

**Briefing to the Security Council on the
Fifteenth Semi-Annual Report of the Secretary-General to the
Security Council on the
Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004)**

8 May 2012

Mr. President,

I am pleased to address the Security Council today to present the 15th semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004).

Mr President,

I am glad to recall that since the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1559 on 2 September 2004 several provisions have been implemented such as the withdrawal of the Syrian troops in 2005; the conduct of free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon. The Secretary-General is disappointed to report today that there has been yet again no further progress towards the implementation of the remaining provisions of resolution 1559 (2004) over the last six month.

In fact, there has been no further progress for more than two years.

We are keenly aware that the situation in the region has not been conducive to further progress on the outstanding provisions of resolution 1559 (2004).

The stagnation in the process of the implementation of the resolution could lead to the erosion of the provisions already implemented, and the efforts to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty and political independence.

Mr. President,

Let me elaborate.

Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias continue to operate in the country outside of the Government's control in serious violation of resolution 1559 (2004). While several groups across the political spectrum in Lebanon possess weapons outside Government control, the armed component of Hizbullah is the most significant and most heavily armed Lebanese militia in the country. It reaches almost the capacities of a regular army.

The leadership of Hizbullah has acknowledged that it maintains a substantial military arsenal. Hizbullah is also a Lebanese political party which is part of the current Government coalition.

In addition, there are a series of Palestinian armed groups operating in the country inside and outside the refugee camps.

Over the reporting period, there has been no tangible progress towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias as called for in the Taif Accord and resolution 1559 (2004).

During his last visit to Lebanon, the Secretary-General reminded his interlocutors of the serious risks that the existence of these militias poses to the stability of the country and domestic peace. Since the adoption of the resolution in 2004, no concrete steps have been taken to address this crucial issue which stands at the heart of the sovereignty and the political independence of Lebanon.

The only exception was the National Dialogue of 2006 that took some preliminary decisions on this matter. However, they were never implemented.

Armed groups defying the control of the State are incompatible with the objective of strengthening Lebanon's sovereignty and political independence as called for by the resolution.

It contradicts the protection of Lebanon's unique pluralistic system and the rights of Lebanese citizens.

The issue of Hizbullah's weapons has remained central to political debate in Lebanon. I recall that the previous tenuous Lebanese consensus on the legitimacy of the arms of Hizbullah has broken down. Representatives of the Opposition have singled out Hizbullah's weapons as a destabilizing factor in the country and an obstacle for democracy. Many Lebanese see the continued existence of such arms as an implicit threat for use within Lebanon, bearing in mind the events of May 2008.

In several public pronouncements over the last six months, the leadership of Hizbullah stated that it has upgraded the strength of its military capabilities, and will seek to continue to do so in blatant defiance of resolution 1559 (2004). In addition, it has disclosed publicly for the first time that since the creation of the militia in 1982, the Islamic Republic of Iran had provided it on a regular basis with political, moral, financial and logistical support. This constitutes a violation of Security Council resolutions.

The Secretary-General condemns the possession and the use of illegal weapons wherever they occur in Lebanon, in particular in populated areas. For this reason, he calls upon all parties and States to immediately halt all efforts to keep, transfer and acquire weapons, and build para-military capacities outside the authority of the State. All foreign financial and material support for Lebanon must be channelled transparently through the Government of Lebanon only.

Hizbullah maintains close ties with a number of regional states, in particular with the Islamic Republic of Iran. We urge these States to encourage the transformation of the armed group into a solely political party and its disarmament. This is consistent with the requirements of the Taif Agreement and resolution 1559 (2004). This will be in the best interest of regional peace and stability.

We remain convinced that disarming and disbanding armed groups in Lebanon can best be achieved through a Lebanese-led cross partisan political process. Such a process cannot make headway until external actors cease their military support to Hizbullah, and the group itself accepts to discuss its arsenal in good faith.

I regret that the National Dialogue has not reconvened since November 2010.

Irrespective of the particular composition of the government, the authority of the Lebanese State can only be consolidated through progress on the issue of arms beyond its control. Lebanon can and must revitalise the efforts to address the challenge posed by the continued presence of arms outside the authority of the Lebanese State. This has to be done either through the National Dialogue or with other means it may deem appropriate. I urge the Lebanese leaders to resume and accelerate their discussions on the development of a national defence strategy and to achieve tangible progress.

The end result of such a process must be that there are no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the Government of Lebanon.

It is also high time that President Sleiman and the Government of Prime Minister Mikati finally implement decisions taken in the past by the National Dialogue, such as the dismantling of Palestinian military bases maintained by PFLP-GC and Fatah al-Intifada outside the refugee camps.

The commitment of the government's policy platform to the implementation of previous National Dialogue decisions must be materialized. Security sources in Lebanon have continued to report the use of weapons in and around these para-military infrastructures. These bases, most of which straddle the border between Lebanon and Syria, undermine Lebanese sovereignty and challenge the country's ability to manage its land borders. Since these two militias are headquartered in Damascus, we expect the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to act constructively in this process.

Mr. President,

The profound political and humanitarian crisis in Syria has further hindered progress towards the delineation and demarcation of the border between Lebanon and Syria. I regret the absence of progress and we urge the two countries to move forward on this issue. It has a significant impact on enhancing border control. The delineation of the border is critical to a positive relationship between the two countries. While acknowledging the bilateral nature of border delineation, progress on this matter remains an obligation of the two countries under Security Council resolution 1680 (2006), derived from 1559 (2004).

Against the backdrop of the crisis in Syria more than 10,000 Syrian nationals have crossed the border into Lebanon to seek refuge from the fighting. They are being assisted by the United Nations and the Government of Lebanon. Syrian security forces have continued to carry out operations along the Syrian-Lebanese border, part of which has been mined in recent months. In a number of instances, shooting at or across the border had led to the death or injury of civilians on Lebanese soil. The Secretary-General deplores the recurrent violent actions of the authorities of

the Syrian Arab Republic along the Lebanese-Syrian border. These actions are unacceptable. We call upon the Government of Syria immediately to cease all such actions, and to respect Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity in accordance with Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

There continues to be reports of illegal arm transfers now allegedly taking place in both directions. In particular, latest on 27 April 2012 and 7 May 2012, the Lebanese authorities announced that they had seized shipments of weapons and ammunitions assumed to be bound for the opposition in Syria. Several Member States have continued to express deep concern over the illegal transfer of weapons across the land borders. Lebanese officials acknowledge the porous nature of the border and the possibility that arms smuggling occurs.

In this context, I would like to draw the attention of the Council to public comments made earlier this week by Lebanon's Interior Minister Charbel on this matter in an interview. Commenting on arms smuggling, Charbel said: "of course arms are entering Lebanon because we are incapable of completely controlling the entire border. The army is performing its duties. It completely controls some border crossings, but some illegal crossings remain unsupervised," he explained.

The Secretary-General raised this matter with Lebanese officials during his visit to Beirut and urged them to increase efforts in a more systematic way to ensure a strict control along the border.

The Lebanese Armed Forces informed the United Nations that the deterioration of the security situation in Syria had prompted it to adopt increased measures for the control of the border in order to prevent the entry of arms and military personnel into and out of Lebanon. We urge the Government of Lebanon to finally move forward and adopt and implement a comprehensive border management strategy in the coming period. Doing so would enable better control of Lebanon's international borders and prevent the illegal transfers of arms in both directions. This has become even more pressing in the context of the events in the neighbouring Syrian Arab Republic and would help stemming potential negative repercussions.

Mr. President,

The continued occupation by the Israel Defense Forces of the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line stands in violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). The United Nations has continued to engage closely with both parties to facilitate the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the area. We deplore Israel's continued violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call upon Israel to adhere to its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions and withdraw its forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line.

Israeli overflights of Lebanese airspace raise tension and undermine the credibility of Lebanese security services. They increase the risk of unintended conflict and generate anxiety among the civilian population.

These overflights must cease.

Mr. President,

The situation in most of the 12 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon has remained relatively stable, with the exception of Ain al-Hilweh. Occasional security incidents and inter-factional clashes continued to occur in the camp. The threat of internal violence that could potentially spill over into surrounding areas still exists in a number of camps. Some of them continue to provide safe haven for those who seek to escape the authority of the State.

We remain concerned by the conditions of hardship inside Palestinian refugee camps. We call on the Government of Lebanon to implement amendments to the Lebanese Labour Code and Social Security Law adopted in August 2010, so as to improve the employment prospects of Palestinian refugees. Moreover, the Government of Lebanon and donors should support and strengthen the work of UNRWA to ensure fundamental improvements in the living conditions of Palestinian refugees.

Such progress would not prejudice the eventual resolution of the Palestinian refugee question in the context of a comprehensive regional peace agreement.

Mr. President,

During the period under review, Lebanon has witnessed relative political stability. However, this calm is very fragile as the country is increasingly vulnerable to the deterioration of the situation in Syria.

We are deeply concerned about the impact of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic on the political and security situation in Lebanon. The Lebanese political leaders have widely different views on events inside Syria and it is of paramount importance that they all protect Lebanon from potential repercussions. In this regard, we commend the Government of Prime Minister Mikati for its efforts to date to ensure that the negative impact of the crisis in Syria on Lebanon is limited.

A number of security incidents occurred in Lebanon over the last six months. These are detailed in the Secretary-General's report. Such incidents are indicative yet again of the ongoing security threats in the country and the proliferation of weapons held by non-state actors, which are of concern to the United Nations.

They are also a reminder that the Lebanese authorities should do more to impose law and order throughout the country. The Secretary-General is in particular disturbed by the assassination attempt, which he strongly condemns, on Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea. We call upon the Lebanese authorities to deploy every effort to arrest those responsible for this assassination attempt and bring them to justice. Attempts to destabilize the domestic situation in Lebanon by conducting political assassinations are unacceptable. The establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon signals the strong determination of the international community to put an end to impunity in Lebanon. In this context, I recall that the Secretary-General extended the mandate of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon for a period of three years, from 1 March 2012. We thank the Government of Lebanon for transferring its share of the funding for the tribunal's budget for 2011.

Mr. President,

Several of my Lebanese interlocutors are concerned that whatever the outcome of crisis in Syria is, Lebanon will be – in one way or another - negatively affected. Events in Syria are polarizing political life in Lebanon and have military and humanitarian implications. I am aware that this Council has been focusing lately mostly on the situation in Syria. Nevertheless, this should not detract it from remaining cautious about Lebanon, where the ingredients for internal tension are present. For this reason, we must not lose track and continue to encourage all relevant parties to fully implement this and all other Security Council resolutions pertaining to Lebanon as it remains the best way to ensure Lebanon's long-term prosperity and stability as a democratic state.

Much work lies ahead for the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004). I am however keenly aware that neither the tensions in Lebanon nor the overall implementation of all the provisions of resolution 1559 are purely domestic matters.

We urge once again all political leaders to transcend sectarian, individual and other interests and genuinely promote the future and the interests of the State. They must preserve the comprehensive political framework of co-existence in mutual respect, as set out in the Taif Agreement.

The Secretary-General is firmly committed to the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) for the sake of regional peace and stability. This is of paramount importance in particularly difficult and challenging times. We, therefore, call on all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006).

But above all, it is in the best interest of Lebanon and the Lebanese themselves to make progress towards the full implementation of the resolution for the long-term stability of their country and the region.

Thank you Mr. President.