

Check Against Delivery

SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR ANGELINA EICHHORST, HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE OF RESTART CENTRE

TUESDAY 24 MAY

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am pleased to be here today to launch the work of the National Steering Committee of "Restart Centre", within a project which aims to support children affected by armed conflict in Lebanon. I am glad to see that representatives of a host of key decision makers, Lebanese and international, public and private, have come together to show solidarity with a better future for children in Lebanon.
- Children's rights are neither optional, nor negotiable. The promotion and protection of children's rights is a priority for the European Union: children are the future, and it is only through them that the values enshrined in international human rights treaties can continue to be upheld. The Rights of the Child are laid out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), its Optional Protocols and many other international and regional human rights instruments.
- In Lebanon's past children have been used during conflicts. The risk that children continue to be enrolled in conflicts remains very real. At the international level, Lebanon has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Children despite signing it in 2001. Lebanon has neither ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Paris Commitments to Protect Children from Unlawful Recruitment or Use by Armed Forces and Armed Groups. It is time for Lebanon to ensure the full implementation of its international commitments regarding children's rights. The first step, is to adopt a law that criminalises the recruitment or use of any children under 18 years by armed forces or groups.

Check Against Delivery

- The National Steering Committee which is being launched today has an ambitious goal: it will ensure that more attention will be given to improve the welfare of children in Lebanon.
- But we expect more than this: in the long term, the very core of European Union support lies in our belief that a more protective environment for children has to be established.
- I wish *Restart Centre* all the success in its ambitious but achievable goals and actions and hope its work will contribute significantly to the welfare of Lebanese children, hence the society as a whole.
- Thank you.