

The Dream Statement

Samir Kassir

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(Translated from Arabic)

I don't know who was distributing it, and I wasn't interested at first. I thought it was just another commercial brochure. But then I was taken by its title The Dream Statement. So I said; "Let's dream!" And I started reading it. The dream was nice, and the statement read as follows:

We the undersigned Lebanese citizens,
as we have been shocked by the level of moral degeneration in the country, its being overtaken by despicable personal rivalries, and a falsification of political life which are keeping us from perceiving the marvelous changes happening in our surrounding and impacting our future and that of our future generations.
And as we await the upcoming elections, we anticipate that this milestone would pump new blood in our various institutions, including the municipalities, the presidency of the republic and parliament. These elections are calling upon us to declare our desire for radical change in the Lebanese government.

Thirteen years since the end of armed struggle in Lebanon, it has become clear that the Lebanese people, all of them, have not only lost their wars, but also the chance to rise up, whether by their own will or despite it, and are about to lose the last thread of hope.

Thirteen years after the continuous undermining of the rules of national life, thus adding to the destruction inflicted by the war and continuing to drain the country's human assets, the desire for change has become coupled with a sense of despair due to a self-consumed political class paralyzed by a deficiency of moral standards and long-term vision.

Thirteen years after almost completely ruining the chances of the country's resurrection, sometimes planned but mostly random, and of filling the souls of citizens - whom have been repeatedly asked to give up their right to participate in the political process - with despair, change has not only stopped being a beautiful dream but has also been prevented from being a dream at all thanks to those in power who have so far managed to keep it distant from reality.

But the dream is not far from being realized, and it starts by knocking on reality's door from the moment we dare to declare it. We start realizing the dream as soon as we cry our need for it.

We the undersigned Lebanese citizens,
since we perfectly realize that our ideological, political and sectarian differences sometimes justify our negative outlook, we also perfectly realize that our dream of a recovered country has remained strong enough to reconcile these differences. What we dream of is as simple as having faith in tomorrow.
What we dream of is a country that can transform its differences into a source of power and cohesion, a country free of selfish, sectarian and family constraints.

What we dream of is a state that is owned by all its citizens and its citizens only, fortified by an independent judiciary and an unshakable popular support, a state that is not held by sectarianism or patronage.

What we dream of is a society whose mobility is not constrained by imposed loyalties and whose divisions are not protected by the intelligence forces. Equal opportunity is what guarantees the freedom of this society.

What we dream of is a democratic culture that regains its momentum to support the renewal of Arab democracy, a culture which is concerned with the liberation of Palestine and one that does not fear the freedom of Syria or Iraq.

We the undersigned Lebanese citizens, as we recognize that achieving change is not dependent only on changing the rules of the political class that governs the country, we welcome the beginnings of change, even if still timid, which started to appear in Damascus and which indicates, despite its weakness, that Syrian domination over Lebanon is close to its end. We call upon those responsible for it to adopt the means of national dialogue and reconciliation there. There is no better guarantee for Lebanon than democracy in Syria as much as there is no better guarantee for Syria than a unified and resuscitated Lebanon.

But we also realize that it falls upon the Lebanese people to choose the path that leads to future change regardless of the allegations raised against the Syrian regime due to its thirteen-year-long tutelage rule over Lebanon. Therefore, we call upon all the sectors of Lebanese society to rally and launch the wheel of change by pushing for the formation of a transition government that oversees the presidential elections, plans the end of the Syrian tutelage rule, reestablishes the Taef republic and starts soothing the wounds inflicted by the war and post-war eras.

The preferred government must possess the capacity of representing different Lebanese factions and enjoy unwavering moral values and a modern administrative effectiveness. Only such a government is capable of taking the steps needed to rebuild the Lebanese political system and regain the balance in the republic.

The most important of these steps are:

- Defining a timetable for the withdrawal of Syrian forces, including the date of withdrawal of the Syrian intelligence apparatus and the exact places of redeployment of those units whose total pullout might be delayed according to the defined timetable.
- Implementing the article of the Taef Accord pertaining to the delineation of administrative districts ahead of the drafting of the electoral law that is stated in the same document.
- Unifying the Lebanese intelligence apparatuses and restructuring their operations according to the constitution and the International Declaration of Human Rights. Dismissing security officials who have become symbols of abusing their power for political, personal or factional benefits.
- Liberating the judiciary from political and intelligence interventions.
- Protecting individuals and groups who fought in the ranks of resistance to the Israeli occupation according to conditions that safeguard the Lebanese social fabric.
- Pursuing the dismantling of armed militias and disarming them completely.
- Reconsidering the amnesty law so that it would comprise all the crimes committed during the war until the date of dismantling the militias without discriminating between victims, forming a committee in charge of

defining political crimes committed during the war and after it, releasing political prisoner, and allowing the return of those in exile.

- Holding the arms of Palestinian camps after collecting them on behalf of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and negotiating with European and international agencies ways to improve the living conditions of refugees ahead of a solution that allows them to join the Palestinian state according to the Roadmap.
- Resuming monetary reform policies in line with the Paris II Conference recommendations.
- Revealing the balance of all public expenditures since the end of the war and designating the areas where politicians have interfered to divide the spoils.
- Reopening the court cases related to the banking and financial scandals that have been shelved prematurely.
- Launching a national workshop to look into the future of the Lebanese University and public education.
- Initiating a dialogue with the Syrian rule to find the gaps in the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination between the two countries in order to reach the highest possible level of economic harmony.

O ye citizens,

since the war has ended, the circumstances of this country have never been worse than what they have been today. Yet we want these conditions to serve as a chance for revival as we start the countdown for the election of a new president of the republic. Let this election be at least a chance for us to express our need for a moral resuscitation of the republic.

O ye citizens, say your word or else you lose your chance.

I didn't believe what I read. This is impossible. There is no one in the country who even dares to dream. And I was right. I glanced at the street around me. There were no leaflets or anyone distributing them. There was a motorcade of fancy American cars, belonging to one of the officials, driving amid sounds of shouting and cheer. I regained consciousness, and I regretted immediately that I had woken up from the dream.