

Lebanon sends congratulations on Saudi Arabia's Founding Day

Author:

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BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun sent a cable of congratulations Friday to King Salman on the occasion of Saudi Arabia's Founding Day.

"This occasion holds many bright milestones in the Kingdom's history, which, with its vision and efforts, has managed to reserve an advanced position among the modern countries striving for broader horizons. Saudi Arabia has never spared any effort to defend the just humanitarian and Arab causes, and to preserve the unified Arab world despite all the circumstances in the region," Aoun said.

He further praised the Kingdom's support for Lebanon and the Lebanese, hoping "bilateral ties will recover for the good of the two brotherly peoples."

Aoun also sent a cable of congratulations to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, stressing the importance of this occasion, which "is one of the brightest milestones in the history of Saudi Arabia that overcame many challenges in order to build a brighter tomorrow."

Speaking before a delegation of Arab justice ministers in Lebanon on Friday, Aoun stressed "Lebanon's full desire to cooperate with Arab countries and show solidarity in all issues that help develop and strengthen laws and unify legislation in these countries."

He hoped that the delegation would contribute to alleviating the problems that sometimes arise between the Arab brothers.

"Beirut's doors are open to everyone, especially to the Arab brothers," Aoun said.

Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit and Assistant Secretary-General Hossam Zaki arrived in Beirut on Friday to participate in a ceremony to honor three winners of the award for the best doctoral thesis in the Arab World in the field of law and justice.

Meanwhile, several pro-Syrian regime and Hezbollah figures objected to the position expressed by the Lebanese Foreign Ministry condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib met the ambassadors of France and Germany to Lebanon, who thanked Lebanon for its stance. They requested Lebanon's participation in "adopting the resolution submitted to the UN Security Council on the crisis and voting on it in the General Assembly."

Bou Habib's media office reported that he assured the two ambassadors that "Lebanon stands firm in its position which stems from its keenness to adhere

to the principles of international legitimacy and international law, which constitute the basic guarantee to protecting international peace, order and the territorial integrity of small countries, especially since Lebanon has suffered greatly from the Israeli occupation and its continuous violations.”

However, he said, “Lebanon will abstain from adopting the resolution submitted to the Security Council and the Lebanese position regarding the vote will be considered later on in the event that the resolution is referred to the General Assembly.”

Bou Habib said that he met the Russian ambassador to Lebanon on Thursday and informed him that Lebanon was about to issue “a statement condemning the Russian military operation, but this position is not directed against Russia and we do not want it to affect the solid bilateral relationship.”

Lebanon’s Mills Association feared a wheat crisis since “Lebanon imports the majority of its wheat from Ukraine and all wheat sale deals have been canceled due to force majeure, leading to an increase in the price of a ton of wheat by \$45 to \$50.”

Economy Minister Amin Salam revealed: “Negotiations have been underway for about three months with several countries, including India and the US, in search of alternative sources of wheat. If the situation develops in Ukraine and it becomes impossible to import from it, we will of course resort to other sources.”

Salam explained: “There are five ships in the port of Beirut and other ships are arriving soon, and the Central Bank has approved transferring funds to cover imported wheat. This stock is sufficient for more than a month, and we will work to secure more. We assure the Lebanese that there is no problem in this field.”



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[Abu Dhabi crown prince, Jordan's king discuss regional, international developments](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-02-26 00:57

RIYADH: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed on Friday reiterated his thanks and appreciation for Jordan's strong stance in condemning the terrorist attacks on the UAE and the its solidarity with the Emirates, state news agency WAM reported.

Speaking during a meeting with King Abdullah II, who is on a visit to the UAE

capital, Sheikh Mohammed congratulated him and his wife, Queen Rania, on receiving the Zayed Award for Human Fraternity, in recognition of their regional and international efforts and initiatives on supporting peace and values of tolerance and coexistence.

King Abdullah said he takes pride in the “strong, historical fraternal relations that bind the two countries and their peoples,” Jordan’s Petra news agency said.

He added that Jordan stands with the UAE in the face of all threats to its security and stability, reiterating condemnation of the Houthi attacks on the UAE, and stressing that the security of the UAE and Jordan is indivisible. The two sides discussed prospects for developing bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international developments.





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Fri, 2022-02-25 23:22

WASHINGTON D.C.: The US will continue to engage with Russia over efforts to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, even though Moscow's invasion of Ukraine had made it a "pariah on the world stage," State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday.

Price said US officials would now only engage with Russia counterparts on

issues of “fundamental to our national security interest.”

That includes the talks to revive a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, including Russia, Price said.

“The fact that Russia has now invaded Ukraine should not give Iran the green light to develop a nuclear weapon,” Price added.



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[UN: More Syrians need aid now than at any time during war](#)

Author:

By EDITH M. LEDERER | AP

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Fri, 2022-02-25 22:05

UNITED NATIONS: More Syrians need humanitarian assistance now than at any time since the country's civil war began in 2011, the UN's deputy humanitarian chief said Friday, a sign that "the world is failing the Syrian people."

Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya told the UN Security Council that this week's assessment of humanitarian needs found that 14.6 million Syrians will depend on assistance this year, a 9 percent increase from 2021 and a 32 percent increase from 2020.

"This cannot be our strategy," she said, stressing that Syria now ranks among the 10 most food insecure countries globally, with 12 million people having limited or uncertain access to food.

Msuya said Syria's economy is spiraling further downward, food costs keep rising, and people are going hungry. The cost of feeding a family of five with only basic items has almost doubled over the past year.

Families are now spending on average 50 percent more than they earn, which has meant borrowing money to get by, she said. This has forced "unbearable choices," including pulling children, especially girls, out of school and increasing child marriages.

"Female-headed households, older persons without family support, persons with disabilities, and children are disproportionately impacted," Msuya said. She urged donors to respond generously to the UN's upcoming humanitarian appeal for Syria for 2022, which will be geared toward "increasing resilience" and access to basic services, including water.

"We need more funding and we need to scale up early recovery programming alongside our life-saving work," Msuya said. "But most importantly, Syrians need peace."

Geir O. Pedersen, the UN's special envoy for Syria, told the council that militarily, "any of a number of flashpoints could ignite a broader conflagration."

He cited as examples mutual shelling, skirmishes, and incidents involving improvised explosive devices across frontlines in the northwest, northeast and southwest as well as violence across international borders. There also have been drone strikes in the northeast, Israeli strikes in the south and in the capital Damascus, and security incidents on the Syrian-Jordanian border which the Jordanian government says are related to drug smuggling.

"It is plain that there is a stalemate, that there is acute suffering and that a political solution is the only way out," Pedersen said.

He announced that a 45-member committee representing the Syrian government, the opposition and civil society will resume talks in Geneva on March 21 on draft constitutional reforms, and the co-chairs have agreed to future sessions in May and June.

Syria's conflict that began in March 2011 has killed half a million people and displaced half the country's pre-war population of 23 million, including more than 5 million refugees mostly in neighboring countries. Though fighting has subsided in recent months, there are still pockets controlled by the Syrian opposition, where millions of people live.

A 2012 road map to peace in Syria approved by representatives of the United Nations, Arab League, European Union, Turkey and all five permanent Security Council members calls for the drafting of a new constitution. It ends with UN-supervised elections with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate. A Security Council resolution adopted in December

2015 unanimously endorsed the road map.

At a Russia-hosted Syrian peace conference in January 2018, an agreement was reached to form a 150-member committee to draft a new constitution. A smaller 45-member body would do the actual drafting, including 15 members each from the government, opposition and civil society. It took until September 2019 for the committee to be formed.

Pedersen said he is concerned that Russia's invasion of Ukraine this week could make it more difficult to get the "international diplomacy" needed for a political process to implement the road map and bring peace to Syria, which is a close ally of Russia.



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plight of Palestinian prisoners

Fri, 2022-02-25 21:56

RAMALLAH: The joy of freed Palestinian prisoner Hisham Abu Hawash was matched only by the delight of his family and friends, as well as the hundreds worldwide who followed his 141-day hunger strike.

Abu Hawash was released on Feb. 24 after spending 16 months in Israeli detention.

The 40-year old construction worker from Dura, Hebron, was first arrested by Israeli forces on Oct. 27, 2020 and placed under a six-month administrative detention order.

Later, the order was arbitrarily extended to Feb. 27, 2022.

Israel released Abu Hawash at the end of his sentence amid growing Palestinian public anger, as well as criticism from international human rights organizations, the EU and UN.

However, Abu Hawash's case is just one of many. Of the 4,500 Palestinian political prisoners held by Israel, 540 are being detained without trial. Among them are 41 women and 140 children under 18.

Israeli prison authorities imposed strict punitive measures on Palestinian prisoners following the escape of six inmates from Gilboa prison in September 2021.

Qadoura Faris, director of the Palestinian Prisoners Club, told Arab News that inmates face daily problems caused by the prison administration, which is seeking to destroy their collective efforts over the years to improve living conditions in detention.

He said that this process follows an Israeli committee's recommendation to "make the prisoners' lives difficult."

Israel has arrested almost 1 million Palestinians since its occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in 1967, Faris said.

"No sun has risen since the beginning of the Israeli occupation without daily arrests," he added.

Detentions are part of a systematic plan to sap Palestinian communities' will to resist and also to create fear, Faris said.

Despite the relative calm in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, human rights organizations say that even something as minor as a Facebook post can lead to arrests and a trial if Israeli authorities view it as incitement.

Israeli security targets Palestinians aged from 19 to 25 in order to deter them from protests and activism, while fines imposed on prisoners by Israeli

courts swell the Israeli budget.

Meanwhile, the struggle of dozens of Palestinian prisoners continues from behind bars, even as dozens are enrolled with universities and are pursuing studies at all academic levels.

Some have contested legislative elections while serving time.

The education initiative was led by Marwan Barghouti, a senior Fatah leader serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison for leading the second Palestinian intifada from 2000 to 2004.

While Palestinians consider those behind bars in Israel “freedom fighters,” many Israelis describe them as “terrorists,” saying they tried to kill Israelis and should die in prison.

The issue touches almost every family and neighborhood, and most Palestinians believe that the Palestinian Authority should make prisoners’ freedom a top priority.

Prisoners and their families hoped the election of US President Joe Biden would kick-start the Israel-Palestine peace process, and that prisoner releases would be a crucial issue in any negotiations.

However, as these hopes fade, it appears only an expected prisoner swap between Hamas and Israel can deliver freedom to those, including the infirm, women and children, who have spent more than 20 years behind bars.



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