palestinian refugees and migrant workers, gender equality is denied, and confessional leaders and state institutions are prone to authoritarianism. Many Lebanese citizens fear for their security – social, economic and physical – or are politically or economically disenfranchised. Few Lebanese look to the state to safeguard their welfare, but rather refer to community affiliations both inside and outside Lebanon's borders. Post-war neo-liberal reconstruction policies have ignored or undermined social protection.

Unresolved reform challenges such as Hezbollah's arms and the weakness of the army are highly significant, not least as Sunni militants become more active in Lebanon. The security sector is not just a technical challenge. Political ownership of security 'assets' is key and international policy needs to focus on negotiating practicable agreements with political leaders that control assets, and ensuring that these are respected and implemented.

Lebanon is resistant to radical reform. Even though its Constitution explicitly requires the abolition of political confessionalism as a 'basic national goal', an electoral system itself based on 'confessional proportionality' blocks progress. Many reforms, such as suggested in the Taif Agreement or by the Boutros Commission for electoral reform, are counter to the socio-economic interests of political elites; politicians oppose reform projects in order to protect private interests, while confessional politics and consensus democracy enable elites to block reforms.

**"Lebanon suffers from constitutional schizophrenia [...] While the Constitution makes the abolition of the confessional system a 'basic national goal', other parts of it protect that same system."**

*Lebanese academic*



Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nassrallah (R), Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri (C) and Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora (L) attend a session of the National Dialogue in Beirut, 27 March 2006. © JAMAL SAIDI/AFP/Getty Images

Progress on political reform requires a concerted, gradualist strategy that acknowledges the realities of the confessional system. Incremental changes would allow people to see progress in a viable political process. Such an approach could address specific domains such as local administration, could adopt new legislation introducing a minimum set of achievable reforms, and set a precise calendar for implementation.

Reforms could be negotiated as balanced 'packages' that can enable various parties, political blocs and interest groups to compensate losses with benefits. A gradual and balanced approach could allow new elites, alliances and discourses to evolve in the political scene – making it more democratic and potentially paving the way for deeper reforms in the future. Beyond empowering small local administrative units, decentralisation could provide the broad framework for reform, by helping to redefine the relationship between central and local authorities, and to re-think key issues of representation, participation, accountability, local development and ultimately, the political system. This could in turn help to revive the civil oversight role of civil society, which is currently easily co-opted by political and confessional elites.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase and tailor focus on electoral reform. In particular, building on the experience of the EC's Central Election Commission (CEC) in the 2009 elections, support the establishment of an Independent Electoral Commission, members of which should be selected according to criteria of professionalism, expertise and integrity. Key prerogatives should include the regulating and monitoring of electoral spending and media campaigns.
- Ensure the NIP for 2014–2020 includes a measurable commitment to furthering and enhancing reconciliation, dialogue and the judiciary.
- In the longer term, as part of a balanced package of political reform, explore the establishment of a confessional Senate to offset reforms designed to deconfessionalise parliament.
- Encourage the state to review and implement as early as possible reform measures suggested by the Boutros Commission, and accepted in principle by deputies: for example lowering the voting age to 18, organising voting for expatriate nationals, and facilitating election of women.

## 3.

## To move forward Lebanon needs to deal with its past. Issues of truth, memory, justice, accountability and reconciliation need to be addressed.

Within Lebanese society, narratives about the civil war are politicised. They coexist alongside a 'state-sponsored amnesia', the result in part of the general post-war amnesty law (1991). Political elites who played a role during the civil war have refused to foster public debates about it for fear of being implicated in atrocities and abuses. Blanket amnesty has been used as a substitute for transitional justice; residual resentment from the war is transmitted between generations. Lebanese communities and social groups remain highly divided and susceptible to violent mobilisation by sectarian leaders.

State-led reconciliation efforts for thousands of Lebanese displaced by the war have in fact reinforced social and political segregation, for instance by employing a community approach. They have further ignored local traditions and customs, and other common reconciliation approaches based on acknowledgement and forgiveness. Victims have been

explicitly excluded from many reconciliation processes, while some reparations have been conditional on recipients accepting official 'reconciliation agreements'.

**"If reconciliation is achieved on these grounds, it will be temporary. It must be based on fair foundations. Reconciling is not an exchange."**

*Villager, Abay*

Post-war demilitarisation and reintegration of militias has been piecemeal and selective. Significant sectors of society remain armed and ready for violent mobilisation – including post-war generations. Reintegration policies have led to the militarisation of politics, rather than the civilianisation of militias, as semi-operative militia fighters have been integrated into partisan national institutions by political leaders. Although the armed forces have been rehabilitated and reorganised, sectarian tensions and conflicting political priorities weaken its role to promote sovereignty.

At a societal level, reconciliation efforts to discuss the past through free and public debate about the war are hindered by the fact that the vast majority of Lebanese continue to live within the confines of sectarian neighbourhoods, associations, schools and media.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support civil initiatives to promote memory and reconciliation – in particular to help extend these beyond urban and intellectual elites to include peripheral districts and grassroots, for example through established, elder-led rural traditions and norms for peaceful mediation, which combine civil law and tribal codes within local justice systems. These do not guarantee just arbitration, but could provide channels to disseminate local outreach for national reconciliation.
- As part of the EU's support to the education sector, explore options to review and revise history curriculums for schools; this does not assume developing an agreed or official history, but rather collecting various narratives of the war and the past, so that Lebanese groups can better accommodate and acknowledge different perspectives as a means of improving understanding of the 'other'.
- Encourage religious clerics and secular intellectuals to engage together in responsible debate on fundamental humanitarian, ethical and spiritual values that are shared across all constituencies and that can underpin national political life and state policies, and work with clerics to engage in dialogue with extremists from their own confessions.

### Case study: Dealing with the past

The 'state-sponsored amnesia' on Lebanon's violent past is apparent in the absence of either a national archive or public library containing evidence and documentation about its recent history. In the years following the civil war, individuals and NGOs started initiatives to reflect on questions of memory, truth, the rebuilding of society and conflict resolution through roundtables and debates. In the same period committees and associations developed, formed by families and relatives of missing persons.

The Association for Documentation and Research (UMAM D & R) began as an attempt by its founders to better explore and understand the events of the civil war. They gathered the testimonies of a range of combatants, politicians, civilians, displaced and relatives of missing people. To be able to cross-reference different testimonies and stories, a research centre was established in 2004, initially housing oral archives and documentation, including pamphlets and brochures from the war years. With support from a range of donors, personal and family funds, the centre has since evolved to become a space for films, exhibitions, roundtables and workshops on archiving, memory and the fight against violence, as well as for cultural and artistic events. This has helped to preserve part of Lebanon's collective memory, which would otherwise have been lost. It is located in a predominantly Shia district of Beirut, with a strong Hezbollah presence, and aims to be a common resource for all Lebanese.

## 4.

## Refocusing on internal challenges to Lebanese sovereignty and peace can help build resilience to the country's external challenges.

External developments have diverted attention from addressing structural causes of conflict in Lebanon, and have allowed the political elite to abdicate responsibility for progress and reform.

**"Internal and external dimensions to Lebanon's protracted war are both intertwined and acknowledge each other, and it is vital to disentangle them in relation to all political and armed forces still operating in the country."**

*Professor/researcher, think tank, Paris*

The failure of political institutions to manage internal conflict encourages Lebanese leaders and people to look to neighbouring states. Lebanese communities and political blocs present external ties as non-negotiable and immutable, for example 8 March Alliance and Hezbollah's ties to Syria and Iran; or 14 March Alliance's hostility to Syria and embrace of the West.

External dangers are real, present and proximate. Lebanon's borders and maritime boundaries are variously porous and disputed – Ghajar village, Kfar-Shouba hills and the Shebaa Farms, or recently discovered natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean – and recurrently act as flashpoints for political violence or provide channels for illicit arms transfers in and out of Syria. There is a risk of Syria's internal conflict spilling over into northern regions of Lebanon – especially Sunni and Alawite neighbourhoods of Tripoli.

Direct international intervention has struggled to promote the interests and welfare of Lebanese people. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, set up to investigate the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 has operated according to international priorities as much as local needs and realities. It has failed to disentangle the mesh of internal and external challenges surrounding the assassination and has done little to further

peace or the rule of law. Rather, it risks becoming another focus for instability: 8 and 14 March Alliances each use the STL as a tool to destroy the other's legitimacy to rule.

Political reform and national reconciliation are the best sources of resilience to external challenges, to bolster national self-determination and to uphold Lebanese security. Power shifts in Damascus, while risky and unpredictable, could in the longer term free up political space for Lebanese parties – in particular Hezbollah – to focus more on domestic priorities. International policy should look to anticipate and identify regional leverage points for positive social and political change within Lebanon. Lebanon has a history of social mobilisation to press for political change – from before, during and after the war. However, social movements have easily been co-opted by existing elites, and their potential dissipated.

Resuming the National Dialogue, started in 2006, could provide an opportunity to re-focus on domestic priorities. The Dialogue brought together leaders of key sectarian groups and political affiliations in the broadest gathering since the civil war to address issues ranging from the status of the president to the assassinations of prominent Lebanese figures and the disputed border region of the Shebaa Farms. A key issue of discussion is Hezbollah's 'Resistance' arms and the reunification of Lebanon's national defence. In fact, since 2006 Hezbollah has enhanced its firepower and strategic autonomy.

Resumption of the Dialogue could be a positive step to bring opposing Lebanese positions closer together on the definition of state security and national strategy, and international pressure and incentives might help reopen it, based on achievable and incremental objectives. To ensure inclusivity, international partners should be prepared to engage with all Lebanese parties.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- The EU should lead other international actors to support intra-Lebanese dialogue, through the resumption of the National Dialogue, in order to discuss issues relating to Lebanese national sovereignty and self-determination. For example, trans-sectarian discussions and interaction on understanding of Lebanese identity and sovereignty, and initiatives to diminish sectarian intervention in Lebanon's armed and security forces. The EU should push its Member States and other international partners to engage with all Lebanese parties.
- The EU should work more with civil society, to support its capacity and voice. It should look to build on successes of previous social campaigns (eg grassroots mobilisation in the late 1990s around common rights), and learn from past mistakes (eg co-option of the 2011 popular campaign to challenge the sectarian regime by both 8 & 14 March Alliances).
- The EU and other international actors should use their influence to push Lebanon, Israel and Syria to resolve outstanding border and boundary disputes, including through the provision of technical expertise on demarcation. To be effective, the international community needs to be coordinated and consistent. The failure of the UN to follow-up on explicit requirements for Israel to withdraw from specific locations belonging to Lebanon (ie north Ghajar) has meant many in Lebanon perceive a double standard – ie that strategic regional politics trump international law.

## Methodology

This brief draws on the views and perspectives of around 30 leading actors and observers closely involved in work in or on Lebanon in a range of different fields: researchers and academics, civil society activists, security forces, marginalised groups, as well as donors and policymakers. Rather than seeking to present a consensus view on the challenges facing Lebanon, their analysis and ideas are brought together in a collection of articles, developed by Conciliation Resources as part of a forthcoming edition of *Accord* (Issue 24), edited by Elizabeth Picard of the *Institut de Recherches et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman* (IREMAM), and Alexander Ramsbotham, *Accord* Series Editor. Two analysis workshops in Lebanon in June 2011 and March 2012 provided opportunities for discussion and reflection with a range of Lebanese experts and practitioners.

The articles in *Accord* 24 will review peacebuilding in Lebanon, to examine its effectiveness and opportunities and priorities for progress. It will focus on themes of reconciliation, reform and national self-determination.



Lebanese demonstrators hold a portrait of a missing boy during a protest in Beirut to demand information on loved ones, missing since the country's Civil War, on 13 April 2012.

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This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. Conciliation Resources and Saferworld take no position on whether this representation is legally or politically valid.

## REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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[www.c-r.org/PPP](http://www.c-r.org/PPP)

For further information please contact:  
Alexander Ramsbotham, *Accord* Series Editor,  
Conciliation Resources, [aramsbotham@c-r.org](mailto:aramsbotham@c-r.org)



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Conciliation Resources  
173 Upper Street, London N1 1RG, UK  
Phone: +44 (0)20 7359 7728  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7359 4081  
Email: [cr@c-r.org](mailto:cr@c-r.org)  
Web: [www.c-r.org](http://www.c-r.org)

Registered charity no. 1055436  
A company limited by guarantee no. 03196482

Saferworld  
The Grayston Centre, 28 Charles Square  
London N1 6HT, UK  
Phone: +44 (0)20 7324 4646  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647  
Email: [general@saferworld.org.uk](mailto:general@saferworld.org.uk)  
Web: [www.saferworld.org.uk](http://www.saferworld.org.uk)

Registered charity no. 1043843  
A company limited by guarantee no. 3015948

Cover image: Thousands of people demonstrate to demand an end to Lebanon's confessional system, calling for a secular state. Beirut, 20 March 2011. © ANWAR AMRO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES