

**Security Council**

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Note verbale dated 22 December 2015 from the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

The Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Office of the President of the Security Council and, with reference to the Mission's note of 23 December 2015, has the honour to forward a copy of the letter dated 20 December 2015 (see annex), from H.E. Mr. Gebran Bassil, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon, addressed to H.E. Ms. Samantha Power, President of the Security Council, concerning Lebanon's comments on Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) of 18 December 2015, on the situation in the Middle East/Syria.

The Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations would be grateful if the present letter and its annex would be circulated as a document of the Security Council.



**Annex to the note verbale dated 22 December 2015 from the
Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to
the President of the Security Council**

Beirut, 20 December 2015

Lebanon welcomes the progress achieved in the discussions of the International Syria Support Group and remains committed to fully supporting the serious work of the group and welcomes the adoption of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) of 18 December 2015, in particular its reference to the safeguard of the interests of countries hosting Syrian displaced persons or refugees, among whom Lebanon holds the highest ratio of refugee both per capita and per square kilometre.

In this regard, we would like to reiterate the concerns that we had previously raised during the two rounds of discussions in Vienna and the one in New York concerning the voluntary repatriation of Syrian nationals displaced into neighbouring countries and in particular into Lebanon. The insistence on the qualification of repatriation as being “voluntary”, even after the end of the conflict raises fears from settling and integrating the displaced Syrians in Lebanon. Nothing would justify, for whatever humanitarian reason, their stay in Lebanon after the end of the conflict as the reasons behind their displacement would have been sorted out. Under these conditions, the choice of those displaced Syrians to remain in Lebanon would be motivated by economic reasons, which make them fall under the category of “economic migrants”, thus entirely leaving the option for the host country to decide on the fate of their sojourn and of their return, which cannot in this case be considered as voluntary. Paragraph 14 of Council resolution 2254 (2015) concerning the plight of Syrian displaced persons and refugees does not fully coincide with the language adopted on this matter on 14 November 2015 in the aftermath of the second round of discussions held in Vienna.

As a matter of fact, Lebanon has been confronted since March 2011 with a mass influx of Syrian nationals displaced into its territory. This unprecedented and exceptional influx calls for exceptional measures. Unlike other countries tempted by drastic procedures to contain the waves of migration (closing the borders, compulsory refoulement, use of police and military means, etc.), Lebanon, though not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees, has kept its borders open, abiding by the principle of non-refoulement, and has voluntarily applied most of the provisions of the said convention.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm that resettlement and humanitarian admission opportunities constitute a partial solution to the crisis. Bearing in mind that settlement and integration of non-Lebanese in Lebanon is prohibited by the Lebanese Constitution, Lebanon believes that the safe repatriation of Syrians into their homeland is the only durable solution for the crisis, and that conditions for such repatriation can precede the achievement of a political solution in Syria. Recent history, particularly in the Balkans, bears witness of such an occurrence. This safe return is conducive to the stability in Syria and contributes to the anticipation of the reconstruction of the country. Moreover, and in line with the international community’s call to set up a Syrian owned and led process that would lead to the end of the conflict, Lebanon is of the view that the safe return of Syrians to their country will strengthen the ownership of the process by the Syrians themselves.

Finally, I would request that the present letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Gebran **Bassil**
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants
