

Speech of Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon
Opening of Wadi el Salib Tourism Information Center of Reyfoun
Keserwan

Tuesday, 6 November 2012

Check Against Delivery

Excellency Mr Mohamed Fneish, Minister of State for Administrative Reform,

Mr. Nouhad Nawfal, President of the Keserwan Ftouh Union of Municipalities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind invitation to this inauguration. It is always a great pleasure to come to this beautiful region and certainly for an important occasion like this.

Today we will see the concrete results of the European Union's support to municipalities assuming their role in promoting local development. The inauguration of the Tourism Information Center of Rayfoun is particularly symbolic as it bridges and connects the past, presence and future – being located in a meticulously renovated 18th century house. This inauguration also provides us with a good example of the reasons for which we support municipalities: this project could only be realised because a local development plan was established through a participative

approach that took all the local stakeholders needs and proposals on board.

This project is part of a larger programme aiming at boosting the socio-economic development of the Keserwan Ftouh Union of Municipalities through the creation of an attractive environment for tourism activities. Indeed, the valleys of Wadi el Salib and Wadi Daroun deserve more attention. Their natural beauty should benefit from ecological environmental protection and holds a strong potential for tourism development.

A boost to the local tourism sector is expected to bring new job opportunities, and will therefore encourage people to stay and build their future here. The Local Development Office and the Tourist Information Center that are now installed in the beautiful rooms of the renovated villa will work hard towards this objective and we hope that the Local Development Office will continue with its participative approach and will initiate further important initiatives for Keserwan.

Let me warmly thank all those who made this possible: His Excellency Minister Mohammed Fneish and his team at the Ministry working steadily and successfully on achieving results; IMG who provided precious technical support; the various contractors and supervisors who delivered good quality work. But I would like, above all, to express my gratitude and my respect to Mr. Nouhad Nawfal, the President of the Keserwan Ftouh Union of Municipalities, and Mr Georges Sfeir, the

President of the Kesserwan Cluster and Mayor of Rayfoun, as well as to mayors and members of municipalities from the Keserwan cluster, many of whom are amongst us today. All of you are demonstrating a high sense of responsibility and a real commitment to ensuring a more sustainable environment for your citizens.

The European Union will keep on supporting you: because regional development and support to local communities are key for the future of your country; and because sustainable growth and stability can be strengthened by fighting against regional imbalances.

Local actors should have a leading role in their development process all across Lebanon. They are best placed to deliver local services and to take decisions on their development perspectives. This is why the European Union does not only support capacity building of municipalities but also advocates for a decentralisation reform in Lebanon.

I am now eagerly looking forward to visiting the results of your hard work over the last years and once again cordially congratulate everybody involved in this project.

Thank you.