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PRESS RELEASE

Inauguration of EU-funded waste treatment plant in Baalbeck

Under the auspices and in the presence of HE Nabil de Freige, Minister of State for Administration Reform, a solid waste treatment plant, built and equipped with support from the European Union, was inaugurated today in Baalbeck. The inauguration ceremony was held in the presence of Mr. Marcello Mori, Head of the Sustainable Development Section of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon, Members of Parliament of Baalbeck-Hermel, Dr Hamad Hassan, Head of the Municipality of Baalbeck, Mr. Gianandrea Sandri, Director of Cooperazione Italiana, and representatives from local authorities, the civil society and the company that was awarded the tender contract for the operation of the facility.

The EU covered the cost of the construction and equipment of the treatment plant with a grant of €1,426,000. The works were implemented by the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR). The actual processing capacity of the plant is 70 tons of waste per day. The capacity will be extended to 250 tons within the next two years thanks to upcoming EU funds, which will allow for the treatment of all solid waste generated in Northern Beqaa.

Head of the Municipality of Baalbeck Dr Hamad Hassan thanked the European Union as "the main donor and the solid partner," adding that "this facility required a lot of time and follow up until we reached the starting point that will allow for a change in the environmental aspect of the city and of the touristic and agricultural region. It will be a benchmark for the institutional developmental and strategic work that aims to achieve sustainable development, and administrative and practical decentralisation. Communities and local authorities could then play their central role in resolving the many issues."

"As we have been reminded by the recent dramatic developments regarding what is called 'the solid waste crisis', Lebanon is characterised by a cruel lack of infrastructure adapted to the treatment of household waste," Marcello Mori said. "It is in this context of acute lack of infrastructure that the European Union intervention in this sector in Lebanon for more than 10 years falls," he added.

Minister Nabil De Freige said that he was pleased to inaugurate the new treatment plant, adding that "thanks to two new funds from the EU for €14 and €21 million we will launch the expansion of the treatment plant, in addition to designing and constructing a sanitary landfill near the plant." "For the first time in Lebanon, we will have a model for a comprehensive treatment of waste that includes a sorting and composting plant, a sanitary landfill and a bio-gas unit for electricity production." The minister also pointed out that "the second stage will depend on the success of the current stage", highlighting the importance of sorting at the source and that "work will begin between the ministry and civil society, especially Arc-en-Ciel Association, to raise awareness about this issue, which will help, amongst other things, to produce compost that farmers can benefit from."

The support provided by the EU for the construction of the Baalbeck solid waste treatment plant is part of a broader EU-funded project on solid waste management currently targeting the Municipality of Baalbeck, to then target the Union of Municipalities of Baalbeck in a second stage

and the Baalbeck-Hermel governorate in a third stage. This project also foresees the construction of a sanitary landfill and a pilot bio-digester that can produce electricity out of organic waste. It is expected to be completed by the end of this year. In total 60 municipalities representing 400,000 inhabitants will directly benefit from this EU support.

The project for the Union of Municipalities of Baalbeck-Hermel falls under a larger EU-funded solid waste management programme that will target the municipalities of Zahle and Bar Elias, and the Unions of Municipalities of Jeb Jennine, Srar, Tyre, Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil. Actions funded under this programme, which is also implemented by OMSAR, include the construction and extension of solid waste treatment plants and of sanitary landfills that will be managed by the municipalities themselves. A dedicated technical assistance team will also be recruited to support them to fulfill their duties.

EU support complement the current efforts undertaken at national level to limit upstream production of household waste, as well as efforts of sorting at source which will make the recycling and treatment more effective. In total, the EU has already allocated nearly €77.5 million throughout Lebanon for solid waste management.