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May 14, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to request that you take urgent action using existing U.S. authorities to address the rapidly deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in Lebanon. The financial and economic crisis is causing significant and growing hardship among the Lebanese people, placing at risk the country's access to essential supplies like food, medicine and fuel, as well as threatening internal and regional stability.

As a result of longstanding political, economic, and governance challenges, the Lebanese people are facing significant and growing food insecurity. Due to the ongoing financial crisis, food prices have increased by 350% in the past year, which, combined with a concomitant economic decline, threaten the Lebanese population's access to adequate nutrition and food supplies.<sup>1</sup> The poverty rate has also increased substantially, with over half of Lebanese living in poverty and nearly a quarter in extreme poverty.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Lebanon hosts over 1.5 million Syrian refugees who are also facing the impacts of the escalating food prices.<sup>3</sup>

Given that an estimated 80 percent of Lebanon's food is imported<sup>4</sup>, the financial crisis and depreciation of the Lebanese lira will continue to threaten the food security for millions of ordinary Lebanese people. Long-term reforms and improvements to the country's governance are needed, including addressing the role of regional and non-state actors. However, urgent assistance provided directly to the people of Lebanon is needed now to prevent the already widespread food insecurity from turning into a humanitarian catastrophe.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/10/middleeast/lebanon-ramadan-poverty-cmd-intl/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/20-00268\\_pb15\\_beirut-explosion-rising-poverty-en.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/20-00268_pb15_beirut-explosion-rising-poverty-en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/18/no-food-in-the-fridge-a-gruelling-ramadan-in-lebanon>

<sup>4</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53292>

Additionally, the Lebanese people are facing ongoing challenges with health care access due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the increased price of imported medicine, and cost barriers to privately run hospitals. According to a recent World Food Programme survey, the share of Lebanese households that are having difficulties accessing health care services rose from 25% in July-August 2020 to 36% by the end of 2020.<sup>5</sup> This, along with the relatively low rate of COVID-19 vaccination in the country, makes Lebanon uniquely vulnerable to the ongoing pandemic and other public health crises. Financial hardship is also increasingly a major barrier for seeking medical treatment in the country.

Lebanon is also contending with a breakdown in educational services, with the high poverty rate resulting in Lebanese families unable to pay for school fees and basic supplies like textbooks. These developments, combined with spillover effects from the ongoing crisis in Syria, have resulted in over-crowding of schools and high dropout rates, which are undermining future educational attainment and economic opportunity.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the lack of access to quality education makes young people vulnerable to violence or exploitation, as well as to appeals from extremist movements.

To address these pressing needs in food security, health care, and education, I am requesting a substantial increase in U.S. assistance to address these rapidly escalating crises. This includes additional funds through USAID's Food for Peace Title II and Economic Food Security Programs to address Lebanon's food security issues, as well as increases in USAID's basic education assistance. This also includes strong funding increases for USAID's health programs for Lebanon, including direct assistance to cover increased health care costs that act as a barrier to access, as well as additional dedicated support to help the country address the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, we ask you take all practical measures to ensure that this aid is disbursed through trusted partners and NGOs, following all applicable US laws and vetting standards for recipients and implementing organizations, directly to the Lebanese people in a timely manner that reflects the urgency of the need.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress

CC: Antony Blinken, Secretary, U.S. Department of State  
Jake Sullivan, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Samantha Power, Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

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<sup>5</sup> <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000124175/download/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1883/Lebanon\\_CDSCS\\_Dec\\_2020.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1883/Lebanon_CDSCS_Dec_2020.pdf)