

Attached is an advance copy of the **Thirty-sixth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)** for the information of the members of the Security Council.

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Thirty-sixth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

I. Background

1. The present report is the thirty-sixth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). It provides a review and an assessment of the implementation of the resolution since the issuance of the previous report on the subject (S/2022/345) on 22 April 2022 and covers developments until 23 September 2022.

II. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

2. Since the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004) by the Security Council on 2 September 2004, limited progress has been made on its implementation. A number of provisions, including with respect to the existence and activities of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, remain pending.

A. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon

3. Through the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council sought to help strengthen the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout the country, in accordance with the Taif Accords of 1989, to which all the political parties in Lebanon had committed themselves. That objective has remained the priority of my efforts.

4. On 15 May, Lebanon held its parliamentary elections as scheduled. Out of country voting was conducted in 58 countries on 6 and 8 May. Voter turnout was similar to the previous elections held in 2018, at 49.2 per cent. There were 718 candidates competing for 128 parliamentary seats. Of those, 118 (16.4 per cent) were women candidates, up from 14.4 per cent in 2018.

5. According to the official results, as shown in the report of 14 July 2022 on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2022/556), the Amal Movement and Hizbullah retained all Shia seats in Parliament. The Free Patriotic Movement lost seats, leading to the Lebanese Forces becoming the biggest Christian party – and the biggest party overall – in Parliament. No dominant political party emerged from the Sunni side, in the absence of the Future Movement, which did not nominate any candidates for this election. Independents and emerging groups won 15 and 13 seats, respectively. Eight women were elected to Parliament, a slight increase from six in 2018.

6. Despite recognizing overall delivery by the electoral authorities, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) and the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, a domestic election observation group, documented violations such as vote-buying, “clientelism”, inequality in media coverage, intimidation and campaign obstruction, and abuse of power by local authorities and parties. Fifteen

challenges were filed with the Constitutional Council, the formal electoral dispute resolution mechanism, to contest results in 10 districts.

7. In its final report, the EU EOM noted that “many of the female candidates met by the EU EOM observers reported cultural, financial or political barriers to their participation. Female candidates and journalists throughout the country reported to the EU EOM being seriously threatened and discredited online. The mission’s social media monitoring picked up degrading comments, threats and insults of a sexual nature, and incitement to violence.” As Lebanon has no temporary special measures, the mission recommended that such measures be adopted to increase women’s representation in Parliament. Furthermore, a project supported by the United Nations Development Programme to document women’s experiences in politics found that 80 per cent of the respondents acknowledged having experienced violence.

8. On 20 May, the International Support Group for Lebanon issued a statement to welcome the timely conduct of the elections and urge the new Parliament to “move boldly forward to pass the legislation needed to stabilize the economy, improve governance, and enact the reforms.” The Group also called “on all relevant actors to work quickly on the swift formation of a government that can implement the extremely important outstanding reforms and continue to work with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), including by implementing the prior actions Lebanon committed to in its 7 April 2022 staff-level agreement in order to lay a solid basis for socio-economic relief and a sustainable recovery of Lebanon.”

9. The term of the newly elected Parliament began on 22 May. On 31 May, the new Parliament re-elected Nabih Berri of the Amal Movement as Speaker for a seventh consecutive term, with 65 votes out of 128. The Parliament also elected Elias Bou Saab of the Free Patriotic Movement as Deputy Speaker, also with 65 votes.

10. Prime Minister Najib Mikati’s government entered caretaker mode upon the commencement of the term of the new Parliament. On 23 June, following binding parliamentary consultations convened by President Michel Aoun, caretaker Prime Minister Mikati was designated to form a new government with the support of 54 Members of Parliament. After two days of non-binding parliamentary consultations, Prime Minister-designate Mikati presented to President Aoun a proposed Cabinet line-up on 29 June. Discussions between the President and Prime Minister-designate on the Cabinet formation were ongoing as at the end of the reporting period.

11. On 24 June, the International Support Group for Lebanon called “on all political actors to form a government quickly” and emphasized the need “to adhere to the constitutional calendar in order for the presidential election to take place on time.” Similarly, the Jeddah Security and Development Summit, attended by leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and the United States, in its final statement issued on 16 July, “called on all Lebanese parties to respect the constitution and carry out [the presidential election] in a timely manner.” The same leaders also expressed their support for Lebanon, and particularly for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces in “their efforts to maintain security in the country.”

12. On 26 July, the new Parliament had its first legislative session. Reportedly, the session was marred by inappropriate verbal exchanges, including bullying of some female Members of Parliament, which forced an early end to the session. On 31 July, a march was organized by a group of individuals under an Instagram page called “The Feminist Movement” (*Taharok Nasawi*) in solidarity with “women and marginalized groups targeted by systematic violent practices by the authorities, the media and certain sections of society.”

13. On the occasion of Ashura on 9 August, the Secretary General of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, said that they “are calling seriously for the formation of a government with full authorities, particularly since there are those predicting and threatening with a presidential vacuum.” He reiterated the need to form a government on 17 September, saying that “we should not reach the point where ... there may be a presidential vacuum and a caretaker government.”

14. The term of President Aoun will end on 31 October 2022. According to Article 73 of the Lebanese constitution, the Speaker convenes Parliament as an electoral body to elect a new President “at least one month and at most two months prior to the expiration of the outgoing President’s term.” Accordingly, the presidential election period started on 1 September. As of 23 September, Speaker Berri had not called for a presidential election session yet.

15. Reacting to the debate on whether presidential authorities could be delegated to a caretaker government, Speaker Berri stressed, in a speech on 31 August, the importance of respecting the constitutional deadline to hold the presidential election, adding that “Parliament is ... the only one entrusted with the interpretation of the constitution and its provisions.” In an interview on 8 September, President Aoun said that “this [caretaker] government is not eligible to assume my powers after the end of my term, and I consider that it does not enjoy the national legitimacy to replace the President of the Republic.”

16. On 3 September, the 13 Members of Parliament from the “Forces of Change” bloc launched their “presidential rescue initiative”, calling for the election of a “reformist” President who would meet the group’s “standards for the presidency.” They noted that they would resort to “all legitimate means of popular pressure” if a new President is not elected according to their “standards” before 21 October when, according to Article 73 of the Constitution, Parliament will “meet automatically on the tenth day preceding the expiration of the President’s term of office” if no election has yet been held.

17. Lebanon commemorated the second anniversary of the Beirut port explosion on 4 August. Marches took place in Beirut, with demonstrators demanding justice. The domestic investigation into the port explosion has been stalled since December 2021, following legal challenges filed against the judge leading the investigation. Some Members of Parliament who were facing charges in the case were re-elected to Parliament. On 6 September, the High Judicial Council in Lebanon approved a proposal from caretaker Minister of Justice Henry Khoury to appoint an alternate judge to take over the task of adjudicating the release requests of detainees in the case, until

the lead investigative judge could resume his investigation. This triggered protests and sit-ins by dozens of families of the victims, who called the move an attempt by the political class to prevent justice. They also filed criminal complaints on 12 September against caretaker Minister of Justice Khoury and caretaker Minister of Finance Youssef Khalil for their alleged role in the obstruction of the investigation into the explosion.

18. On 3 August, the International Support Group for Lebanon issued a statement to “note with concern the lack of progress so far in the judicial proceedings and call on the Lebanese authorities to do everything possible to unblock any hurdles to the completion of an impartial, thorough and transparent investigation into the port explosion.” The statement indicated that the Group also “expects the Lebanese Parliament to adopt the necessary legislation, in line with international standards, to strengthen the independence of the judiciary.” Families of the victims, some Lebanese politicians, human rights experts and advocacy groups are increasingly calling for an international investigation into the explosion.

19. Referencing the case of *Prosecutor v. Merhi and Oneissi*, the Appeals Chamber of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon on 16 June unanimously sentenced Hassan Habib Merhi and Hussein Hassan Oneissi to life imprisonment. The Appeals Chamber found them guilty in connection with the 14 February 2005 attack in Beirut that killed former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and 21 others and injured 226 people. With the delivery of the sentencing judgement, the Tribunal completed its judicial work and moved into its residual phase as of 1 July 2022.

20. In its resolution 1680 (2006), the Security Council strongly encouraged the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to respond positively to the request made by the Government of Lebanon to delineate their common border, noting that such measures would constitute a significant step towards asserting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon and improving the relations between the two countries.

21. The delineation and demarcation of the boundaries of Lebanon remain critical to enable proper border control and management and to prevent smuggling, including with regard to the movement of people, goods and, potentially, arms. While border delineation is a bilateral matter, progress on the issue remains an obligation for Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, in accordance with resolution 1680 (2006).

22. There was no progress in relation to the issue of the Shab‘a Farms area. Neither the Syrian Arab Republic nor Israel has responded to the provisional definition of the area contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) on 30 October 2007 (S/2007/641).

23. Israel continued to occupy the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). In identical letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council dated 20 April (A/76/817-S/2022/348), 12 May (A/76/831-S/2022/395), and 23 May (A/76/843-S/2022/420),

upon instructions of her Government, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon referred to construction work carried out by Israel in or near Ghajar as “acts of provocation” and “violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon.”

24. During the reporting period, unmanned aerial vehicles and fixed-wing aircraft, including fighter jets, of the Israel Defense Forces continued to fly over Lebanon, in violation of Lebanese territorial sovereignty and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006).

B. Extension of control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory

25. The Government of Lebanon continued its efforts to extend the authority of the State over all the Lebanese territory, as called for in the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004).

26. On 5 June 2022, President Aoun and caretaker Prime Minister Mikati condemned Israel for sending a floating production, storage and offloading vessel to the offshore Karish gas field. President Aoun said, “Negotiations to demarcate the maritime borders [between Lebanon and Israel] are still ongoing, and therefore any action or activity in the disputed area constitutes a provocation and a hostile act.” Caretaker Prime Minister Mikati called Israel’s action “extremely dangerous”. On 8 June, the Israeli Ministers for Defence, Energy and Foreign Affairs issued a joint statement to declare that “the Karish rig is a strategic asset of the State of Israel” that Israel is “prepared to defend.” On 9 June, the Secretary General of Hizbullah warned that Hizbullah “is capable militarily and materially of preventing [Israel] from extracting oil and gas from the disputed Karish field.”

27. On 2 July, the Israel Defense Forces reportedly intercepted three UAVs from Lebanon that had “approached the airspace over Israel’s economic waters” but “did not pose any imminent threat.” Hizbullah later claimed that it had launched three unarmed drones towards the Karish field to deliver a “message”. On 4 July, Prime Minister-designate Mikati stated that “any action outside the framework of the state’s responsibility ... is unacceptable and exposes it to unnecessary risks.” On 5 July, Israel’s caretaker Prime Minister Yair Lapid warned the Lebanese government “to rein in Hizbullah” or else Israel “will be forced to do so.”

28. In identical letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council dated 11 July 2022 (S/2022/550), the Permanent Representative of Israel expressed his government’s “serious concerns” regarding the UAV incident, calling it a “dangerous hostile act ... yet another provocation by Hizbullah.” In response, in identical letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council dated 11 August 2022 (A/76/921-S/2022/619), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon, on behalf of her Government, stated that “Israel cannot claim that there exists an internationally recognized and established exclusive Israeli economic zone as long as indirect negotiations between Lebanon and Israel have not produced an agreement on the disputed areas.” She further stated that “parties should refrain from engaging in any activity in the disputed areas ... and rather be focused on advancing the negotiations.”

29. On several occasions in July and August, the Secretary General of Hizbullah threatened escalation if Lebanon was “forbidden” to extract its oil and gas, while Israel could unilaterally begin oil and gas extraction from the Karish field before an agreement was signed. On 19 July, caretaker Prime Minister Lapid said that Israel does “not seek confrontation but whoever tries to attack our sovereignty or Israeli citizens will learn very quickly that they have made a serious mistake.” Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Aviv Kohavi stated on 11 September that “any attempt to attack the State of Israel in any theatre will be met with a severe reaction or a pre-emptive initiative.” On 17 September, the Secretary General of Hizbullah announced that they “will wait since the negotiations are ongoing and since extraction has not started from Karish. There is time for solutions without a confrontation.”

30. To maintain the operational readiness of Lebanese armed and security forces, on 20 July, the United States Congress approved \$83.5 million for immediate livelihood support to the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces for an initial period of six months. On 12 August, the Lebanese Armed Forces announced that it had received the first installment of a \$60 million grant pledged by Qatar in support of the salaries of army personnel.

31. Lebanon continued to face extensive power cuts, and necessities such as fuel, bread and medicine have become unaffordable for many. The Lebanese pound continued to depreciate, falling below 38,000 LBP to the United States dollar on the parallel market in late September, compared with an official peg of 1,507.5 LBP to the United States dollar. In protest at the dire conditions, tens of thousands of state employees from ministries, local government bodies, schools and universities, courts, and the state news agency have been on open-ended strikes since June. They were joined by hundreds of judges and employees of the state-owned telecoms company and mobile network operators in August. The strikes have caused disruption to essential services and governmental administrative procedures.

32. Crime rates remained high in Lebanon, with the high number of shootings reflecting the wide proliferation of small arms weapons across the country. Following two deadly shootings in Tripoli, caretaker Minister of Interior and Municipalities Bassam Mawlawi announced on 13 September that a “sustainable security plan for Tripoli” had been devised. Reportedly, the assailants in one of the shootings used military-grade weapons. The Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces were deployed to restore calm. On 3 September, the Lebanese Armed Command issued a statement stating that “an army force raided a building in [the town of] Zouk al-Habalsa in Akkar and arrested 11 Syrian [national] and two [Lebanese] citizens. Weapons and various ammunition were seized.” In addition, incidents where depositors forcefully sought to access funds in their own bank accounts increased, with at least five separate banks around the country being held up at gunpoint by depositors on 16 September.

33. Lebanese authorities have increasingly called for the repatriation of Syrian refugees and for international assistance for Syrian refugees to be provided inside Syria instead of Lebanon. On 29 June, caretaker Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants Abdallah Bou Habib and caretaker Minister of Social Affairs Hector Hajjar issued a

joint note to diplomatic missions and international and regional organizations, citing the large number of refugees in Lebanon and the difficulty in controlling its borders, urging “the international community to find sustainable solutions to the Syrian refugees problem.” On 6 July, caretaker Minister of the Displaced Issam Sharafeddine said in an interview that Lebanon planned to start repatriating 15,000 Syrian refugees per month. He visited Damascus on 15 August to discuss refugee returns with Syrian officials. In a letter to the Secretary-General dated 8 September, Prime Minister-designate Mikati called on the Secretary-General to launch “a qualitative process and dialogue ... within a clear road map to address the Syrian displacement crisis.” On 9 September, Prime Minister-designate Mikati tasked the head of General Security, General Abbas Ibrahim, with negotiating with Syria the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. According to the protection thresholds established to monitor the situation, the assessment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is that relevant conditions for safe and sustainable return have not yet been met in Syria.

34. These developments have also been coupled with restrictive measures, such as local curfews, and limiting refugee access to subsidized bread, as well as increasing incidents of community tension.

C. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

35. In its resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, a key provision of the resolution that has yet to be implemented. The provision reflects and reaffirms a decision to which all Lebanese committed themselves in the Taif Accords.

36. Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias within the country continued to operate outside the control of the government, in violation of resolution 1559 (2004). While several groups across the political spectrum in Lebanon possess weapons outside government control, Hizbullah is the most heavily armed militia in the country.

37. There has been no tangible progress made towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as called for in the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). Since its adoption, no specific steps have been taken to tackle that crucial issue, which lies at the heart of the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon.

38. The maintenance by Hizbullah of a military arsenal outside of a legal framework and its involvement in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be denounced by several voices in Lebanon, which consider that those issues are destabilizing factors in the country and undermine democracy. Many Lebanese see the continued presence of such arms as an implicit threat that the arms could be used within Lebanon for political reasons.

39. The self-acknowledged maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups and the alleged increase by Hizbullah of its arsenal pose a serious challenge to the ability of the State to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory.

40. On 25 April, a rocket was launched from the vicinity of Qulaylah in southern Lebanon towards Israel, impacting southeast of the Israeli town of Shlomi. The Israel

Defense Forces responded by firing several dozen artillery rounds into Lebanon in the general area of Wadi Hamul and areas north of Alma al-Sha'b. No casualties were reported from either incident. No group claimed responsibility for firing the rocket.

41. In identical letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council dated 3 May (S/2022/373), the Permanent Representative of Israel expressed “great concern” at the rocket fire, stating that “this attack compounds the already tense situation on the ground and carries with it the potential for dangerous escalation, threatening the entire region.” He added that this “constitutes irrefutable evidence of the presence of unauthorized weapons ... and a further indication of the Lebanese Government’s failure to exert control over all parts of its territory.”

42. Individuals, some in combat attire, with assault weapons were observed by UNIFIL a number of times throughout the reporting period utilizing four firing range complexes not under Government authority in southern Lebanon. These are in uninhabited locations in Zibqin, Qantarrah, Dayr Amis and Frun.

43. On 20 May, the Secretary General of Hizbullah called for postponing the debate over the group’s arsenal of weapons for “an additional year or two,” explaining that Lebanon has more pressing issues that need to be addressed. Expressing the group’s readiness to discuss a national defence strategy, the Secretary General of Hizbullah reiterated on 25 May that “first, find a solution to the issue of the [Lebanese] lira, the [United States] dollar, the salaries ... let an army remain and a state remain, after that, we can discuss whether we hand over our weapons to the state or we hand over our weapons to the army.”

44. In identical letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council dated 25 May 2022 (S/2022/421), the Permanent Representative of Israel stated that “Iran relentlessly transfers unmanned aircraft systems and capabilities to its proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen” in violation of resolution 2231 (2015). In identical letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council dated 31 May 2022 (S/2022/445), the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran “categorically reject[ed] all allegations and fabrications against Iran contained in [the Israeli letter].”

45. The presence of Palestinian armed groups outside the camps continued. Notwithstanding the decision taken in 2006 in the context of the National Dialogue, and confirmed at subsequent sessions, to disarm Palestinian militias outside the camps, no progress was made during the reporting period regarding dismantling the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada in the country.

46. On 4 July, a personal dispute between members of factions in Ein El Hilweh, Lebanon’s largest Palestine refugee camp near the coastal southern city of Sidon, escalated into shooting which caused injuries, destruction of property and temporary displacement of residents. On 8 July, armed clashes took place between two families in the camp, which are affiliated with the Palestinian factions of Ansar Allah and Fatah, respectively. The clashes were reportedly related to a personal dispute, and they led to destruction of property and temporary displacement. On 10 September,

armed clashes erupted again between the same two families in the camp, in which machine guns, bombs and rocket-propelled grenades were used, leading to injuries and material damage. The next day, the Joint Palestinian Security Forces inside the camp withdrew all armed elements to restore calm.

47. On 8 August, a Palestinian official from Fatah was shot dead in the Ein El Hilweh camp. The official was a member of the National Palestinian Security Forces, responsible for the liaison between various Palestinian factions at the camp and the Lebanese Armed Forces. Fatah formed an investigation committee in coordination with the Joint Palestinian Security Forces and the Lebanese authorities to investigate the incident.

III. Observations

48. I commend the Lebanese authorities for holding the parliamentary elections on time and under difficult conditions. The elections enabled the Lebanese people to exercise their right to elect their representatives and demonstrated the political independence of the Lebanese state. I call on the newly elected Parliament to now deliver urgently on the much-needed reforms to address the social and economic challenges the country is facing.

49. I also call on Lebanese political leaders to work together to prioritize the national interest and form a government without delay to lead and implement reforms, which respond to the needs and aspirations of the Lebanese people. It is equally important that a new President be elected in accordance with the constitutional timeframe. The country cannot afford, at this crucial moment of its history, a prolonged governance or executive vacuum.

50. I echo the Security Council's call for measures to promote youth participation and to enhance women's full, equal and meaningful political participation and representation, including in the new government, as well as their economic empowerment. All forms of discrimination and violence against women, including against women in politics, must end. I urge the Lebanese authorities to implement the recommendations of the election observation groups, including the adoption of temporary special measures like quotas to increase women's representation in Parliament.

51. I remain concerned about the outstanding provisions of resolution 1559 (2004). I condemn the rocket fire from southern Lebanon into Israel in April. I also condemn the artillery fire from Israel in response. Security incidents like these have the potential for rapid escalation. They are a reminder of the risks posed by the maintenance of weapons outside the control of the State, the continued presence of armed militias in Lebanon, and regular violations by Israel of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity. This continues to undermine security and stability in Lebanon and the region.

52. The dire living conditions also pose security risks to the country by opening up space for non-State actors. In this regard, I stress the importance of further and increased international support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and State security institutions for the security and stability of Lebanon. I thank all those who have been

assisting these institutions at a time of enormous pressure and encourage all partners to contribute to this effort.

53. The self-acknowledged maintenance by Hizbullah of sizeable and sophisticated military capabilities outside the control of the Government of Lebanon remains a matter of grave concern. Calls from sections of the Lebanese population for the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) and for rejecting the possession of arms outside State authority indicate that the maintenance of weapons by Hizbullah remains a divisive issue within the Lebanese society.

54. The Lebanese State should increase its efforts to achieve a monopoly over the possession of weapons and the use of force throughout its territory. I continue to urge the Government and the armed forces of Lebanon to take all measures necessary to prohibit Hizbullah and other armed groups from acquiring weapons and building paramilitary capacity outside the authority of the State, in violation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). The presence of unauthorised weapons at firing ranges in southern Lebanon not under Government authority is a clear violation.

55. I again call upon all parties not to engage in any military activity in or outside Lebanon, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). It is critical that the Accords be preserved and implemented by all to avoid the spectre of renewed confrontation among Lebanese citizens and to strengthen the institutions of the State. All parties concerned must contribute to efforts to reinforce the institutions of the Lebanese State.

56. The continued self-acknowledged involvement of Hizbullah in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic is not only in breach of the disassociation policy and the principles of the Baabda Declaration of 2012, but also carries the risk of entangling Lebanon in regional conflicts and undermining the stability of Lebanon and of the region. Furthermore, it demonstrates the failure of Hizbullah to disarm and its refusal to be accountable to the very State institutions that the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) was intended to strengthen. The reported involvement of Hizbullah and that of other Lebanese elements in fighting elsewhere in the region remains of concern.

57. Countries in the region that maintain close ties with Hizbullah should encourage the disarmament of the group and its transformation into a solely civilian political party, in accordance with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004), and in the best interests of Lebanon and of regional peace and security.

58. In that regard, it is important that decisions taken from the earlier National Dialogue be implemented, specifically those relating to the disarmament of non-Lebanese groups and the dismantling of the bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada.

59. I strongly condemn all violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, as they undermine the credibility of Lebanese security and State institutions and give rise to anxiety among the civilian population. I renew my calls for Israel to adhere to its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions and to withdraw its forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and the adjacent area north of the Blue Line, and to immediately cease its overflights above Lebanese airspace. The

repeated alleged use of Lebanese airspace by the Israel Defense Forces to strike targets in the Syrian Arab Republic is deeply concerning and poses a risk for regional stability.

60. This August marked the second anniversary of the horrific explosion at the Beirut port on 4 August 2020. No one has yet been held accountable. I reiterate my call for Lebanon to take immediate steps to enable the investigative judge to conduct a swift, impartial, thorough and transparent investigation into the explosion, in line with the demands of the Lebanese people for accountability and justice. The independence of the judiciary must be respected. I also reiterate the need for a thorough and transparent investigation into the deadly clashes in Tayyounah on 14 October 2021 and the assassination of Lokman Slim.

61. As the Special Tribunal for Lebanon concludes its judicial proceedings, I trust that Lebanon, in line with its obligations under international law, will ensure that those who are behind terrorist acts are held accountable, and that violence is not committed with impunity.

62. I commend Lebanon for continuing to host the largest number of refugees per capita in the world. Restrictive practices impacting refugees in Lebanon, which have contributed to increased community tension, are concerning. Recalling that refugee returns must be voluntary, safe and dignified, I commend the Lebanese government for seeking constructive engagement in the search for durable solutions for Syrian refugees and encourage them to continue to work with UNHCR on this issue. It is equally important that the international community continues to maintain a robust and united response to the needs of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

63. It is also vital that donors continue to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in view of the dire situation of the Palestine refugees. The role of UNRWA in maintaining stability in the Palestine camps in Lebanon is more critical now than ever and vital to the dignity and security of Palestine refugees. Such efforts are without prejudice to the need for a just resolution of the Palestine refugee question in the context of a comprehensive settlement in the region.

64. I count on the continued commitment of the Government of Lebanon to its international obligations, and I call upon all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). The United Nations will continue its efforts in support of the full implementation of those and all other resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.