



World President's Office

LEBANON'S ELECTIONS – WHAT IS THE FATE OF TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS AND THE STATE AND HOW WILL THE UN OVERSEE THE EXTERNAL VOTING RIGHTS OF THE DIASPORA?

With the looming elections and the imminent undertaking that has been long-awaited by the October Revolution and its constituent members both within Lebanon and without, the time has now come for the United Nations to be not only seen but heard and we hope respected by the Lebanese authority and its officials in the conduct of the forthcoming ballot.

The World Lebanese Cultural Union is both cautious and apprehensive that there will be a fair, open, free and transparent ballot.

There are causes for concern as to the conduct, safe custody and the integrity of the ballot that is to be cast will be properly counted, but more importantly secured from the time the votes are recorded, collected and ultimately collated with attendant scrutiny to ensure that the ballot as declared was just and fair.

It is the concern of those voters within the diaspora who by Article 3 of the Lebanese Electoral Law 2018 have been given the right to vote that is the pre-eminent concern of the WLCU in its role as the custodian of the cultural heritage of the diaspora and its Lebanese adherents.

There are as estimated 245,000 Lebanese expatriates who constitute eligible voters as registered. They are located in Europe, North America and Australia in the main. There are certainly those within the Middle East, predominantly the gulf, Africa and in southern America and equally in Mexico.

Recently the Lebanese Government affirmed that the expatriate vote was not only sizeable, but more importantly in sync with the revolution and that it was not comfortable with nor would it tolerate any longer the ruling Government as in turn seeing the Government move to ensure that the ballot is both rigged and more importantly compromised by seeking to disenfranchise on account of ineligibility the expatriate vote.

The need to reissue and/or reapply with identity cards in a timeframe that is so constrained by a deliberate contrivance by the domestic Lebanese Government with the sole if not avowed purpose to disenfranchise the Lebanese diaspora comes as no surprise and equally smacks of tactics of a regime rooted in corruption and riddle with a cancer-like fear that unless it takes utterly undemocratic and illegal steps, it cannot survive the outcome of the ballot box.

The UNDP is both responsible for and equally has a mandate insofar as Lebanon has in the past and will again for this particular election resort to the resources of the UNDP, in particular to implement the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 28 September 2018 39/11 "Equal Participation in Political and Public Affairs" sees a need on the part of the UNDP to be even more vigilant than has been its custom in the past in not only Lebanese elections, but elsewhere.

The concern of the expatriate class as they exist within the diaspora is not so much a concern over the financial fiasco they have equally been the casualties of by being lured into investing in Lebanese banks, but is equally matched by the malaise that has beset the society and driven the middle class to the poverty line and those who were on the poverty line to even more of an arduous existence than they had already had to eke out in the past.

The billions of dollars that were repatriated if not remitted by the diaspora not only outranked the contribution made by the IMF and/or the World Bank, but represented the financial lifeblood of the Lebanese which has now been haemorrhaging not only on account of the economic mismanagement on a grand scale by the Central Lebanese Bank, but equally by the presidency and his coterie of corrupt cohorts who constitute and seek to maintain a disguised democracy that is no more than a devious demagoguery overseen by this inept geriatric President who has long lost any ability to govern and equally has the universal disrespect of not only his own people but those within the diaspora whose shame is unrelenting in terms of their invectives concerning his catastrophic administration.

The concerns of the WLCU are that the ruling system has in the past always viewed with deep suspicion the rights of the diaspora and more importantly their vote simply because they are educated in and more importantly have become real adherents to democratic regimes from within which they are so contained and observe their livelihood and lifestyle that they confidently seek to assert the transmission of those democratic values from wherever they are so located to the Lebanese model which seeks equally to rebuff any attempt to ensure that the enfranchisement of the diaspora is undertaken with confidence in the knowledge that the vote will never be in favour of the regime.

The UNDP must be conscious of the attempts undertaken by the current electoral law system to abolish if not demean and dilute the voting power of the expatriate population. There are equally concerns with respect to how the current regime is attempting to limit the right of expatriate voters abroad to ensure that their votes are not cast as they see the numerical presence of the expatriate vote as tolling the death knell of their existence as a government which will inevitably allow the forces of reform, truth and justice to prevail and seek to redress the national wrongs that have been committed, in particular the Beirut port explosion and the gross economic mismanagement to name but two of the current causes for concern.

The World Lebanese Cultural Union on 25 January 2022 published a letter to the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants as well as diplomatic missions abroad to explain the financial crisis of the current regime and its handiwork in bringing it about and to bring to the notice of those diplomatic missions what are the concerns that we now seek to again place on record and bring to the attention of the UNDP as follows:

1. The need for the provision of free polling stations abroad, and if and where necessary to assist embassies and consulates in securing these centres which are now being prevented if not positively prohibited on account of the alleged cost that they represent in setting up such centres in foreign countries where voters are eligible to vote but are prevented from voting in those centres by reason of the so-called “cost prohibition” that the establishment of these centres represents.
2. That the UNDP is formally requested as a non-governmental, non-sectarian and an apolitical organisation to be an observant member and to represent and to ensure that the overseeing of the ballot together with its integrity and transparency is properly

documented, physically overseen, enabled by sufficient monitoring to be tabulated and to be the subject of final reports as to how it was carried out to ensure that auditing is beyond reproach, if not doubt.

3. The role of the WLCU in the democratic event that this election represents or should in turn be considered is to ensure that the current ruling class in terms of the current regime is prevented from interfering unlawfully in the electoral process, in particular the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs which has a deft if not determined position to ensure that expatriate electors are not given preference in respect of those who are voting. The need to have an independent monitoring authority free of any political cadres is an absolute fundamental requirement.
4. The WLCU respectfully but nevertheless must demand of the UNDP its assistance and intervention to ensure that the Lebanese Government in the task required to ensure the transfer of ballot boxes to the appropriate counting station is undertaken with a view to ensuring not only domestically but externally that these ballot boxes are collected, secured and counted in a fashion to be properly tabulated and that the ballot remains, as it should, free, open and fair, but more importantly secure.

In concluding, we in the WLCU see the parallels that were undertaken between the revolutionaries in America who, 80 years after English Revolution were set upon by George III and his Parliament who began imposing taxes on Americans and seeking to increase British control over the colonies, the colonies drew on more than a century of English and American resistance to the infringement of their rights.

What was new was that the Americans rebelled against Parliament as well as against the King, believing that the Parliament had abandoned its role as the protector of liberties against royal overreach.

Equally, the Lebanese Revolution referred to as the October Revolution and its constituent members are not so much engaged in a terrorist act, but rather are to be seen as revolutionaries of the spirit and preservation of the right to live in a democratic, free and fair society and that it is not beyond the pale of recognition in any civilised nation throughout the world watching that their right to sustain and to be heard as they seek to do in the ballot box that is to be undertaken in the current electoral scenario with which the country will embark upon, deciding its future is also a right that belongs to those diaspora constituents who by Article III of the Lebanese Electoral Law are equally given the right to participate in this vision for Lebanon, and more importantly their democratic duty to be heard in its attainment.

In all of this is it in vain that the work of the late Professor Charles Mellick, who was a co-author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should go unheard as a great Lebanese statesman of such international repute that what he sought to achieve and how he helped attain it in the cooperative spirit of drawing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should be so blasphemously betrayed by the current Lebanese Government who have nothing more to gain than the preservation of their less-than-erstwhile reputations, and to seek to have the past maintained?

We call on the UNDP to intervene.

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