



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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February 19, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Via email:

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The August 4, 2020 explosion in the port of Beirut killed almost 200, injured thousands, demolished neighborhoods, leaving many homeless – a vivid and traumatic manifestation of all that has beset Lebanon for years: a severe economic and financial crisis, political corruption, and a stream of refugees that amounts to more than a third of Lebanon’s total population. Long-standing divisions have led to a political impasse, so there is no functioning government. In addition, the involvement of regional powers appear to be subverting Lebanon’s traditional role as a pluralistic, tolerant, and neutral nation within the Middle East.

As chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I want to convey an appeal by Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai, patriarch of the Maronite Church and president of the Assembly of the Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of Lebanon. In his remarks on February 9, 2021, Cardinal Rai called for the United Nations to convene an international conference to “help save Lebanon” from total collapse and bankruptcy.

The Holy See has continually advocated for Lebanon’s importance to the region and the world. Saint Pope John Paul II reminded us that Lebanon “is more than a country, it is a message of freedom and example of pluralism for East and West.” Most recently, Pope Francis [wrote](#) a letter to the Lebanese people on December 24, 2020 in which he called on them to “once more be a people of fraternal solidarity,” whose identity is to show the world “mutual respect, coexistence and pluralism.” In his February 8 [address](#) to the Diplomatic Corps, the Holy Father noted the uniqueness of Lebanon where Christians, through their educational, health, and other services, form “an intrinsic part of Lebanon’s historical and social fabric.” He warned that “a weakening of the Christian presence risks destroying internal equilibrium and the very reality of Lebanon.”

Though increasingly marginalized, the Maronite Church remains a well-respected entity within Lebanon, able to play a bridge building role if it receives support from the United States. I affirm the sure foundations outlined in Cardinal Rai’s “Active Neutrality” proposal articulated on August 7, 2020 offering a critical road map to save Lebanon from complete collapse. I urge you to direct the U.S. Mission to the United Nations to help mount an international effort to bring about a solution to Lebanon’s crisis, seeking the cooperation of allies and regional powers. It is

in the interest of the United States and the stability of the Middle East that Lebanon serve as an example of a pluralistic nation where different religions can coexist.

Sincerely yours,

+ *David J. Malloy*

Most Reverend David J. Malloy

Bishop of Rockford

Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops