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**Statement to the U.S. House Committee, Washington, Feb. 16, 2000 by Etienne Sakr(Abu-Arz), Chairman, Guardians of the Cedars, and Leader of the Lebanese Front.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to be in this prestigious council and to speak on behalf of my voiceless, besieged and tormented people.

As you know, Lebanon is totally occupied by foreign forces; the Israelis control about ten percent of the territory in the south, and the Syrians occupy and control the rest of the country - which includes the capital Beirut, and all government institutions.

Syrian occupation is the root evil and the cause of Lebanon's tragedy and responsible for the loss of its political independence. Syria's military grip and intelligence services decide all fundamental questions concerning Lebanon.

Asad's tyranny has humiliated the government and the national Parliament that acts as a timid rubber stamp. Democracy has been violated for many years and elections are a sham.

Beirut is Lebanon's Vichy. Syria has confiscated Lebanon's political agenda, preventing our country from freely representing itself within the peace process in the Middle East.

In order for Lebanon to recover its political independence, reassert its special national character and contribute to the emergence of a Middle East based on freedom, dignity, and peace, we demand to be released from all foreign occupation -especially Syrian which is the most perilous - in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Resolution 520 which called for "the withdrawal of all non- Lebanese forces from Lebanon."

Syria has flagrantly disregarded the Taif Agreement of 1989 that demanded a Syrian military pullback from Beirut. Meanwhile, Syrian colonialism has flooded our land with close to 2 million Syrian laborers causing massive unemployment among Lebanese people and the closing down of our local industries and factories.

Syria imposes itself as the self - appointed arbiter of Lebanese politics, using levers of security and intelligence. Manipulating Lebanese institutions, like the army and the media for its hegemonic purposes.

The Lebanese live in fear of being arrested and kidnapped, jailed and tortured, for any statement of opposition, or act of resistance. Amnesty International has documented the inhuman reality of thousands of missing Lebanese persons in Syrian jails, while hundreds of thousands of others have fled to Canada, France, Brazil, the United States and elsewhere.

For over 20 years, the security zone in south Lebanon has served as a free Lebanese region that has kept the flame of liberty burning. Our courageous soldiers in the Southern Lebanese Army, of whom more than 600 have been killed and many more wounded in action, assure that the vision of a Free Lebanon will not vanish. But the Southern Lebanese Army (the SLA), with its more than 2000 soldiers -Christians, Muslims, and Druzes - requires a new and revolutionary purpose: it must be renamed The Free Lebanon Army (FLA), adopting an activist offensive military strategy that diverts from its present static defensive posture. This revitalized army should be strengthened morally and militarily in order to be able to face the forces of Iranian Islamic terrorists (Hizbollah) and Syrian Arab occupation.

Our struggle in the south would kindle the flame of freedom throughout Lebanon and reawaken our people's national spirit. We must act to save and secure the Lebanese population in general and in particular the Christian population who are constant victims of assault, arson and rape in the towns and villages under Syrian domination. And we dream of bringing back home the exiled patriots who were forced to flee Lebanon.

The goal of Syrian domination of Lebanon is achieved by the manipulation of the Israeli - Lebanese equation - such that Syria is to remain the arbiter of Lebanon's political affairs. War and Politics serve as the instruments for Syrian obstruction of peace, and legitimization of occupation over its small Lebanese neighbor.

The principal of liberty can never accommodate foreign occupation, also the project and vision of peace in the Middle East must first require the elimination of the oppression and domination.

Syria is blackmailing Israel by waging a war against her in South Lebanon through Hizbollah in order to get more concessions, and at the same time is blackmailing Lebanon in order to maintain its occupation forces long after a peace treaty is reached.

It should be clear to all reasonable people, that peace and domination are two incompatible realities ... because peace means freedom and not occupation

In no way should Lebanon pay the price for an unreliable and questionable peace, just as it has paid the price of war for the last 25 years.

Syria is trying to persuade the West that she is in Lebanon to serve as a peace -maker and to stop the civil War. But in reality, Syria is a trouble - maker. The Civil War and the Lebanese War with Israel are both Syrian creations.

Therefore, we call upon the United States to take practical and diplomatic measures to expose and declare the illegitimacy of Syria's domination over Lebanon, and to support the Free Lebanese resistance and struggle to liberate our country, according to the principles of democracy, human rights, and self-determination that are sacred to the American political heritage and, principal goals of American foreign policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I come to you from a country with a history of many millennia, a sacred land in the Middle East. But since 1975 our people has suffered an endless tragedy of inhumanity and injustice.

But when we search for salvation, we find an indifferent, cynical, and often hostile world community. We see Europe, America, and no less Israel, courting Syria in the diplomacy of Mideast peace- making. Lebanon is forgotten, abandoned, and crushed under the boots of Hafez al-Asad's troops and proxy warriors.

I ask the distinguished -Members of the Congress: have we the right to be free in our historic homeland? Justice answers yes we have - and I have come here from Lebanon to urge your intervention in order to regain our rights for freedom and sovereignty, and I thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on behalf of my voiceless people.

Please help us to regain our Free Lebanon!

Long Live Lebanon.

The Commander of The Guardians of the Cedars  
Etienne Sacre (Abu Arz).

**This speech was delivered by the Commander at a conference arranged by the World Lebanese Organizations (WLO) in Washington the 27th of June 1998.**

Ladies and gentlemen:

It has been 22 years and the Lebanese tragedy is still going on. Unfortunately, The western world is still watching our tragedy passively, knowing that the major cause of this tragedy is the Syrian occupation of Lebanon.

Syria has deployed 40 thousands soldiers since 1976 all over the country depriving us from our independence and freedom. They have allowed about 2 million illegal workers into Lebanon. This is depriving our economy and creating a serious crisis of unemployment in our country.

What is hurting us as Lebanese is that the western world is allowing Syria to devour Lebanon at a time when Syria still remains on the list of countries supporting terrorism?

It is beyond understanding why some U.S. officials still see the Syrians as peace makers, when in fact they are terrorists and trouble makers. There will be no end to our tragedy as long as Syria is dominating Lebanon. A Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon will be the beginning of a solution to end this tragedy.

We ask, Is the U.S. Administration aware of the Syrian danger in Lebanon and keeping silent? That would be a real shame. Or, is the U.S. Administration not aware of the Syrian danger in Lebanon? That would be a greater shame.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are here today to focus on the real Syrian danger, threatening not only peace in Lebanon, but also peace in the middle east. We have been fighting the Syrian occupation in Lebanon and its satellite terrorist groups for the last 22 years. And we are still doing that today from the security zone and Jezzine in south Lebanon, because we have promised our people to preserve in this fight until we liberate our beloved country and gain back our freedom.

Ladies and gentlemen, A free Lebanon is not only able to sign a peace treaty with Israel, but is also able to lead the peace process in the middle east.

So please, help us to free Lebanon.

Thank you.

At the service of Lebanon

The Commander of The Guardians of the Cedars  
Etienne Sacre (Abu Arz).