

Statement

By

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**CONFERENCE ON
SOCIAL PROTECTION IN AN INSECURE ERA:
A SOUTH-SOUTH EXCHANGE
ON ALTERNATIVE SOCIAL POLICIES RESPONSES TO GLOBALIZATION**

27 February – 1 March 2001

Beirut

Excellency, Minister Assa'd Diab, Minister of Social Affairs

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The challenge of future development is to work for inclusive development based on principles of social justice and equity, and to systematically internalize them into national strategies and policies. Meeting the challenges of rapid transformation and change at the global level calls for radical adjustments and new initiatives. On one hand, these adjustments and initiatives aim to seize the opportunities offered by the break down of borders, the opening of markets and the spread of technologies. On the other hand, they should reverse the negative social effects of globalization which can lead to new forms of interdependency almost always associated with inequalities.

The objective of our Conference is to provide a forum for the exchange of experiences among developing countries for formulating inclusive social policies that address some of the negative consequences of globalization. The point of emphasis here is that there are lessons to be learned from alternative policy responses being adopted and diverse approaches being experimented with by other countries in the South.

Although Lebanon may be considered by some to be somewhat self-absorbed, it is also a globalizer in the true sense of the word. It is a country engaged in the international debate on defining a new set of public goods and their relationship to the concept of globalization and international cooperation. The country's open economy and liberal system and the invaluable asset of its human resources, both domestically and through the networks of expatriates in countries throughout the world, provide a solid basis and head start. An important pointer is the country's wealth in the potential of its people. The quality of life that

will be experienced by the Lebanese in the not-so-distant future will be mainly the result of the creative efforts and skillful know-how of the Lebanese themselves.

Nevertheless, global and regional changes pose serious challenges to a small country like Lebanon – they add to national changes required to overcome the remnants of the long period of war and occupation. Lebanon is heavily involved with the challenges of a changing political map at the regional level and with rebuilding and recapturing its role as a regional service center.

A recent turning point was the withdrawal of the Israeli Army from southern Lebanon on 25 May, 2000, after 22 years of military occupation and more than two decades of isolation and deprivation of the region and its people. Hence, the Government put high priority on consolidating efforts and resources for the rehabilitation and reintegration of south Lebanon into the national political, economic and social context. To this end, UNDP is supporting the local population and the government to capture opportunities to unleash the region's growth potential.

Furthermore, we, in UNDP, are proud to be associated with the Ministry of Social Affairs and other national institutions in supporting many important initiatives aiming to enhance development knowledge, promote national dialogue and implement a wide range of participatory development programmes.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has been a leader and pioneer in flagging and addressing critical concerns of social development. For many years, UNDP and the UN System in Lebanon successfully supported the bold efforts of the Ministry in the areas of poverty alleviation, population issues, the promotion of gender and development concerns advocacy for the rights-based development for the disadvantaged. At the official level, much of the data and information needed for the formulation of a social development agenda was produced and lobbied for by the Ministry notably in the area of poverty reduction and follow-up

to the commitments to the World Summit for Social Development and others. These efforts were catalytic in the formulation of national programmes in collaboration with civil society and the private sector.

UNDP, in collaboration with the Council for Development and Reconstruction, also produces the National Human Development Reports. The latest is being currently prepared, entitled “*Choosing to be Prosperous: Globalization and Human Development*”. The previous reports presented a Sustainable Human Development Profile and concerns for Youth and Development, respectively. Also with the Council for Development and Reconstruction, UNDP supports the largest development portfolio for reducing intra-regional disparities. *To this end, UNDP had supported national pioneering programme in Baableck, the Chouf, Southern Lebanon and now Akkar, targetting support to local governance mechanisms including moving at the community, cooperatives and municipality levels.*

The immediate challenge facing Lebanon is that of achieving economic recovery and sustainable insitutional reforms, which will stretch its opportunities and reduce its vulnerability to global changes. Significant reforms and modernization efforts have been achieved in the public sector, notably customs. Information technology and the electronic meduim are being spread through technical cooperation programmes for Administrative Reform. More is needed to develop legislation, and standards and norms according to international standards. Euro-Med agreements and accession to WTO, for which Lebanon holds an observer status, require capabilities in Government and the private sector, to negotiate trade agreements, to enlarge the partnership base in the Arab region and the world.

Lebanon like many countries has a lot to learn from the experiences of others. With this note, I wish to extend a warm welcome to our international guests From China, Korea, India, the Phillipines, Brazil, Costa Rica, South Africa,

Ghana, and Chile, and our neighbors from Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt. We collectively thank them for their efforts and willingness to share – and -- to learn from the experiences and perspectives that will be presented, discussed and debated over the next three days.

I also want to thank our colleagues from the UNDP Special Unit on Technical Cooperation between Developing Countries and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies for organizing this discussion which promises to be rich in substance and exchanges. I also thank them for holding the conference in Lebanon.

Thank you.