



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union to
the Republic of Lebanon

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PRESS RELEASE

Statement by the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton following her visit to Lebanon

Following her visit to Lebanon (17-18 June), the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton, issued the following statement:

"I arrived in Beirut last night and held talks with President of the Republic Michel Sleiman, Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri and caretaker Prime Minister Nagib Miqati. I visited a community centre together with UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres. I also went to visit the United Nations Interim Force for Lebanon and held talks with Force Commander Brigadier Paolo Serra.

In all these meetings, I reiterated our commitment to Lebanon's security and prosperity. I also recalled our support for Lebanon's official policy of dissociation from the fighting in Syria and for the Baabda Declaration, and I call on all parties to abide by it.

I stressed that de-escalating tensions is a priority. We fully support the Lebanese Armed Forces in their efforts to provide security, protect the borders and preserve calm.

We spoke about the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. I reiterated the EU's commitment to a political solution to the conflict in Syria and the need to bring an end to the violence. The EU fully supports ongoing efforts towards an international peace conference, based on the principles included in the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012.

Concerning the refugee crisis in Lebanon, I said that any country would have struggled with an increase of 25% of its population and commended all efforts to provide protection and assistance.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the EU has come forward with substantial financial assistance, of 1.24 billion Euros for Syria and the neighbouring countries affected by the crisis. This morning, I saw for myself what we are doing to help Lebanon respond to the Syrian crisis. The community centre I visited is emblematic of our approach. It is about working with the most vulnerable. It is about empowering and helping Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities working together.

I expressed the hope that a new Government will be formed soon to address the pressing challenges which Lebanon faces today".