"Overcoming Divisions: A Conference for Lebanon's Future"
Maison du Futur in collaboration with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation
Bikfaya, May 14, 2025

At a pivotal moment in Lebanon's history, transitional justice, reconciliation, and rebuilding the state based on a new social contract emerge as essential pillars for shaping the country's future. Standing at a political and social crossroads, Lebanon now has a rare opportunity to reconsider its national framework in light of the rapidly evolving regional and international context, and in response to its citizens' aspirations for a more just, equitable, and stable homeland.

In this context, "Maison du Futur" inaugurated its conference titled *"Overcoming Divisions: A Conference for Lebanon's Future"*, in the presence of a distinguished group of officials, national figures, experts, intellectuals, and media professionals. The conference is part of the center's 50th anniversary celebrations and marks the beginning of a year-long series of events throughout 2025 that will address the major political and social challenges facing Lebanon and the region, seeking practical approaches to build a state grounded in citizenship, justice, and fairness.

The participation of a group of Lycée students stood out, reaffirming the role of the new generation in envisioning a future capable of transcending the legacy of division and building a renewed Lebanon.

Address by President Amine Gemayel, Founder and President of Maison du Futur:

In his opening remarks, President **Amine Gemayel** welcomed the attendees and emphasized the importance of their presence, which reflects a diversity of affiliations and a shared desire to build a unified and reconciled Lebanon. He stressed that overcoming divisions is not merely a slogan but a national necessity for Lebanon to remain a unified, sovereign, and viable state. He noted the continued post-Taif fragility, including sectarianism, lack of trust, and foreign interference.

He pointed out that the conference would tackle these challenges through three central sessions focusing on: collective memory and national identity, peaceful means of addressing internal conflicts, and strengthening national resilience and sovereignty in the face of external pressures.

He concluded by stating that *Maison du Futur* has always served as a space for awareness, reflection, dialogue, and building shared visions for a better future, thanking the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for its partnership in organizing the event, as well as all the speakers and participants.

Address by Mr. Michael Bauer, Resident Representative, Konrad Adenauer Foundation – Lebanon Office:

Mr. **Michael Bauer** underscored the importance of the conference held under the theme *"Overcoming Divisions: A Conference for Lebanon's Future"*, co-organized with *Maison du Futur*. He noted that Lebanon is at a defining moment that requires an honest and inclusive national dialogue, praising the Taif Agreement as a roadmap for coexistence that remains unfulfilled. In the ongoing efforts to rebuild the state and restore stability, he stressed that dialogue is essential and central to the Foundation's mission in Lebanon.

Bauer emphasized that dialogue is not merely an exchange of views, but a tool to build trust between communities, bridge conflicting historical narratives, and create a shared vision for a peaceful and sovereign Lebanon. He added that the conference provides a vital platform for listening, debate, and finding common ground, pointing out that while we reflect on the past, our focus should be on ensuring unity and sovereignty in the future. He expressed hope that the event would help explore ways to strengthen Lebanon's national resilience and create a country where diversity is a source of strength rather than division.

He concluded by thanking the speakers and organizers, extending special appreciation to *Maison du Futur* and its president Amine Gemayel, and calling for an open and responsible dialogue that contributes to a more stable and united future for Lebanon.

First Session: "Remembering the Past and Imagining the Future"

The first session, titled *"Remembering the Past and Imagining the Future,"* was moderated by Mr. **Abboud Bejjani**, CEO of GEN and a board member of *Maison du Futur*. It featured Professor **Paul Carmichael**, Professor of Public Policy and Governance at Ulster University; Professor **Joe Maila**, Professor of Geopolitics, Mediation, and International Relations at ESSEC (where he also directs the Mediation Program); and Professor **Jean-Paul Chagnollaud**, Honorary University Professor, author, and Director of the Institute for Research and Studies on the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Mr. **Abboud Bejjani** took the floor and thanked President Amine Gemayel for the invitation to participate in the conference and to moderate this session, which focuses on the topic of reconciliation and the concerns or ambiguity that often accompany the post-conflict and post-war phases. He explained that reconciliation does not only mean addressing past issues, but also requires confronting the fears and doubts that persist when the consequences of conflict are not adequately addressed. For many, the inability to face the past can hinder their ability to envision a brighter future.

He added that today's session will examine key questions related to reconciliation: How can societies effectively deal with the complexities of recovery? What role do truth and dialogue play in addressing fears and uncertainties? And how can lessons learned from various contexts contribute to our understanding of current challenges?

Prof. Jean-Paul Chagnollaud then took the podium and began his intervention by thanking President Amine Gemayel for the kind invitation**.** He said that history has shown that most, if not all, societies have gone through deep crises and violent conflicts, but many have, to varying degrees, managed to find a path to recovery. However, the road to justice and reconciliation is not a single, straightforward one—it is multiple, intricate, and filled with complexities. There is no single answer or ready-made formula.

The major dilemmas facing post-conflict societies may be summed up in three terms: **punishment, reconciliation, and reconstruction**.

1. Punishment – Between Holding Perpetrators Accountable and Seeking Justice

In contexts of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide—such as in Rwanda or South Africa—a central question arises: **Should perpetrators be held accountable? And how?**

In **Rwanda**, the genocide against the Tutsis stands as one of the most horrific crimes in modern history. After the war ended, the Tutsis assumed power and initiated a two-track justice process: international justice aimed at prosecuting the major perpetrators, and a traditional community-based justice system called **Gacaca**, which allowed thousands of suspects to appear before their communities to seek reparation and restore balance in villages that witnessed massacres. Gacaca focused on community-based accountability and "judicial truth" through collective testimonies and identifying those responsible. It succeeded in enhancing community participation and handling over a million cases in a decade, though it lacked adequate legal safeguards for the accused.

In other cases, **general amnesty** was proposed—not to forget, but to move beyond the past. While this option may offer political stability, it has serious consequences, particularly for victims who feel doubly punished—first through the violence suffered, and second through the denial of justice.

In **South Africa**, general amnesty was part of the political settlement that enabled a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy. It was a kind of "conditional truce," where amnesty was not free but part of a broader vision for building a new state. The **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** did not aim to prosecute all perpetrators but sought truth in exchange for amnesty. The public acknowledgment of crimes committed—before victims and society—was considered a cornerstone of reconciliation and nation-building. The aim was to establish a "narrative truth" that integrated both victims' and perpetrators' experiences, fostering collective healing. While this approach helped reduce political tension, it also raised questions about fairness to victims and their right to judicial justice.

2. Reconciliation – Between Deep Wounds and Rebuilding Trust

Justice is not only about prosecuting perpetrators or compensating victims; it also involves **rebuilding collective memory** and establishing a **shared national narrative** that acknowledges past wounds without erasing them.

In this context, transitional justice is more than legal tools—it becomes a **social and cultural act** that redefines relationships between the state and citizens, between individuals and communities, and between victims and aggressors. Reconciliation is a complex concept: not merely forgiving, but mutual recognition of humanity and a collective promise that such atrocities will not be repeated.

Reconciliation occurs at multiple levels:

- Among political actors.
- Within communities affected by conflict.

- In towns and villages that suffered violence.

It is not just a handshake or a political slogan; its fundamental goal is to **restore trust, reduce uncertainty, and build a renewed national commitment**.

So, how can we achieve reconciliation?

At its core, transitional justice is not only what happens in courtrooms, but what remains in the **nation's memory**. It is a society's ability to look in the mirror, recognize its past, and collectively vow "never again." One of the most prominent reconciliation mechanisms was the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** in South Africa, led by Bishop Desmond Tutu. The Commission heard testimonies from both victims and perpetrators and presented a massive three-volume report to President Nelson Mandela—symbolizing the weight of the past and the need to confront it.

A central element of reconciliation is **truth**, or at least the acknowledgment of part of it. Without recognizing victims and their rights, and without compensating them even symbolically, reconciliation remains shallow or superficial. **Victims must be heard and acknowledged** for genuine reconciliation to occur.

3. Reconstruction – Building the State Anew

Reconciliation cannot be completed without **reconstructing the state** in a way that fosters unity and trust, and reduces division and uncertainty. This requires action on three fronts:

1. **Institutional and Functional Reform:**

A key question arises: Should those involved in past crimes remain in power? Or is institutional restructuring essential to rebuild trust and clean the state apparatus?

2. **Constitutional Foundations:**

Post-conflict moments call for a new constitution—or at least a new social contract—that ensures inclusive participation and enshrines equality before the law.

3. Public Policy Priorities:

- **History and education**: Rethinking the official historical narrative and educating future generations on pluralism and inclusive national identity.
- **Justice**: Reforming the judicial system and guaranteeing its independence to protect rights effectively.
- **Monopoly of legitimate violence**: As Machiavelli said, state-building cannot be completed without disarming armed groups and consolidating state control over arms.

We have reviewed a wide range of international experiences in transitional justice—some successful, others not. The lesson is not to copy blindly but to **learn and adapt**. Choosing the appropriate model is not just a legal or political decision—it reflects a new **social contract** that the emerging state must build after collapse, whether through punishment, amnesty, or truth.

Ultimately, **transitional justice is not only about the past—it's about building a fairer and more equitable future**. It "forces us to recognize the limits of law and compels us to exercise moral imagination to envision a different future. It is not just about managing the past, but about the courage to imagine a better tomorrow."

Lebanon, like other post-conflict states, has the **core potential to succeed in this path**, if political will and a sincere national vision are present.

Intervention of Professor Paul Carmichael

Professor **Paul Carmichael** began his intervention by thanking the organizers for the invitation, and he extended a special greeting to the young men and women in attendance, emphasizing that they represent the real hope for Lebanon's future and are the most important participants today. He noted that his participation is part of an academic research project he is currently working on, and that his intervention would focus on several points he considers directly related to Lebanon's journey toward building its future on new foundations.

Comparing Lebanon and Northern Ireland

Carmichael explained that there are fundamental differences between the experiences of Lebanon and Northern Ireland, despite some points of similarity. While Lebanon is an independent and sovereign state, Northern Ireland is a constituent part of the United Kingdom and still grapples with a political conflict over its constitutional future—whether to remain within the UK, pursue independence, or join the Republic of Ireland.

He pointed out that Lebanon has suffered—and continues to suffer—from direct foreign interventions in its internal affairs, whereas Northern Ireland's experience was relatively insulated from such external interference. However, both countries share a deep colonial legacy that has left its mark on their political and social structures.

At the state level, he noted that Northern Ireland enjoys a strong institutional structure and an independent judiciary, despite disagreements among some communities over the legitimacy of the state. In contrast, Lebanon suffers from institutional weakness and a declining level of citizen trust in its institutions.

Although the population of Northern Ireland represents only 3% of the UK's total, the region's unique geographical, historical, and political context has given it a prominent position. Its natural beauty has attracted attention, but the armed conflict was intense and violent until the signing of the **Good Friday Agreement**, which brought a relative end to the violence—although it did not fully establish a sustainable **positive peace**.

Challenges of Peace and Ongoing Structural Violence

Since the agreement was signed in the late 1990s, Northern Ireland has continued to face recurring challenges, including government resignations, institutional paralysis, and the continued presence of "peace walls" separating Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods—a situation reminiscent of apartheid.

Carmichael noted that youth—especially young women—are today at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts, despite lingering voices that seek to revive violent memories of the past. While some violent incidents have occurred since the agreement, they remain limited compared to the level of violence seen in the past.

Factors that Contributed to the Agreement

Carmichael spoke about a number of dynamics that helped pave the way for peace, most notably:

- The East-West rapprochement at the end of the Cold War, which reduced international tensions surrounding the conflict.
- The growing global awareness of the need to stop terrorist financing, especially with the rise of international counterterrorism efforts.
- The critical role played by research centers and think tanks advocating for dialogue as an alternative to violence—similar to the work being done today by **Maison du Futur** (The House of the Future) in Lebanon.
- The prominent role of the United States, particularly President Bill Clinton and mediator George Mitchell, in creating a conducive environment for a comprehensive political agreement.
- The role of the European Union, which provided extensive support and funding to peace and stabilization efforts.

He recalled a symbolic moment that captured the spirit of reconciliation: Queen Elizabeth II's meeting with Irish officials in Dublin and her visit to a memorial honoring those who had resisted British rule—an unmistakable sign of a willingness to turn the page and look toward the future.

Recommendations for Lebanon

In concluding his intervention, Professor Carmichael offered a number of recommendations drawn from the Northern Irish experience that could be useful for Lebanon:

1. **The importance of keeping dialogue channels open**, stressing that discussion within one's own group is not enough—dialogue must also include those we disagree with, or even fear.
2. **Mutual acknowledgment of pain and suffering**, affirming that no one has a monopoly on victimhood. Pain is human—whether it is the pain of a mother who lost her son, or a mother of a perpetrator who suffers in a different way.
3. **Broadening participation in dialogue**, ensuring that it goes beyond politicians and leaders to include all segments of society—with a special and central role for youth.

4. **Celebrating differences**, viewing diversity not as a threat but as a source of richness.
5. **Promoting the concept of responsibility alongside rights**, as rights cannot be separated from duties. Citizenship requires a mutual commitment between the state and its citizens.

He concluded by stressing that the path to peace is long, and that overcoming the past requires courage, vision, and a collective determination to build a shared future.

Professor Joseph Maïla's Intervention

Professor **Joseph Maïla** opened his intervention by thanking President Amine Gemayel for the invitation. He praised the remarks of the previous speakers, noting the difficulty of adding anything after such profound ideas had been shared. Nevertheless, he affirmed that his personal and academic experience had led him to a fundamental conviction: it is impossible to emerge from chronic crises without inclusive and effective dialogue — a principle that applies perfectly to the Lebanese context.

1. The Taif Agreement and the Lebanese Experience

Professor Maïla compared the Taif Agreement with the Good Friday Agreement that ended the conflict in Northern Ireland, considering both to be turning points in the histories of their respective countries. However, he noted that the Taif Agreement, more than 30 years after its signing, has still not succeeded in lifting Lebanon out of its structural crisis.

He pointed out that many of the issues the Taif Agreement was supposed to address have been under discussion since the 1970s — as if political time in Lebanon has stood still for half a century.

2. The Conceptual Framework of the Taif Agreement

Maïla reviewed the four main pillars addressed by the Taif Agreement, which continue to weigh heavily on Lebanon's present reality:

1. **Redefining Lebanese Independence:**

   The agreement recognized Lebanon as the final homeland for all its citizens. However, questions of sovereignty — such as border demarcation (with Israel at sea and with Syria on land) — remain unresolved.

2. **State Structure:**

   The agreement defined the distribution of powers among the three presidencies, but the practical application of this balance is still a matter of constant dispute and political tug-of-war.

3. **Lebanese Identity:**

Lebanon's sectarian diversity is supposed to be a source of richness, but it has become a battleground for identity struggles, with some sects trying to impose their vision at the expense of others.

4. **State Orientation and External Allegiances:**

Lebanon is an Arab country open to the West. However, the deep vertical division in external loyalties (Iran, the Gulf, the West...) weakens its foreign policy and generates emotional alignments and clashing identities, rather than fostering a unified national stance.

3. Why Has National Reconciliation Not Been Achieved in Lebanon?

Professor Maïla raised a fundamental question: why has national reconciliation not been achieved in Lebanon despite all the conflicts and political settlements it has experienced? He identified several key obstacles:

- **Sectarian Rigidity:**

Sects no longer see themselves as foundational components of the state but as closed cultural groups incapable of coexisting with the "other" — a form of ethnographic withdrawal. He remarked: "An expression that's become common in Lebanon today, reflecting this ethnographic retreat, is: *'They're not like us'*, in reference to the 'other'."

- **Unresolved Question of the State's Structure:**

Is Lebanon a centralized state? A decentralized one? A federal one? This question has remained unanswered since Taif. Meanwhile, public loyalty continues to revolve around individuals or sectarian leaders, not the state's institutions.

- **Geography and Surrounding Conflicts:**

Lebanon has long remained under the influence of two regional powers: Syria and Israel, and later Iran. A true reconciliation with the surrounding geopolitical environment has never taken place, leaving the country in a state of "perpetual oscillation," like a pendulum.

- **Violence as Discourse and Culture:**

Although militias were officially dissolved, the culture of violence was never eradicated. It still manifests intellectually and rhetorically, through attempts to impose views by symbolic force rather than through dialogue.

- **The General Amnesty Law:**

Professor Maïla discussed Lebanon's approach to past violence through the adoption of a general amnesty law, criticizing this approach as one that legalized forgetting without acknowledging the victims or pursuing any form of transitional justice. He asked a crucial question: *Must we forget in order to reconcile? Or should we first read the past carefully before closing its chapter?*

4. Reflections and Recommendations for Lebanon's Future

Professor Maïla concluded his intervention with a series of thought-provoking questions and observations that deserve further debate, including:

- **External Alignments:** Are the Lebanese people united around strategic choices and external political affiliations? Is it possible to develop a balanced national approach?
- **The Role of the Lebanese Diaspora:** As in the Irish case, Lebanon has a vast diaspora. It is necessary to think about how to integrate this diaspora into the state-building process, rather than leaving it on the margins of national decision-making.
- **Returning to the Concepts of Citizenship and Democracy:** A healthy society cannot be built without everyone's participation in both rights and responsibilities. Dialogue is not merely an exchange of words; it is the ability to incorporate the other's thinking into our political and cultural consciousness.

He concluded by quoting Desmond Tutu, a symbol of reconciliation in South Africa: *"We cannot close the book on the past unless we have read its pages carefully."* He added: *"There may be no final solution, but we can move forward — through remembering and forgetting at the same time — just enough to ensure that the tragedy is not repeated."*

Open Discussion:

When the moderator opened the floor for discussion, a series of questions were raised, reflecting the audience's interest in unpacking the concepts of reconciliation, memory, justice, and the role of individuals and institutions in overcoming the aftermath of war and division.

The first question addressed a fundamental issue: *Should we forget or forgive? And how can forgiveness be achieved when the same political actors remain in power?*

In this context, Professor Carmichael noted that history teaches us that enmity does not last forever and that reconciliation does not occur overnight but rather gradually and through small steps. He reminded the audience that forgiveness can be difficult, especially for those directly affected, and that the burden of forgiveness may fall on the younger generations.

Professor Chagnollaud added that in Rwanda's experience, the question did not even arise, as the Tutsis won and took power. They chose not to establish an international tribunal but instead opted for the local "Gacaca" system to implement transitional justice through courts held on the very soil where blood was shed. He emphasized that justice in Rwanda was a long, cumulative process

based on truth-telling. By contrast, he cited France's experience in dealing with the Algerian War: after the signing of the Evian Accords in 1962, General Charles de Gaulle issued a general amnesty that included perpetrators of torture. This led to an official closure of the chapter without real reconciliation with the victims, whose wounds remained open for decades.

Another question was addressed to Professor Joseph Maïla regarding who holds the responsibility for promoting dialogue and reconciliation. He responded that forgiveness is not granted, it must be asked for — it is not automatic. He stressed the need to write a shared historical narrative, citing the Franco-German reconciliation model, where unified history textbooks were written and taught in both countries. This strengthened mutual understanding and deep reconciliation. He insisted that Lebanon must write a common history, as current Lebanese history books stop at the year 1946.

In the same vein, Chagnollaud spoke of the Élysée Treaty signed in 1963 between Germany and France (Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and President Charles de Gaulle). Just weeks later, the Franco-German Youth Office was established, laying the groundwork for strong relationships between the two countries' youth. He emphasized the crucial role of younger generations in turning the page on the past.

Regarding the role of youth, families, schools, and media, students from the French Lycée asked how to teach children history in a way that contributes to peace. It was explained that the family forms the primary nucleus of awareness, while schools provide the critical tools to deconstruct inherited narratives. The role of media, however, is different — and sometimes problematic — especially given the spread of disinformation. This makes it necessary for consumers to have tools to filter and critically assess content.

There was also mention of MP Sami Gemayel's speech during the government confidence session, where he called for a national reconciliation and the writing of a unified war narrative. It was noted that today's conference serves as an implicit response to that call. There is indeed a real need for a broad committee comprising politicians, civil society representatives, political parties, religious figures, and experts in education and media to address issues related to collective memory, reconciliation, and peace education — particularly considering the powerful influence of social media as a primary source of information for youth.

Another question shed light on violence within the same sect, particularly among Christian groups during the war. It was emphasized that victims need to be heard, not preached to. Peace education starts with listening and acknowledgment, not condemnation.

An additional question from the Lycée students concerned whether genuine reconciliation is possible in Lebanon and what the first steps might be. It was noted that there is no ready-made formula or fixed phases. However, the essence of the matter lies in reshaping citizenship outside the confines of sectarian affiliation. The self-isolation of each group during the 1970s contributed to the outbreak of the war, and its effects cannot be undone without producing citizens liberated from exclusive sectarian identity.

One intervention stressed the importance of highlighting not only separatist tendencies or the idea of "those who are not like us," as Maïla mentioned, but also the factors that drive Lebanese people

toward peace and unity. There is a genuine desire among large segments of society for coexistence, and it is our responsibility to invest in this desire and translate it into dialogical and structural pathways.

Another contribution addressed the diversity of reconciliation models: some countries succeeded through strong centralization, others failed despite adopting decentralization. Without a clear vision of citizenship and justice, Lebanon risks starting its journey from the "wrong man," which necessitates first building its own national unity — one that is neither imported nor externally imposed.

The final question from Lycée students tackled the role of the United Nations and the international community in the post-Taif reconstruction and reconciliation process, asking whether their interventions served Lebanon's interests or were driven by geopolitical agendas.

Professor Maïla responded that accountability begins with a change in mindset. He acknowledged that global models (such as Germany and Italy) show that unity is never achieved overnight but gradually. He admitted that the war in Lebanon was "internationalized," and that the Lebanese were both tools in it and parties to it. He concluded with a powerful metaphor: **"We need to park our problems — not to ignore them, but to face them later with a calm mind and constructive vision."**

Second Session: "Nonviolent Solutions to Internal Conflicts"

The second session, titled **"Nonviolent Solutions to Internal Conflicts,"** was moderated by journalist and writer **Carol Dagher**. Participants included His Excellency Minister of Justice **Adel Nassar**, Mr. **Ali Hamdan**, a prominent political and media advisor to the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament Nabih Berri and an active member of the Amal Movement, and Dr. Mohamed Al-Sammak, a leading Lebanese thinker and advocate for interfaith dialogue.

Ms. Carol Dagher expressed her gratitude to President Amine Gemayel and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for organizing this important conference. She expressed her pride in moderating this session alongside a distinguished panel of speakers. She stated, "Today, we ask ourselves: What are the divisions we face in Lebanon, and how can we overcome them? These divisions are societal, regional, political, and sectarian all at once. How can we restore the rule of law in Lebanon, which has long suffered from violent sectarian conflicts?"

She added, "In a divided society experiencing intertwined internal crises, the state is under great pressure. Distrust of state institutions in Lebanon has always been high due to corruption, favoritism, and clientelism, which has deepened feelings of injustice and inequality. The big question is: What are the real solutions? Are there genuine solutions to restore the rule of law and ensure coexistence among all? How can we resolve conflicts peacefully? What is the role of negotiation in a society like ours? And how do social achievements contribute to peaceful conflict resolution?"

The floor was then given to His Excellency Minister of Justice Adel Nassar, who began by saying, "I am not sure that I will limit my intervention to the topic of justice alone, as what I have prepared

goes beyond this narrow concept to touch on broader dimensions related to the nature of internal conflicts, ways to address them, the limits of democracy, and the role of the state."

First: The Nature of Conflicts and the Difficulty of Defining Them
Resolving local conflicts is not an easy matter, and defining these conflicts itself is subject to debate. In the Lebanese case, it is not possible to pinpoint a clear source of conflict. When weapons are raised, it is often too late for any peaceful solution. We must acknowledge that internal conflicts are rarely purely internal; external factors almost always intervene, as we saw in the Lebanese war, which was not a "civil war" in the traditional sense. While Lebanese parties were at the heart of the battles, the presence of foreign fighters—Palestinians, Syrians, and others—was prominent. This is not unique; even the Spanish Civil War, which began as an internal conflict, became a battlefield between fascism and Nazism on one side and progressive forces on the other.

Second: The Limits of Democracy as a Tool for Conflict Resolution
Many claim that democracy is the solution to avoid violence, but reality is more complex. If democracy alone were sufficient, we would not have witnessed so many coups in countries that follow this system. As Winston Churchill once said, "Democracy is the worst form of government—except for all the others that have been tried." Democracy provides peaceful tools to resolve disputes—such as voting, representation, and public debate—but it does not have absolute power to prevent conflicts. Cases like the Basque region, Northern Ireland, or Corsica indicate that democratic systems do not necessarily end violence.

The motivations behind violence are not always economic. Often, the cause is ideological or religious. In fact, the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the group, as one thinker said, can be stronger than the fear of poverty itself.

Third: Voting Does Not Always Resolve Conflicts
When societies are divided ethnically, sectarianly, or regionally, the mechanism of "majority rule" is insufficient to guarantee justice or stability. In such cases, minorities may view democracy as a disguised dictatorship and resort to violence as a means to defend their existence.

Fourth: Democracy Needs Complementary Pillars
Ballot boxes alone do not guarantee democratic stability. They must be accompanied by mechanisms such as:

- National dialogue,
- Active political parties,
- Trade unions,
- Media and public opinion,
- Mutual trust between citizens and institutions.

In Lebanon, the concept of dialogue has often been associated with stagnation and temporary compromises, rather than constructive solutions. Nevertheless, dialogue remains one of the tools to overcome crises, as happened in 1968 when the state contained political violence by resorting to early elections.

Fifth: State Building and Restoring Trust
To prevent the recurrence of conflicts, we need a strong state capable of:

- Integrating all citizens regardless of sect or affiliation,
- Enhancing trust in public institutions, especially the judiciary,
- Respecting citizens and, in return, protecting itself from collapse or exploitation.

When law and institutions are used to hold officials accountable, this becomes an entry point to resolving conflicts peacefully. But without an independent and trusted judiciary, building a modern state is impossible.

Sixth: Towards a Just Constitution and a Shared National Narrative
What is needed today is a constitution that guarantees rights for all, without reinforcing dominance or excluding any party. When citizens are subject to political and sectarian clientelism, their trust in the state and their compatriots vanishes. Lebanese must be able to confront the past, understand their differences, and seek a shared historical narrative that respects the stories of all components without negating them. Lebanon has succeeded, despite everything, in building a common cultural and social denominator that forms a suitable ground for dialogue. True, there are branches and differences, but they remain governed by this common denominator, which we must strengthen and expand.

He concluded by emphasizing that peace cannot be imposed by force nor built on exclusion. Lebanese must learn the art of dialogue and accept one another to move toward sustainable peace that makes violence a past memory that cannot be repeated.

Dr. Muhammad Al-Sammak took the stage and said, "Allow me to begin with a two-chapter story that embodies two integrated dimensions of the Lebanese experience: the political dimension and the human dimension."

Chapter One: The Holiday Inn Hotel to Bikfaya

This was before the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war. I was in the lobby of the newly opened Holiday Inn Hotel in Beirut. My friend, journalist George Oumeira, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Al-Amal*, approached me, visibly upset. He asked about my proficiency in English and then requested my help with translation because Sheikh Pierre Gemayel was in the hotel hall receiving a Canadian parliamentary delegation that spoke only English. I went with him, and the dialogue was delicate and sensitive. The delegation members tried to convince Sheikh Pierre that the Christians in Lebanon had no future except by turning Lebanon into a Christian state, just as the Israelis turned Palestine into a Jewish state, and they promised to support this. Sheikh Pierre firmly responded, "Israel itself has no future if it does not do as we do: coexist with Muslims and build a shared life with them." The discussion continued without either side being convinced, but it clearly reflected Sheikh Pierre's vision of the state and citizenship.

Chapter Two: Bikfaya

Years later, when the civil war was raging, news arrived of a death in Sheikh Pierre Gemayel's family. I went with Prime Minister Salim Hoss, whom I was advising, to offer condolences. Hoss spoke to Sheikh Pierre: "When will we choose the best military officer as army commander, the best banker as governor of the Lebanese Central Bank, and the best educator as president of the Lebanese University?" Sheikh Pierre replied indignantly, "And where is the national commitment?" Hoss became angry and retorted, "Are you questioning our patriotism?" The question arises: What changed Sheikh Pierre's position between the Holiday Inn and Bikfaya? The answer is linked to the Palestinian weapons that entered Lebanon and the different perspectives Lebanese had towards them. At first, we Muslims did not see the negative implications of the extremism in the use of these weapons inside the country, while the Christians perceived them differently. Sheikh Pierre's concern and his stance on citizenship and loyalty pushed us toward self-criticism. Indeed, this path began under the leadership of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, to reconsider our positions and assessments. This story sheds light on the complex relationship between internal and external factors but confirms that the Lebanese tragedy is not just a conspiracy but also a national responsibility.

Lebanon the Message – A National Experience with Human Significance

Years ago, I was invited to a conference at the Rockefeller Center near Lake Como, alongside researchers from Ireland and Yugoslavia, to compare the crises these countries had gone through. The goal was for each of us to learn from the other's experience. At that time, and I repeat it today, the Lebanese experience is not only the property of Lebanese people, despite my deep pride in my Lebanese identity; it is a universal human experience. Sometimes the Vatican understood this experience more than we did. For example, the Second Vatican Council radically changed the Catholic approach to Islam. At the First Vatican Council, Islam was regarded as heresy, and it was explicitly said that Muhammad "led his nation astray and to hell," and all Jews were held responsible for crucifying Christ. But after the Second Vatican Council, Islam became recognized as a religion "in which we worship God together."

The Vatican chose Lebanon to carry this human message, resulting in the Synod for Lebanon, then the Synod for the Middle East. The Vatican wanted Lebanon to be a beacon for religious freedom, which the Pope described as the "crown of freedoms," surpassing the concept of "tolerance," which the philosopher Nietzsche considered an insult implying superiority, in favor of the concept of equality in rights and religious freedom.

This major shift in concepts was embraced by Al-Azhar with active Lebanese partnership in preparation and drafting, led by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, establishing a new discourse between Christianity and Islam based on equality rather than superior tolerance.

Lebanon… The Ongoing Mission

Despite these intellectual and political achievements, these approaches have not succeeded in containing the internal fragmentation we still suffer from today. Nevertheless, Lebanon's pioneering role has not disappeared, especially through Islamic declarations — and I emphasize

"Islamic" — issued by Al-Maqasid Charitable Association, Al-Azhar, the Mecca Conference, the Amman Messages, and other Islamic institutions working to reformulate Islamic thought in relation to the other. Hence, it must be emphasized that Lebanon cannot afford division because it is not merely geography; it carries a human message that transcends its national borders, and its role is not its own because it is entrusted with this human message. Saving Lebanon means saving the idea of pluralism, coexistence, and inclusive citizenship. Lebanon's national unity and singularity are not just slogans but existential choices and historical responsibilities.

Mr. Ali Hamdan then spoke, saying that our constitution states in its preamble a constant declared by Imam Musa al-Sadr that Lebanon is the final homeland for all its citizens, and to be so, Lebanon the state must embrace justice and partnership among all Lebanese as equal citizens in rights and duties. Are we like that?

Discussing the importance of continuously seeking nonviolent solutions as alternative means to resolve conflicts, he identified the causes of internal conflicts in Lebanon as follows: political sectarianism that adopted a system of sectarian quotas, leading to corruption, lack of social justice, and accountability; the failure to implement some provisions of the Taif Agreement, especially abolishing political sectarianism, removing parliamentary sectarian quotas, establishing a Senate, and broad decentralization.

Regarding nonviolent solutions, he pointed out that they all assume dialogue, reconciliation, building trust, and acceptance of the other through a nonsectarian national upbringing. He considered that the challenges to adopting nonviolent solutions in Lebanon are many, most notably: dominance of sectarian and religious discourses, absence of political will for dialogue, weakness of state institutions, and lack of accountability.

He concluded his intervention with a set of recommendations to strengthen nonviolent solutions, chiefly: full implementation of the Taif Agreement, enhancing citizenship education, encouraging media to spread a culture of dialogue and tolerance, empowering civil society to participate in decision-making and accountability, and adopting a stable electoral law, neither horizontal nor vertical, to ensure fair representation.

He said that with the consecration by Pope John Paul II of Lebanon as the land of the message, encounter, and laboratory of dialogue, and with Imam Musa al-Sadr's prior affirmation that Lebanon is a country of a message, we are called to love Lebanon and work for its people's security, unity, and stability, thanking President Amine Gemayel for the invitation.

Open Discussion:

After the session concluded and the floor was opened for discussion, a series of questions were raised, which can be summarized as follows:

One attendee asked a question about nonviolent solutions, wondering why the issue of illegal weapons for the resistance was not raised. The response affirmed support for the official discourse that the only legitimate weapon is that of the state, noting that there is a dialogue led by President Joseph Aoun on this matter.

Then, a question was directed to Mr. Ali Hamdan regarding his concept of the civil state he mentioned. He explained that this topic is broad and requires a separate conference. He added that Lebanon differs from most countries because of its sectarian composition, and it is possible to reach a consensus on foundations upon which a civil state can be built, such as protecting the sects. He mentioned that the Senate could have been a solution to reassure the different sects.

One participant pointed out that laws related to personal status represent the first steps toward building a civil state, but Hamdan responded that the crisis in Lebanon lies in the failure to implement what is agreed upon, noting that they agree on laws but do not enforce them. He emphasized that good intentions and love of the homeland could bring this goal closer. He also noted that the Lebanese government, during President Elias Hrawi's era, approved civil marriage, but this approval was not followed by implementation and was shelved.

In another question about the difference between a secular state and a civil state, and whether Hamdan preferred a secular state, he replied that this is a complex issue and a matter of division in Lebanese society, with no consensus on it. He stressed that reducing excessive sectarianism is the beginning of the path toward a civil state, and that the transition to a secular state is a long process requiring time.

Michel Naim referred to the phrase "They resemble us" and considered it inappropriate, affirming, as a Lebanese Orthodox Christian, that every Lebanese, regardless of sect, resembles him. He questioned whether there is genuine coexistence among Lebanese or if they live a "shared death" due to conflicts. He stressed the need to seek coexistence through decentralization, distinguishing between abolishing political sectarianism in the sense of treating citizens solely as citizens, and sectarian representation.

One participant asked Mr. Hamdan about the importance of dialogue and respecting its decisions, recalling previous experiences in 2006 and 2008 when dialogue led to agreements, including neutralizing Lebanon from regional conflicts, but some parties did not abide by them, causing tensions. He stressed the need to convince all parties, especially Hezbollah, an ally of the Amal Movement, to commit to the dialogue results for them to bear fruit.

Hamdan replied, affirming that political differences may exist, but he considers everyone partners in the homeland. He noted that Israeli attacks on Lebanon occurred before Hezbollah existed, considering dialogue essential to dispel fears and commit to the results for stability.

Roger Dib posed a question to Dr. Muhammad Al-Sammak inspired by the symposium's title, noting that the recent summit between Saudi Arabia and America gave the impression of the

beginning of a new future in the region based on peace and reconciliation with the modern era. He asked how Lebanon could interact with this development and be an active part of the new region.

Al-Sammak answered that Islam does not know a religious state in the sense of a state ruled by clergy, but rather believes in a national civil state whose citizens legislate according to their interests, noting that Al-Azhar jurisprudence in the 19th century affirmed this principle. He stressed the necessity of building bridges of respect and love with others as they are.

His Excellency President Amine Gemayel addressed Dr. Al-Sammak, praising him as a symbol of dialogue and cooperation between sects and religions in Lebanon and the Arab world. He referred to his continuous efforts and good relations with the Vatican and Al-Azhar, which contribute to building bridges of understanding. He affirmed that Hamdan's words reflect optimism for the future, recalling the days of Imam Sadr and Imam Shamseddine and his book *"My Will"* as a basis for meeting in Lebanon. He expressed hope that their teachings would return as an entry point for salvation and for Lebanon to regain its natural role and understanding among Lebanese, thus marking a significant part of the path traveled.

Session Three: Strengthening National Resilience

The third session titled "Strengthening National Resilience,"took the form of a dialogue between His Excellency Walid Jumblatt and His Excellency MP and President of the Lebanese Kataeb Party, Sheikh Sami Gemayel, moderated by media professional and academic Albert Kostanian.

Kostanian began the session by thanking La Maison du Futur and President Amine Gemayel for organizing the conference. He allowed himself to move beyond the word "resilience" as stated in the session's title and its English and French equivalents, "flexibility," because both terms carry a defensive symbolism, as if the country is enduring and being flexible against an external force trying to bend it. He asked, "Isn't it time to go beyond the concepts of flexibility and resilience to something more positive, which is proposing a Lebanese project that transcends fear of the other and that we present to the region and the Arab world? And what is this project?"

He continued: "After one hundred years since the declaration of Greater Lebanon, the great Ghassan Tueni wrote a commentary: 'A century for nothing.' Allow me, for the second time, to disagree with him because during this century we all became attached to this country, which is a final homeland with final borders. So, has the time come to move from an entity to a homeland? And after fifty years since the end of the Lebanese war, which I also disagree with Ghassan Tueni's description of it as the war of others on our land, isn't it time to move to a state of peace? The military war has nearly ended but the war still exists in thought and practice. Isn't the failure to conduct a population census a continuation of the war? Isn't denying women the right to grant citizenship to their husbands and children a continuation of the war? Time has no value in Lebanon and the Middle East in general, and we live under a temporary constitution while awaiting the transition whose mechanism was defined by the Taif Agreement."

To respond to these questions, the floor was given to His Excellency Professor Walid Jumblatt, who said: "We cannot ignore what is happening in the region at this historic moment, and what is happening is positive. Who would have expected the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime and the

meeting between the new Syrian president Ahmed Al-Sharaa and U.S. President Donald Trump? Both have happened. We are facing a new Middle East, and all we hope for in this pivotal phase is to preserve the Sykes-Picot maps, and we care about maintaining Greater Lebanon, which was established by the French.

Today, preserving these maps is conditional on the solution in Palestine. I welcome the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in coordination with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan regarding Syria. Regarding the Abraham Accords, who said we oppose them? They started in Lebanon in 2002 through the Arab Initiative: land for peace. Where is the land today? If this systematic destruction of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank continues, there will be a change in the Sykes-Picot Agreement and its maps, and then we must hold on to our patriotism.

In Lebanon, there are major challenges. I also disagree with Ghassan Tueni's description of it as a war of others on us; it erupted among Lebanese due to historical accumulation and lack of trust. We want a new Lebanon and must offer new proposals, update the Taif Agreement after implementing the clauses that have not yet been implemented, and enact a new election law because the current law preserves the dichotomies. The current debate over Hezbollah's weapons fuels opposites so they remain and feed each other. We must return to what unites us. Lebanon has always had political differences, and we had two currents—the alliance and the approach—and both were in government. We must attempt to create a large centrist party with a new election law. Whoever reconciles with the Sharia can remove the Israeli presence from southern Lebanon. The Lebanese army is doing its duties, but it requires further and greater empowerment to cover all the borders. The army needs support, and I do not see any connection between supporting it and financial reform.

I call for benefiting from the emergence of this new Middle East, and I want to thank Trump for lifting sanctions on the Syrian people, which has a great positive impact on us. However, he must also realize that it is time to stop supplying Israel with weapons that are annihilating the Palestinians."

Kostanian addressed Sheikh Sami Gemayel with the following question:

"Do you share Walid Jumblatt's optimism, and are we internally ready to build a state?"

Sheikh Sami Gemayel said that "The presence of Walid Bey among us is appreciated and reflects the kind of Lebanese reconciliation we aspire to in the future."

In response to the question, he said "Let us set things in their proper context. There are political differences between us and Walid Bey, and we belong to different generations. Perhaps this enriches this encounter, which seeks to draw a new vision for Lebanon's future.

As a Lebanese, regardless of my political affiliation or position, I aspire for my children to live in a better country, to have a more secure future for all Lebanese, to live in safety, to trust their country, and to be able to build their future here.

This year, we have emerged from a time filled with occupations, dictatorships, and external tutelage. For the first time in fifty years, Lebanon is free from foreign guardianship, and there is no internal party that believes it can impose its will on others or make decisions on their behalf. This is a historic opportunity to build something different from what we have experienced in the past.

From this perspective, we hope that Walid Bey's rich and difficult path serves as an example from which we can learn the positives and avoid repeating the negatives.

What led to the war of 1975 and to our current situation is our fear of each other and the lack of trust between us. Today, I don't see anyone seriously working to solve this issue. The sectarian sentiment remains extremely high in Lebanon. We have never once sat together around a table to present our fears and aspirations to one another.

Trust is like a vaccine—it protects us from future divisions. As long as it is absent, conflicts will keep recurring.

As Lebanese, we are naturally averse to openly wounding one another or speaking frankly. Yet in private, we destroy one another and weave conspiracies. We lack the courage to tell each other the truth and express our fears so we can close one chapter and open a new one based on transparency.

Reconciliation is essential. The wound is deep and present, and we cannot deny it. We have a structural problem with trust among the Lebanese, and if someone gets a chance to overpower another, they will take it.

As long as we allow political parties that thrive on sectarian tensions to exist and continue their practices, the wound will not heal. The wound is deep, and we must have the courage to clean it, disinfect it, and allow it to close properly—rather than just putting a bandage on it, which will only cause it to fester again. The pain will be great, but it is necessary.

Everyone supports the idea of a reconciliation and truth-telling conference, which I called for during the government confidence session. The only barrier preventing it from becoming a reality is the presence of illegal weapons. For Lebanese to sit together, the weapons must be removed.

Walid Bey said that the President of the Republic is addressing this issue with wisdom and composure, away from political one-upmanship, and is working with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Hezbollah to resolve it.

The issue of weapons is a contentious one and must be addressed wisely. After that, we can sit together to identify and address our mutual fears in a first stage, then look into the Taif Agreement, keep what is good, develop what needs to be developed, and introduce whatever new elements are required.

We must think about developing the state—its system, structure, governance, education, and healthcare—and encourage Lebanese citizens to improve themselves. We are pushing in this direction, and we hope that the Socialist Party will help us rebuild the bridges between Lebanese."

Albert Kostanian:

"Walid Bey, do you agree with the description of the deep wound among the Lebanese? And is the dialogue proposed by Sheikh Sami sufficient?"

Walid Jumblatt:

"Dialogue is always good and necessary. The wound Sheikh Sami speaks of has cumulative and historical causes. In the reconciliation that took place in the Mountain, we were able to close two wounds: the wound of 1860 and the wound of the war that began in 1975. Today, I don't think anyone can incite as we allowed ourselves to do in the past. With the presence of social media, accountability is greater, and political leaders no longer have the same freedom to speak and act as they please. Dialogue is absolutely necessary, and we must give it a proper framework."

Sami Gemayel:

"What you said is true. The reconciliation between Bikfaya and the Mountain took place with President Amine Gemayel and was completed with Patriarch Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir. I witnessed it personally through the warm welcome I received in the Mountain. The same happened when we came together in Martyrs' Square after the assassination of President Rafik Hariri. Today, there is a Shiite wound that remains open, and we must work together to heal it. Efforts in this direction are required from us and from the Shiite community. After everything this community has endured, if we don't have the ability to embrace it and extend a hand, the process of rebuilding the nation will be hindered. There are voices within the Shiite community speaking in this direction, and we must develop a joint plan to address this wound so that we can move forward together. With the absence of Prime Minister Saad Hariri's moderation from the scene, there is a growing trend toward extremist rhetoric that may overshadow the voice of moderation. Clearing hearts and sitting around one table is the only way forward."

Walid Jumblatt:

"The area north of the Litani River is a sensitive topic when it comes to disarmament. The Israelis don't give you the chance to reach an agreement on this matter, especially with their ongoing attacks that further deepen the Shiite wound. There's another point I personally have reservations about, and that is the matter of peace with Israel. We must postpone it for now because, as I said, the wound is still very deep in Lebanon, and it is further compounded by the wound of Gaza. When all Arabs make peace with Israel, our time will come. But we hope that, in doing so, the Arabs do not forget the fundamental question: *'What will become of Palestine?'"*

Albert Kostanian to Sheikh Sami Gemayel:

"What is Lebanon's stance on peace and normalization with Israel? And do you understand Walid Jumblatt's concerns?"

Sami Gemayel:

“We cannot make any decision—especially one of this magnitude—before building the state. Half of Lebanon is in ruins and, as we said, there is a deep wound that must be acknowledged and addressed. Truth-telling and reconciliation must take place, as they alone will lead to trust in the state, and from there to trust in whatever path it chooses. It’s clear that we cannot engage in peace unless all Lebanese agree. There is undeniably a regional trend toward peace, and Lebanon cannot remain outside this consensus. It seems we may end up being the last country to sign peace, especially since Syria appears likely to enter into this process before us. First, we must repair relations among the Lebanese, heal the Shiite wound, rebuild, and establish a functioning state.

We are determined not to accept illegal weapons, just as we reject any Israeli occupation of even a single inch of our land. The international community can help us achieve both goals simultaneously. We want to rid Lebanon of all foreign occupation. The President of the Republic’s stance on ending occupation and eliminating illegal weapons is clear. Once those two objectives are achieved, once the Shiite wound is healed, and once we negotiate the borders with Israel—then we can observe the direction of the Arab track and align with it. The regional question today is whether the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be able to make peace without the establishment of a Palestinian state—and on the other hand, whether Trump will be able to pressure Israel into accepting one.

In conclusion, regardless of regional changes, and in principle, we cannot remain in eternal war with any of our neighbors. Peace must eventually be made. Eternal war that destroys Lebanon and the Lebanese people’s trust in their country should not be our ambition. Our ambition should be lasting peace.”

Albert Kostanian to Walid Jumblatt:

"Do you have any comment on what Sheikh Sami said?"

Walid Jumblatt:

"In terms of the economy, aid may come, but we don’t want to go back to the past and receive assistance randomly. A master plan is necessary, and I believe one was previously developed — I remember that the Maison du Futur prepared such a master plan. We must examine the problems of each region beyond just infrastructure titles. In Tripoli, President Rafik Hariri wanted to rehabilitate the refinery and revive the oil pipeline to Kirkuk, but Syria prevented him because of the Baniyas pipeline."

Albert Kostanian to Walid Jumblatt:

"On the internal front, what about Lebanon’s governance and preserving the Taif Agreement? Should the dialogue address the development of the Taif Agreement? And what direction should be taken — internationalization, secularism, or abolishing sectarianism?"

Walid Jumblatt:

"I hope for the abolition of political sectarianism, but I don't know if we can actually accomplish it, because sectarianism is deeply rooted. The sectarian system was implemented after the massacres of 1860, based on the Ottoman millet system. We must hold a dialogue about this. There's a question I'd like to ask Sheikh Sami: today, there is talk about reintroducing mandatory military service, which undeniably played a role in bringing together young Lebanese from all sects. Do you support it?"

Sami Gemayel:

"Today, no — and the main reason is the economic situation. Young people won't be able to work if it is implemented, and the majority of Lebanese today, especially the youth, are in desperate need of employment. I fear it would lead to even greater youth emigration. When the economic situation improves, I would definitely support it.

If I may, I'd also like to respond to the last question Albert posed to Walid Bey. I believe there are two fundamental pillars for building a new Lebanon, which I drew from a book by the Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka, titled *Multicultural Citizenship*. Some may think that the concepts of 'citizenship' and 'pluralism' contradict each other, but in reality, they are complementary and do not cancel each other out. This concept is different from that of that of inclusive citizenship. It is based on the principle of full equality between citizens and takes citizenship beyond legal equality to include recognition of the cultural identity of each group. It therefore rests on respecting diversity, acknowledging it, and protecting it.

Switzerland is an example of multicultural citizenship: people feel proud of their Swiss identity and national belonging, yet the system allows them to teach their own language, protect their culture, live their traditions, and preserve their historical heritage and cultural affiliations. When the state acknowledges and protects diversity and pluralism, people love it more. But when diversity is suppressed or erased, people grow to resent the state.

I believe any truth and reconciliation conference should be based on these two principles. We don't want anyone to adopt the other's narrative, but to acknowledge it. Together, we can build the future and weave a shared story based on our experiences. We must write a common experience founded on the finality of the homeland, its borders, and our shared will to live together — with Lebanon being open to both East and West, and a meeting point for freedom and religions."

Albert Kostanian:

"You spoke about alliances, approaches, and the importance of moderation and centrism. Can we imagine Taymour Bey Jumblatt and Sheikh Sami Gemayel forming a centrist alliance?"

Sami Gemayel:

"I hope we can eliminate all excuses used by extremists so that centrism and moderation can grow stronger — because the continued existence of abnormal conditions (like the oppression of one

group or the presence of illegal weapons) weakens moderation and fuels sectarian tensions. That's why I stress the importance of addressing the Shiite crisis to prevent its exploitation. The issue of disarmament doesn't only concern Hezbollah; it must also include personal weapons, which I sometimes consider even more dangerous than rockets because they're used on a daily basis. Their presence undermines the rule of law. The solution to strengthening moderation lies in removing the justifications of those who exploit grievances to incite sectarian tension — and whose rhetoric continues to dominate."

Open Discussion:

The discussion was opened with a question about Minister Walid Jumblatt's position on the issue of peace with Israel, in light of regional developments. One attendee commented: "We used to say that Lebanon would be the last country to sign peace, after Syria, but it seems Syria has preceded us. So, do we return to the armistice agreement and uphold the Arab initiative and the two-state solution?"

Jumblatt responded, affirming his commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative, noting that even countries involved in the "Abraham Accords" conditioned their participation on the establishment of a Palestinian state. "The fundamental question, as I said before, is: Will there even be land left to establish this state?" he added, pointing out that a ceasefire does not stop destruction and considering that "peace with Israel" is a matter internal to each country.

The discussion shifted to the concept of reconciliation, and Sheikh Sami Gemayel was asked: "Is the reconciliation you speak of related to past disputes or present concerns?"

Gemayel explained that what is needed is a comprehensive national workshop, including a review of the historical experience. He noted that Lebanon still does not have a unified history book, as history books generally stop at 1946, and asked: "Can a country be built if it cannot write its own history?" He stressed the necessity to review Lebanon's political experience and the causes of the civil war, during which Lebanese fought each other, considering that "the problem is that each side believes it is right and that the others are wrong." He also raised fundamental questions about the political system, asking: "Is it healthy? Is the sectarian system capable of building trust among Lebanese?"

Gemayel spoke of the "demographic concern" as an unacknowledged factor, citing the Beirut municipal crisis as an example. He called for a national candid discussion about cultural and demographic concerns and regional challenges. "We, as citizens — Christians, Druze, and Muslims — must carry each other's concerns and stop waiting for external forces to solve our problems," he said.

Jumblatt supported the idea of writing history by secular historians, citing a lecture by French historian Eugène Rogan as a model to emulate. He mentioned that he is working on his memoirs,

which will be published next June, and affirmed that Rogan's book *Damascus Event* is an example that shows the possibility of objectively documenting events.

Sheikh Sami Gemayel reiterated the idea of narrating historical facts without imposing a single viewpoint, citing the example of Bachir Gemayel's election, and emphasized the necessity of presenting all opinions without adopting any one of them.

Jumblatt replied, "You are right," and recounted a personal story about Bachir Gemayel when he asked him: "Why did you send your militia to the Mountain?" Bachir answered: "To protect the Christians," to which Jumblatt responded: "You were late." He added, "If Bachir were still alive, perhaps the course of events in the country would have changed."

Dr. Ramzi Abu Ismail spoke, noting that "the reconciliation that happened was among leaders, not among the people." He confirmed that national identity remains unsettled and needs deep reform, especially since Lebanon's Arab identity is contested. He called for reconciliation that goes beyond political leadership and reaches society.

Jumblatt responded: "Why not? Don't take me back to the feudal era! We believe in inclusive identities — Arab and Lebanese — and do not want isolated Druze identities." He warned against attempts to distort religious texts, including the *Book of Wisdom*, and the negative influence of some external parties.

Ms. Carol Dagher raised a question about "positive neutrality," wondering whether this concept might be an escape from political sectarianism and help protect sects within a comprehensive national framework.

Gemayel supported the idea, while Jumblatt said that neutrality is not decided by the Lebanese alone, citing Switzerland, which declared its neutrality in 1915 by international decree.

Finally, Jumblatt cited an example from Spain, where the state decided to remove statues of Franco except for one that remained standing. He added: "I told them not to remove this last statue, so the memory remains alive."

When Kostanian asked: "Should we leave one statue for Hafez al-Assad?" Jumblatt answered clearly: "No."

The conclusion of the conference proceedings was then announced.