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Fellow citizens,

I am honored to address you today as a candidate to the Presidency, in delicate circumstances overshadowing the country and the region, at a time when the Presidency is recovering its glory and allure thanks to the honorable stances taken by the current President, General Michel Sleiman, after a long era of marginalization and undermining during the times of tutelage, that lasted for over a quarter of a century.

Fellow citizens,

I address you today, completely confident that the Presidency still has, after the Taef Agreement, important powers. It is still able to play a pivotal role in directing the compass of political life in Lebanon in the right, patriotic direction, provided that a President chosen by the people, through their representatives, accesses this position.

The tutelage-imposed marginalization of the presidential role does not express the true constitutional, legal and political position of this role. In fact, a truly sovereign president is well able to properly implement constitutional provisions, in a way to serve national goals and achieve Lebanon's higher interest.

### **The Lebanese State and Entity**

Fellow citizens,

Lebanon is currently going through one of the most perilous periods of its contemporary history. Lebanon, both as a State and an entity, is being subjected to continuous, direct threats. The government cannot afford to share its power or the decision-making privilege, or to have anyone undermining its authority; and the Lebanese entity cannot afford to have

its balance meddled with, its pacts undermined and its coexistence threatened.

In this context, I ask each and every one of you:

Are you satisfied with the miserable situation that Lebanon has come to?

Do you feel reassured regarding your country, your present and your future?

Aren't you all filled with doubts and overcome with anxiety about all what's being prepared in public and in secret, and about what the future holds for you?

Aren't you concerned about the government and its authority, and about our society?

Who among you does not sense the frustration and anger of the youth, and their constant struggle to find an escape through emigration, looking for a job opportunity here and there, fleeing security, economic and political crises?

Fellow citizens,

The ongoing crisis compels us to say that the actions of some, committed with or without full knowledge, are resulting in the undermining of the foundations of the government, and menacing the Lebanese entity, threatening to alter Lebanon's shining image.

Lebanon as we know it is shifting to the worst, slowly dwindling. Lebanon as we know it has become a candle whose flame is slowly dimming, and our biggest fear is that we will get to the point of total darkness; at that moment, the Lebanon we have always dreamt of will be a mere illusion, a mirage, if the situation remains the same, and if we keep dealing with it the same way.

Today, Lebanon was robbed of its administration and its decision. The government is hindered and paralyzed, two steps from turning into a failed State.

Our national responsibility is to stand side by side in order to break the shackles of fear, anxiety and chaos. We must rush to save the Republic, and bring victory to the concept of the state, in the face of the Statelet.

### **Recovering the Government's Authority to Make Decisions**

Fellow citizens,

The confiscation of the government's authority to make decisions has gone too far. It is a problem that must be radically solved until it becomes an exception from the past, and should never be established as a reality that stigmatizes Lebanon's present and future.

The most important challenge that I want to tackle through my candidacy to the presidential elections resides in implementing the constitution, and enforcing the laws in a way to recover the government's authority to make decisions, and to restore the government as a true government!

In order to solve any of our country's problems, we must not rely on wishes and statements alone, but rather take the decision to change, and implement it. The government has the executive tools to concretize its aspirations into procedural decisions, in a way to ensure that all citizens enjoy their natural and political rights, without hesitation or fear, without oppression or terrorism.

The government means esteem; and the government's esteem depends on that of the Presidency.

The Presidency of the Republic is a dynamic starting point for the recovery of the government, from the pyramid's tip to its base. It is a focal point in the path of redressing the situation, encumbered with gaps, malpractices and imbalances.

## **National Constants**

Fellow citizens,

The phase we are going through can no longer tolerate incomplete solutions, unfinished positions or unachieved presidents.

The slogan of “moderation” has turned into a deadly shade of gray, which resulted in a policy of vagueness, indecision and the failure to take a stance.

The political reality that some are praising has turned into submission, surrender, and a bitter endurance in the status quo.

Thus, redressing the national political life cannot be achieved unless we start by clearly admitting a series of constants that are not subject to debate, and that constitute the very essence of the Baabda Declaration and the Bkirki's National Memorandum. These constants include:

1. Lebanon's true and complete independence, under a free and powerful government, capable of imposing its authority, exclusively, in its legitimate institutions.
2. Respecting the Constitution, abiding to its text and spirit, and making sure it is applied without any exceptions... or favoritism, and without rounding any of its corners, for any reason whatsoever.

3. Lebanon's neutrality, as a guarantee to its continued existence as an immune country in the face of the peril of expanding wars and external conflicts towards it, with an emphasis on solidarity with both the Arab and the International worlds in just causes of humanitarian and political relevance, with the Palestinian cause at the forefront.

## **The Taef Agreement**

Fellow citizens,

The challenge facing our entity today is pushing us more and more to adhere to the Taef Agreement as a political framework that would consecrate the spirit of the pact, and foster the constitutional concept of political life. In order to achieve national balance and recover possession of the Republic, we must work on bridging all the practical gaps that have arisen through experience and practice in the past era; those shortcomings have harmed the government's drive, as well as the productivity and the stability of the different institutions, especially when it comes to the Presidency and the electoral law. Let us endeavor to fill these gaps, be it for the sake of presidential work, or for the sake of drafting a new, modern law for parliamentary elections, as soon as presidential elections are through.

The ideal electoral law we aspire to is one that would find the right balance between preserving coexistence and providing a true national representation.

Warped and severed electoral laws have resulted in the marginalization of large categories of the Lebanese people, and led to the fueling of sectarian and religious fanaticism.

## **The Government and the Exclusivity of Weapons**

Fellow citizens,

Presenting my candidacy to the Presidency of the Republic stems from a personal conviction to never squander the noble sacrifices that were made, and are still being made, by the Lebanese people of different affiliations, in order to achieve an impervious country that provides a decent and free living to its people.

This candidacy is a humble attempt to shorten the Road to Calvary, long endured by the Lebanese people, for their adherence to independence, freedom and sovereignty, until the complete achievement of the desired national goals.

Preserving Lebanon requires installing the concept of the government, and the work of all categories of the Lebanese people in order to uphold the State, recognize the supremacy of the Constitution, respect the laws and adhere to the requirements of the establishment of the State. No country in the world will agree to share its power and decision with any political party or movement, or to have its decision subjected to the authority of a certain group. Therefore, there will be no lenience when it comes to the “exclusivity of weapons” in the hands of the government and under its command.

The government we aspire for is one capable of maintaining its territory and its national identity, so that no Lebanese citizen ever feels like a stranger on his own land.

We want a government that protects its people and imposes security, so that safety, stability and tranquility shall prevail.

We want a government that respects its people, provides it with social justice and watches over their dignity.

We want a government that preserves its youth and provides them with all the reasons to stay and be resilient, not a government that exports competencies and genius, and imports burdens and problems.

We want a government that is complete and balanced in its institutions and performance, especially when it comes to transparency and fighting corruption.

## **The Judicial System**

Fellow citizens,

In order to achieve the aforementioned, we must begin with the judicial system. No government is viable without the judicial system; no economy, business sector, security or tranquility is possible without the judicial system.

Our judicial system is not at all fine.

Laws were originally made to make citizens' lives easier – not harder. But this is not the case in Lebanon. The tergiversation in Court work has had a global negative impact on the political, economic and social life of the Lebanese.

The changes that have occurred on the commercial and financial system in recent decades require the reconsideration of the due process enforced in Lebanon, and the placement of the Lebanese judicial system under radical reforms.

The suspension of the disputed rights for years, and in some cases for decades, waiting for the final verdicts, drains these rights of some – if not all – of their value. It also negatively affects the national economic wheel, shakes the trust of the Lebanese citizens in the laws they are subject to, and in the necessity to resort to court in the first place.

Our views on reforming the judicial system in Lebanon are mainly based on the following:

- A great increase in the number of judges.
- Reconsider the time period for judicial proceeding in Lebanon.
- Reconsider the means of carrying out legal notices.

In addition, I will have absolutely no leniency in facing the corruption and clientelism of some judges. Instead, I will work hand in hand with the government and the competent administrations to uncover them and immediately transfer them to inspection and then to the relevant tribunal.

Speaking about judicial reforms will only be complete after addressing two essential issues: the death penalty, and the situation of prisons in Lebanon.

### **The Death Penalty**

Human life is a gift from God; therefore, a crime can never be punished by a sentence that is itself borderline criminal, no matter how just the motives or the reasons of such a penalty are. Therefore, Lebanon must completely commit to abolish the death penalty, in accordance with the codes of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## **Prisons**

Tackling the issue of sentences and their implementation automatically opens the issue of the situation of prisons in Lebanon.

Prison sentences have a clear purpose: deter criminals and rehabilitate them, as a prelude to releasing them back into society and helping them to reintegrate. However, prisons in Lebanon have turned into a stronghold for crime, perversion, terrorism and drug dealing. Therefore, we must hasten to develop the necessary plans and strategies to address this chronic issue.

## **Military and Security Institutions**

Fellow citizens,

Military and security institutions are the backbone of security and stability in Lebanon.

It is true that the role of these institutions was shackled, framed or confined in a certain direction during the era of tutelage, under the service of the Syrian intelligence services and of those in its orbit. But the liberation and independence of Lebanon in 2005 has not brought back these institutions to play their national role; instead, they retain sediments of the era of tutelage, as if nothing had happened.

How is it possible that all the circumstances related to the operations targeting a certain party were uncovered – and that’s a good thing – while those related to the opposite party – starting with the attempt to assassinate Marwan Hamade, the assassination of Rafik Hariri, and up to the assassination of Mohammad Chatah and everything in between –

were ignored and concealed, not revealing a single thread except for the findings of international investigations?

What we need today is to eliminate all impurities from the work of some security and military apparatuses, and put them back on the right, national and balanced track, in order to provide security and protection for Lebanon as a whole and for all the Lebanese, without exception or discrimination.

### **The Economy and Political Reform**

This brings us to the economic situation and the living conditions, which have greatly deteriorated in the past three years. We must seriously reflect on the issue, and develop a clear vision on how to stop the deterioration, and ensure the revitalization of our national economy.

The first step to any economic reform starts with restoring security and stability, as well as the regular work of constitutional institutions. There will be no economic reform without a political reform, and no economic development, social security or a sustainable financial stability without a complete recovery of all components of national sovereignty.

Restoring the government's esteem means restoring trust; and trust is the cornerstone of any economic construction and social reform.

### **Activating the Partnership Between the Private and the Public Sectors, and the Role of Regulatory Bodies**

The first challenge we are facing today is initiating the cycle of growth, and creating job opportunities capable of containing the vigor of the Lebanese youth, stopping the draining flows of emigration and eradicating poverty and unemployment. Growth is the best way to fund social services, necessary for a decent living. It is also the only way to control public debt. Currently, the greatest danger is the increase of public debt at a faster pace than economic growth – and this is what has been happening for the past three consecutive years.

Therefore, in order to launch the wheel of growth, promote production and create job opportunities of good quality and in large quantity, we must first invest in infrastructure, through partnership mechanisms between the private and the public sectors. These mechanisms must in turn be reactivated after a long period of general stagnation that took over all sectors. This goes hand in hand with the activation of the work of the regulatory bodies relative to the said sectors, so as for those committees to constitute a guarantee for the continuation of work, preventing the problem of change in general policies and strategic directions with every new Cabinet.

### **Electricity and Telecommunication**

The first aspect of applying the said partnership should be in the electricity sector, the reform of which has been long awaited. The electricity sector is a burden on the government, and the origin of 40 to 60% of the treasury deficit.

Second, a partnership in the telecommunications sector, the locomotive of growth in today's world: the world of knowledge economy.

Regulatory bodies and the partnership between the private and the public sectors are the groundwork of reform in all ministries pertaining to services. We must hasten to build a system that meets the needs of

growth and participates in controlling expenditure, improving services, and decreasing tariffs, instead of continuing to waste public funds, and burdening future generations with debts they cannot bear, while service remain mediocre.

### **Financial Markets**

Moreover, speaking of partnership requires a study of the necessity to improve financial markets. It is a structural reform necessary for dispersing dangers, developing companies and funding infrastructure projects to raise their productivity, as they are the best way to benefit from the potential and capacities of the Lebanese Diaspora, by putting it at the service of the national economy and social stability.

### **The Code of Commerce**

It has become a necessity to hasten the modernization of the Code of Commerce, and all the laws pertaining to company establishment and operations, as well as their relationship with the public sector and their liquidation. Such laws include the Tax Law, and the Social Security Act and its regulations. There cannot be any employment or any job opportunities in the absence of companies, and employers will have no incentive to legalize their businesses and the situation of their employees as long as the bureaucratic procedure to do so is complicated and costly, taxes and fees are discretionary and as long as bribery is rampant in all administrations.

## **Oil and Gas**

This newfound wealth, which is oil and gas, is a blessing bestowed upon the Lebanese economy. And to prevent it from turning into a curse, because of the quota system and clientelism, I am truly determined to protect this wealth with all my might, by adopting extremely transparent standards and the rules of good governance. This will be applied by contracting mining companies, and establishing a sovereign fund entrusted with the sector's revenue, as well as ensuring this fund's independence and exclusion from all political conflicts, at all costs.

## **Tourism**

Fellow citizens,

If oil and gas are a wealth still unearthed, Lebanon has a wealth of no lesser value, i.e. tourism. We still have not fully benefited from it, due to political and security reasons that are secret to none. In fact, despite the imposed constraints on this and other productive sectors, tourism contributes with 18% of our national income, and offers a similar percentage of employment. Just imagine what it can do in conditions suitable to its growth! Today, tourism has expanded and now encompasses religious tourism, business tourism, healthcare tourism and environmental tourism; all of which Lebanon can excel in. One of the ideas I suggest to raise Lebanon to the top of the list of touristic countries worldwide, is the establishment of a National Committee for the organization of Arab and International forums in all the fields of economics, science and culture. By doing this, Lebanon will be marked on the map of global tourism.

## **Duty Free Zones and Activating Airports and Harbors**

In order to motivate growth, and based on Lebanon's geographical location and its expertise in the service and industry sectors, it is necessary to build duty free zones in several locations in the country, on the coast as in the Bekaa valley. These zones will create employment for our work force, and promote our exports. Creating such zones requires several legislations, and the rehabilitation of the infra structure. A myriad of possibilities are available, such as: building a duty free zone at the center of the Bekaa, and link it to the Hijaz Railway; building another zone specialized in the IT industry in mountainous regions, or others specialized in derivative industries or those related to the oil and gas sector on the shore. Moreover, we should never forget the necessity of reactivating and developing the airports of Klayaat, Hamat and Riyak, for they play a pivotal role in developing the Lebanese agriculture and industry sectors in general, by exporting local production and linking the local market to other markets abroad. In today's world of globalization and communication, Lebanon restrained its entire economic energy in one airport. As we never forget the necessity to develop Lebanese harbors and recovering the operations of each one of them according to their positions, and reviving the touristic harbors of Jounieh and Tyre, also according to the mechanisms of partnership between the public and the private sectors. In fact, each one of these harbors is a driving force for the balanced growth of the country, through the economic development of the regions and all the sectors.

## **Administrative Decentralization**

In the framework of a balanced development, the draft law on administrative decentralization must be approved. The draft law was drafted by a special committee formed by President Michel Sleiman, and it holds many positive aspects, especially when it comes to the administrative and financial independence of the elected local councils. The time has come for the implementation of administrative decentralization, according to the provisions of the Taef Agreement, in order to stimulate local development, as proven in more than one country worldwide.

## **Healthcare**

The time has come for a true healthcare revolution, with the implementation of a mandatory Social Security System that covers all Lebanese citizens, through a low-cost health card provided to all and available to the vast majority, provided that the government will take it upon itself to cover those who cannot afford it. This is a radical change that not only provides medical insurance for all the Lebanese, but it also opens new horizons, as it will fully cooperate with the private sector's insurance companies. This will certainly push the economy forward, provide medical services at the lowest cost and spare the government all the current waste in this sector.

## **Education**

The education sector is in need of a comprehensive review, given its importance on several levels.

Tomorrow's society is a reflection of the reality of today's youth, their education and their knowledge. Lebanon suffers from a large disparity between private education and public education, despite the immense budget that the government consecrates to education.

The real solution lies in the adoption of what is called an Education Card, provided by the government to each young person; it will allow them access to any school or university of their choice. Restructuring the expenditure of education as such contributes to rationalize spending, benefit from the expertise of the private sector and generate positive competition among educational institutions, which is reflected in the rising level of education and the decrease in the level of waste on the bill of the sector of education.

### **Governance and the Fight Against Corruption**

Development policies and social security consolidation programs should undergo radical reforms in the fight against corruption. Corruption is a common chronic disease in most ministries and governmental institutions, in real estate as in the financial departments, in customs and other institutions. Corruption takes many forms such as bribery, illegal transactions and contracts, concealment of official documents, and even the falsification of legal documents, etc.

Administrations were established to serve the citizens and make their lives easier. Administrative staff shall in no case take citizens as their hostage and engage in extortion, fraud and favoritism in order to receive a bribe, or overlook an illegal transaction.

This is actually the situation within the Lebanese government. It requires the activation of the monitoring and inspection apparatuses in all governmental institutions to fight against corruption, oversee the work of civil servants, to ensure that they perform their duties within the scope of the law, and to reward good people and hard workers, while on the other hand punishing offenders, corrupt individuals and negligent employees. It should even sentence some of them to appear before the disciplinary board or the competent judicial authorities.

### **Control of Resources**

The reduction of public spending and the deficit, which recently reached alarming levels exceeding all globally accepted standards, is a matter of life or death. Everyone is aware of the risks posed by the increase in public debt on monetary and financial stability.

In this regard, I would like to point out that there is a huge gap wasting public money and affecting not only security and the economy, but also the image of Lebanon and the Lebanese abroad. I am talking about the chaos and neglect on all border crossings, in the air, sea or land. This opened the door to an affluent economy that grows like a virus in the body of the national economy, and will destroy it on the long run.

I will never settle for the status quo and, from the very first moment, I will take all necessary steps to correct these fatal distortions. Customs legislation will be implemented and fees will be paid by all, without any exceptions to any civil, military or religious parties. I will see to the implementation of this measure, even if we had to abolish certain decrees and draft others, even if it requires a complete change in the structure of departments and the official staff on the borders, customs, in

the Internal Security Forces, in the General Security Forces and in the Lebanese Armed Forces.

I will not accept the waste of resources in the Republic. Those who are used to commit unlawful acts have two choices: get used to abide all over again, or leave.

### **Administrative Mechanization**

In order to facilitate administrative procedures for citizens and businesses, to reduce bribery and corruption, and to fight the burden of red tape, it is necessary to accelerate the implementation of administration software automation, and the adoption of the electronic kiosk as the cornerstone of the e-government project, which requires a complete restructuring of work in order to simplify tasks and shorten delays.

### **Environment**

As we have mentioned growth, we must emphasize on the fact that we aspire to a sustainable growth that does not advance at the expense of Lebanon's natural wealth: its valleys, its mountains, its air and its water. Today, we are faced with many environmental problems such as the pollution of air and water, the crisis of waste management, and the regression of green spaces. There are uncountable programs and reformist ideas in this area. What we need is a mechanism to make decisions and to find the appropriate resources, and I will not spare a moment to do so.

## **Agriculture and Rural Development**

One of the challenges we are facing is to maintain and develop our rural community in a sustainable manner. Local agriculture plays an important role in this regard. We import 80% of our food needs. This is unacceptable in a country like Lebanon, which is mostly agricultural. On the other hand, the sector suffers from declining markets. Therefore, we suggested the creation of duty free zones, rehabilitate airports, reduce the cost of electricity, develop financial markets and the infrastructure and facilitate administrative services. All these proposals will facilitate the sales of local produce and will open new markets. They also provide a stimulus for growers to improve their products in order to conform to international standards of import and export.

## **The Lebanese Diaspora**

The Lebanese Diaspora is an integral part of the Lebanese body. I will not go into the numerous details, but I will only say that I am determined to revive the idea of creating an independent ministry for the Diaspora, because it is the only one capable of monitoring the affairs of the Diaspora and to ensure that they are tended to as we all desire.

## **Women's Rights**

I cannot end before mentioning that our commitment to women's rights is part of our commitment to a civilization based on human rights. I will not overbid on this issue. Recently, society has demonstrated an increased awareness and a willingness to defend women who are exposed to violence and discrimination.

Beyond that, I am committed to review all laws affecting the rights of women and those that limit their ambitions. These laws will be amended so that Lebanese women enjoy their rights as is the case in all civilized societies.

### **The Arab Spring**

Once all the reforms are implemented, Lebanon will rise to the level of developed countries. It will be an example for the Arab world to which it belongs and in which it plays an important role.

The historical and geographical position of Lebanon requires that Lebanon takes a clear stance vis- à-vis regional and international developments, including the Arab Spring, without contradicting the principle of neutrality. Based on accumulated experience and convictions, I support the Arab Spring as transboundary liberation movement against dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, despite setbacks and pitfalls it suffered, and although sometimes it deviated away from the concept of the revolutions for justice and freedom.

In this context, I strongly condemn fundamentalism of all kinds, takfir and extremism. I think they represent the other face of injustice and tyranny and I will tirelessly fight them considering the danger, fatalism and terrorism they incite.

## **The Syrian Situation**

The painful drainage experienced by Syria and the Syrians confirms that the situation will not improve unless the foundation for a new regime is laid, based on the rules of democracy that preserve diversity. Any solution outside this framework exposes Syria to perpetual turbulence. Any given solution must ensure the full return of Syrian refugees to their country. Indeed, this is a priority for Lebanon that cannot be delayed, despite the great compassion we have for humanitarian considerations.

## **The Palestinian Cause**

We ardently support the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to reach a final settlement based on the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Arab summit in Beirut in 2002.

On this occasion, we reiterate our commitment to the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and we refuse naturalization in Lebanon under any pretext whatsoever.

## **Arab and International Legitimacy, and The Shebaa Farms**

With regard to the Lebanese relationship with Arab and international legitimacy, it should be noted that the President is required to respect international legitimacy under the Constitution. In this context, elusion or failure to fulfill Arab and international legitimacy represented by the resolutions of the UN Security Council pose a threat to Lebanon. This

makes the country vulnerable to shocks; it will be a victim of negligence and will face severe consequences. I also reiterate my full support to the international Special Tribunal for Lebanon that seeks to establish truth and justice. It is high time to put an end to the phenomenon of political assassinations and impunity.

Facts have proven that the implementation of international resolutions is inevitable, whatever the obstacles. I respect and adhere to international resolutions pertaining to Lebanon, in particular resolutions 1559, 1680 and 1701. In this context, there is no other way but to apply international laws concerning the delimitation and the demarcation of the borders with Syria, and the resolution of the issues of the Shebaa Farms and Kfarchouba hills.

Therefore, I call on the Syrian government to sign a joint report which recognizes that the Shebaa Farms are Lebanese. This report shall be sent to the UN for international recognition, and to impose Israeli withdrawal from the region.

### **Lebanon's Defense**

The Lebanese government is solely responsible for the protection of Lebanon and the Lebanese, and to respond to Israeli attacks of all kinds. I will not in any way accept the stranglehold of the decision of the government in this regard, nor in the decision of war or peace. The government not only draws its strength from its army and security forces, but also from its legitimate decision-making power and the support of the Lebanese people, the Arab world and the International Community.

Fellow citizens,

Because I aspire to a country and a government, and I carry a project and a dream...

Because we all need a government that protects its citizens and watches over them...

So that you may always have a country and a government that are yours...

So that, with your children, you can enjoy a better future...

And that you may have a Presidency that accepts no compromise, free of any weakness and forever unwavering...

I yearn for real, long-awaited democratic presidential elections that could restore the trust of the Lebanese in Lebanon, and encourage them to regain confidence in themselves and in their potential, if they act in solidarity, without excluding anyone, to save Lebanon.

We all suffered the woes of many wars, the tragedies of tutelage and the hegemony of weapons. I know and feel what you feel, if not more.

I am among those who were taken away from the classroom and into war, when duty called to defend the land and the people. We faced occupation and tutelage with tenacity, until death and detention... to answer the call of freedom. Our brothers have defended the South, where they were born and lived until they died or until they were detained in Israeli prisons ... and they regained their freedom.

The world might not fully realize what we are doing here today, but it can never forget the achievements of our predecessors, Bachir Gemayel, Kamal Jumblatt, Imam Moussa al-Sadr, René Moawad, and Rafiq

Hariri, all the way to Mohammed Shatah, whose friendship and martyrdom I cannot forget as long as I live.

Today, we are stand together to say that Lebanon deserves the best, and that a President driven by the power of the Cedar Revolution and the dream of the martyrs can only triumph ... and we will triumph!

Long live Lebanon !