

**Speech by Mr. Diego Escalona Paturel, Head of the Cooperation Section at  
the Delegation of the European Union**

**Exhibition on the occasion of the Universal Child Day**

**Friday, 30 November 2012**

***Check against delivery***

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start with an extract from the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton's declaration on behalf of the European Union, issued on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November on the occasion of Universal Children's Day:

*"Unfortunately, children's suffering is still an everyday reality. Millions of children are exposed to conflict, violence and abuse, do not have access to drinking water or a safe home. Or their voices are simply not heard. I am therefore very pleased that the Nobel Peace Prize recently awarded to the EU will be used for the benefit of children in war and conflict zones. (...) and to advocate respect of children's rights worldwide."*

*The Convention on the rights of the child, which is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty, fundamentally changed the way the international community views children. This year, the EU lobbied globally for universal ratification of its Optional Protocols, which increase protection of children in armed conflict and fight against the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. I am pleased to see that, since the beginning of 2011, a dozen States have become parties to these Protocols and I hope that others will join soon." (pause...)*

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

Thank you very much for inviting me to come to Tripoli. I am already curious to see the concrete results of all the children's achievements under this EU funded project. As you are aware, since 1954, the Universal Children day is celebrated by many countries on November 20 each year to mark the anniversaries of both the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The declaration and the convention spell out the basic human rights that children everywhere must have: *the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.*

One would ask on this occasion: *Are all countries following the international rules related to children?* Unfortunately, this is not the case. Many countries, including Lebanon, fall short of their international commitments that aim at improving children's welfare and on combating impunity for child rights violations.

Children, as a vulnerable group, have been greatly affected by the violent conflicts in the country. After 2006, it was estimated that one third of the dead and wounded persons in Lebanon were children and another significant number of children were also injured. Some injuries resulted in serious disabilities. Many of these children had lost at least one of their family members. On top of that, according to official numbers from the Ministry of Social Affairs, 850 cases of child abuse – ranging from emotional abuse and neglect to physical and sexual violence – have been reported so far this year. This is a shockingly high number.

Although Lebanon's penal code in theory protects the rights of children, it regretfully lacks the necessary mechanisms allowing for its implementation. There is therefore a crucial need to place child rights as a priority in the

Lebanese policy agenda and to implement all necessary measures to ensure the effective promotion and protection of the rights of all children. Lebanon should also consider ratifying all protocols to ensure maximum protection to the children of Lebanon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all share the responsibility and the desire to ensure the well-being of our children. Let us then work together and establish a more protective environment for them. The EU is committed to continue its work in this direction and this will be translated into concrete actions. This will be defined within the new programming document that is being currently negotiated with the Lebanese government and which addresses common values of democracy, human rights and social justice.

I wish *RESTART* all the success in its future actions and hope its work will contribute significantly to the welfare of Lebanese children, hence the society as a whole.

Thank you for your attention.