

Because the Lebanese are living in fear from insecurity and from the return of civil war,

Because the State's incapacity to carry out its functions in all areas: security, politics, services, etc., is now threatening to turn it into a "failed State",

Because the different actors of the confessional political system are imposing an agenda on the Lebanese people based on their differences and their risky bets,

Because the illusion of the confessional State has faded and the political system has lost its legitimacy and its capacity to persist,

Because saving Lebanon from its current situation requires an initiative to rebuild the State and the socio-economic and political system on the basis of citizenship, justice, dignity and humanity...

### **We invite you**

To take part in the National Rescue Conference that will take place in Hotel Monroe, facing Hotel Phoenicia, on Saturday 15 June 2013, at 11:00 in the morning.

The signatories of this call are:

Castro Abdallah, Antoine Abi Haidar, Pierre Abi Saab, Sarkis Abou Zeid, Michel Akl, Hassan Al Abdallah, Youssef Al Achkar, Rony Al Assaad, Nassif Azzi, Abderrahman Al Bizri, Marie Al Debs, Ibrahim Al Halabi, Oumaima Al Khalil, Samir Al Makdissi, Zafer Al Moqqadem, Bachir Al Murr, Ziad Al Rahbani, Raghid Al Solh, Ghada Al Yafi, Abdelkader Alameddine, Rafiq Ali Ahmad, Maroun Aoun, Nabil Arja, Sassine Assaf, Hassan Awada, Jean Aziz, Ziad Baroud, Ghaleb Bou Mosleh, Georges Corm, Massoud Daher, Bassam Daou, Ghania Doughan, Rahif Fayad, Sayed Frangié, Raymond Frem, Hanna Gharib, Khaled Hadadé, Grégoire Haddad, Hayyan Haidar, Hassan Hamadé, Kamal Hamdan, Mohammad Hamdan, Jamal Hermez Ghobril, Samah Idriss, Nawwaf Kabbara, Amine Kammourié, Marcel Khalifeh, Fouad Khalil, Fadia Kiwan, Albert Mansour, Ghassan Matar, Kamel Mehanna, Adnan Melki, Elham Moubarak, Ezzat Mroué, Issam Naaman, Omar Nachabé, Charbel Nahas, Emilie Nasrallah, Oussama Saad, Elias Saba, Nizar Saghieh, Talal Salman, Nasri Sayegh, Khodr Slim, Sleiman Takieddine, Najah Wakim.

# A Call to Save Lebanon and Rebuild the State

Lebanon is undergoing a very critical phase that predicts dangerous repercussions threatening social order, in the presence of a non-functional State that is not capable to deal in the least with the intricate conflicts that are storming the region, or to face the repercussions of these conflicts on the interior.

An objective assessment of the current situation of our country, and a forecast of the near future that has become well defined, place us in front of the following facts:

1. The increasing failure of the State to carry out its function in all areas is getting clearer by the day, be it in the fields of defense, foreign policy, security, and preserving national unity, not to mention its flagrant failure to take responsibility for public services, economic management, and public order, and in spreading the rule of law and fighting corruption, etc., as well as a total bankruptcy in dealing with the disputes among political actors that are produced by the system within its formal mechanisms.
2. Although the current political system based on confessional divisions of the Lebanese people and the Lebanese State, lacks the external support it was founded on after the war and that allowed to impose it on the Lebanese people and then to extend it artificially, it has become today incapable to maintain even a formal legitimacy of constitutional State institutions. Parliament will lose its legitimacy as of 20 June 2013, and any extension of its mandate is a qualified coup. As for the government, if it is formed, it will find itself in front of an illegitimate Parliament that is not able to provide it in turn with any legitimacy. The same goes for the Presidency of the Republic in a few months when the time comes to elect a new President.
3. The Lebanese State is threatened to fall, *de facto* and *de jure*, and this entails dangerous consequences, the most important of which:
  - a. The great majority of families whose providers make their living in Lebanon and whose salaries are paid in the national currency, especially government employees (civil and military) and government contractors, are subject to losing their incomes and savings, same as during the eighties and same as what we are witnessing today around the world, with what this entails in terms of social upheavals.
  - b. The hopelessness of the Lebanese towards resorting to the State, in its public administrations, security forces and judicial bodies, will push them more and more towards migration and feudal allegiance to community leaders and surrender to capital holders who are the real holders of power, which puts Lebanon in the eye of the regional storms which would translate into an uncontrollable civil war.
  - c. The fall of the Lebanese State deprives the country from any immunity that can be provided by International Law and the United Nations, and opens the door to foreign interference in its ugliest and most dangerous forms.

In the midst of regional storms and tragedies, the Lebanese do not stand alone in the face of confessional *assabiya*. Community leaders themselves have become bound by determined roles within the logic of the system and according to the conditions of their foreign attachments, thus abolishing their margin of maneuver in a time where Lebanon is in need of big decisions. The political system is constantly producing anxiety while confessional *assabiya* is feeding itself from this same anxiety.

This infernal circle is not an inevitable fate; it is not founded on any constitutional or legitimate instrument. In this context, it is important to underline a set of facts that the pillars of the system have always sought to conceal:

- The confessional political system is in contradiction with the main foundations of national regimes that suppose equality in rights and duties among all citizens. It is even in contradiction with the main foundations of the Lebanese Constitution itself which stipulates that “the people shall be the source of

powers” and that “there shall be absolute freedom of belief.” This simply means that for any Lebanese to adopt one confession or the other should be an act of personal will. And upon this, any electoral or administrative system that automatically or forcefully divides the Lebanese people into categories is null.

- Confessions, in their legal sense, are not entities by themselves; they are social entities that were acknowledged by the State which made them legal bodies, within the logic of tolerance and freedom of belief. However, they transformed in practice into political entities replacing the State. Their influence could not have been enforced and entrenched despite the spread of education among the Lebanese and the tragedies they have encountered, be it not for the weakening of the State and its submission to the interests of the powerful, and to the need of the Lebanese for services, benefits and protections that they were obliged to seek due to the unfair socio-economic system based on rents, injustice, monopoly and paid loyalties.
- From the perspective of human and religious values, religious belief is a free personal act. Confessionalism, when it becomes institutionalized and forceful, contradicts those values. Confessions, when they turn from social formations into political formations, are erected on *assabiya*, and on group agglomeration and rejection of the other; they behave as independent groups in terms of interests, ambitions and aspirations inside and outside Lebanon, which leads to a fragmented society and a crumbling State. And confessional formations are not only based on religious confessions, but also on language and lineage particularities. Historical facts prove that confessional cohesion was based on facing the tyranny of authoritarian regimes, especially those based on religion, and it is true that the region comprises today regimes and authoritarian trends that pretend to be based on religion and that ought to be countered. But this counteraction cannot be by strengthening confessional *assabiya*, because confessionalism feeds majority religious *assabiya* on one hand, and pushes confessional groups to pledge allegiance to foreign and financial powers on the other hand, thus leading to a fragmented society and a crumbling State. This counteraction can only succeed by strengthening the foundations of a civil and democratic State based on citizenship and giving place to citizen interests instead of confessional interests, which is the only State that can protect freedom of belief and individual dignity.

Therefore,

In the light of the above, the signatories of this call confirm their diagnosis of this period and how to face it:

1/ The blocs that are involved in the confessional political system impose on Lebanon the agenda of their own differences and bets, and they have all become incapable of answering to people’s need for tranquility and dignity. The most they can achieve is to postpone the entire fall of the system and of public order, but at the expense of eroding the State structure and credibility. **Lebanon is in urgent need of a different agenda.**

2/ Saving Lebanon requires an initiative **to rebuild the State and the political and economic system** on the basis of citizenship, social justice and human dignity, after the illusion of the “confessional State” has faded and the current system has lost its legitimacy and its grasp, and after it has persistently disfigured the memory of the Lebanese people and wasted their capacities and hopes. This requires: 1) Establishing a clear and civil reference of legitimacy, 2) Effective mechanisms of representation, away from any intermediary entities such as confessional leaderships, and 3) Providing an orderly functioning of executive and judiciary powers. These three pillars have faded and are now missing.

3/ Since constitutional institutions are falling consecutively starting with the Parliament, and in order to prevent the collapse of the State structure although its mechanisms are no longer functional, and in order to manage the intended transitional phase without passing by rounds of violence and without waiting for foreign arrangements and dictations, the decisive step on the way to building the new system and the State is forming a “Transitional Constitutional Commission” trusted by the Lebanese people and representing all social segments whose interests are linked to the preservation of the State, in accordance with their social weight and the level of their attachment to long-term social interests, and who are cross-confessional and surpass authoritarian positions. The transitional constitutional commission should also include intellectual, cultural,

scientific and young capacities that hold public interest above the interests of the powerful and their risky bets and allegiances.

4/ The urgent national functions that the transitional constitutional commission we call for should undertake are the following:

- a. To elaborate a **Temporary Constitutional Declaration** that ensures the conditions of a civil and democratic State and regulates the transitional phase smoothly and safely.
- b. Pursuant to the Temporary Constitutional Declaration, to call for the election of a **“Constituent Assembly”** that would undertake to formulate a definitive Constitution based on the principles of citizenship, democracy and social justice, to be presented to the Lebanese people for general referendum.

In light of the above, the signatories address all forces – individuals, movements, organizations, and civil, scientific, legal, syndical and professional bodies – to invite them to join this rescue movement, in order to gather all popular forces that care for this country.

Establishing the Transitional Constitutional Commission and legitimizing it will not be possible unless the majority of the Lebanese people gather around it. This requires political and social struggles in all public domains, which would reinforce the spirit of confrontation in each public area – syndical, intellectual, youth-related and legal – due to the existence of a clear and unifying political project. The movements in all those domains would in turn feed the general rescue movement, thus turning citizen despair and disorientation into hope and consciousness and organized collective will that would save the country and rebuild the State.

Participation in launching this rescue movement goes through two decisive milestones:

- The first is the **“National Rescue Convention”** that identifies the causes of the problem and draws the horizons and conditions of its solution, not only on the level of the Constitution and representation, but also on all levels of a new social contract that tackles the real agenda of the citizens’ concerns and ambitions.
- The national rescue convention organizes in a second stage the **“Days of National Choices”** that comprise workshops discussing and settling on choices in all areas of life, law, society, economy and institutions, in accordance with the higher interests of society, and with the participation of experts and interested parties.

We have stepped into an era of great changes in the world and the region, and an era of turmoil that is invading our society and mobilizing our youth. It is now possible and necessary to recover the political heritage of this country in all its ramifications, and to free it from mutual accusations, in order to turn the page on forty years of pain and struggles, and to revive public action and the trust in its importance.

**The danger is real and imminent, the failed regime is falling, initiative is a duty, and change is possible.**

The National Convention we invite you to take part in is the first step on the road to rescuing and rebuilding the State. During the convention, we will propose a practical plan aiming at achieving the abovementioned objectives. A follow-up committee will be formed during the convention in order to follow up on the execution of this plan.

Your participation in the convention is necessary for its success.