

UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka
Remarks at the conference “Towards Reform and Recovery:
Implementing the National Anti-Corruption Strategy”

Tuesday, 26 October 2021

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Mikati,
Your Excellency, Minister of State Riachi,
Excellencies,
Esteemed friends and colleagues,

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this important and timely conference.

We are meeting at a watershed moment for Lebanon.

On the one hand, crises are still plaguing Lebanon and the Lebanese people at almost every level: economic, financial, humanitarian, political, judicial.

On the other hand, Lebanon now has a Government in office for little over one month – under the leadership of His Excellency the Prime Minister, and with the important participation of Her Excellency the Minister of State for Administrative Reform.

It has the support of the international community, and on the table are urgent reform and recovery plans that are only waiting for Lebanon’s commitment to start in earnest.

Committing to addressing corruption means choosing the path of reform, choosing the way out of the crisis. It is, above all, prioritizing what the Lebanese people expect.

Poor governance has been a key driver of many of Lebanon’s woes. For too long, a deep accountability deficit and widespread systematic corruption have hamstrung the potential of Lebanon to prosper. This has

been one of the main grievances that Lebanese citizens have articulated in October 2019 and since.

Good governance, in turn, is the foundation for everything – restoring trust, ensuring stability, and for any reform agenda to achieve progress and have positive and sustainable impact.

Good governance and anti-corruption are also at the heart of the so-called “3RF” – the Framework for Lebanon’s Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction that the UN, World Bank and the European Union are joining forces for in support of Lebanon.

Excellencies,

The UN has been at Lebanon’s side in translating the fight against corruption into tangible actions.

We have worked with the Lebanese Parliament on legislation to strengthen the legal framework in line with the UN Convention against Corruption. But more support is needed to put these laws to work.

We have also supported civil society via capacity building and technical assistance, to strengthen its engagement in formal legislative and policy processes. But more is needed to empower women and youth groups and enable citizens to exercise their right to know and to hold accountable those who fail to serve the public interest.

Throughout our activities, we have facilitated for Lebanon access to a global knowledge base and comparative experiences to support innovation and novel ways of tackling the anti-corruption and transparency agenda.

We have provided technical assistance to help Lebanon meet commitments under the United Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), such as its self-assessment report.

Most importantly perhaps, the UN has supported Lebanon in developing its National Anti-Corruption Strategy for which we are gathered here today to reaffirm our commitment, review the progress achieved and outline the way ahead. We are proud to have partnered with Lebanon to facilitate the inclusive process that led to its adoption in 2020, with direct support to the Ministerial Anti-Corruption Committee and the Technical Anti-Corruption Committee .

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Mikati, you have been a strong supporter to this process since its inception in 2011.

Working hand in hand, we have achieved noticeable progress. The Strategy is a milestone for Lebanon, offering a holistic approach that focuses on preventing as well as combatting corruption; and on related reform measures at the national, sectoral and local levels.

It must now be built upon through effective implementation, to give this joint effort the impact it deserves. I urge the Government to waste no time. Tangible outcomes are the strongest demonstration of your commitment to the anti-corruption agenda. We are pleased to reiterate our unwavering support in this regard through the work of the United Nations Development Programme and our partners including the European Union.

Excellencies,

In the case of Lebanon, good governance reforms must place anti-corruption at the forefront. Fragmented technical solutions will not be sufficient; nor will seasonal law enforcement campaigns that often fail to deliver, in the absence of strong institutions and the rule of law, thus leaving the public frustrated more than ever before.

Systemic problems require systemic responses. The challenge at hand requires consistent efforts that pursue inclusive and effective measures to

prevent corruption and reduce its risks, while strengthening the independence and effectiveness of judicial and oversight institutions.

It also requires ministers and leaders of public institutions and businesses to step up and assume their own responsibilities at their respective sectoral levels, such as health, water, energy, education, tax and customs; to introduce meaningful transparency and accountability measures.

Excellencies,

The road ahead is not easy, but we believe that with the following priorities, real progress can be made.

1. Lebanon has committed itself to anti-corruption at the global level when it joined/became a State Party to the UN Convention Against Corruption in 2009. The country is currently undergoing its periodical review, and I hope the Government will finalize its report and take on board the inputs of civil society and ensure that the outcomes of this review will be adequately integrated in the priorities of the Government and the Parliament.
2. Appointing the Board of the National Anti-Corruption Institution and providing the political, financial and technical support to enable it to work in an effective and independent manner.
3. Taking all preparatory steps – legal, administrative, financial, and technical – to ensure a smooth roll-out of the Public Procurement Law next year.
4. Implementing fully two critically important transparency laws: the Access to Information Law of 2017 and its recent amendments and the Law on Asset and Interest Declaration and Illicit Enrichment of 2020.

5. Last, but surely not least, accelerate the finalization and adoption of bills that strengthen the independence, integrity and effectiveness of the Lebanese judiciary in line with international standards and good practices.

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Mikati, Minister Riachi:

Real change is the most powerful message this Government can send to its citizens and the world.

Now is the time for action!

By leading the way, demonstrating commitment, and delivering on the reform agenda this Government has set as its objective, you can be sure the UN and the international community are ready to support you on this mission.

Thank you.