

**Press release issued by the Media Office: May Chidiac Foundation - Institute**

Beirut, July 18 2022

**Within the framework of the project "Renewing the Political and Economic Structures in Lebanon", the May Chidiac Foundation-Media Institute, in cooperation with the Public Affairs Section at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, held a ceremony to mark the release of the policy paper and recommendations.**

**The special event was held at Le Royal Hotel - Dbayeh and presented by the high-profile journalist Youmna Naufal. It was attended by prominent politicians, diplomats, media experts, economists, and social personalities.**

**(Please find the list of prominent persons who are known to have attended the event, at the end of the press release).**

**The opening speech was introduced by the project manager, Dr. Mireille Hajj, who welcomed the attendees on behalf of the Foundation. She sincerely appreciated the effort of the team who did a hard work to achieve Part one of the project and to propose a policy paper that includes a substantial reform agenda. A project that wouldn't have come together without the support of the US Embassy in Beirut.**

**She then took the opportunity to thank Ms. Krisi Hayden, the former Public Affairs section Officer with whom we launched the project, and Ms. Melissa O'Shaughnessy, who has started her function as Grant Officer for the "Renewal of Political and Economic Structures in Lebanon" project, since July 5. She also thanked Ms. Dorothy Shea, US Ambassador to Lebanon, for her participation in this project and for her continued support.**

**And she welcomed all different prominent and outstanding figures, senior fellows, ministers, ambassadors, and experts, the MCF- MEDIA INSTITUTE had the privilege to receive in-person in the studio, or virtually via zoom in hybrid panels and Fireside Talks.**

**Dr. Hajj tackled the economic, financial, political, and social crises, Lebanon is going through. A multilevel crisis that is endangering its population, plunging them into poverty and threatening their well-being. She shed light on the main internal and external factors contributing to the aggressive crises.**

**She argued that: “In such an environment, executing and running a program smoothly, was a huge responsibility, because there was a need to analyze the issues without undue delay, plan, organize and complete eleven panels and two fireside talks within the specified scope. The purpose was to detect urgent key challenges, analyze the risks, and provide policy responses that can lower the obstacles and combat the problems in the country”.**

**She stressed that the strong conclusion is that even if this policy paper is not going to be implemented perfectly, adopting some of its recommendations can improve things.**

**The MCF-MI should hence pursue its work with the Public Affairs section at the United States Embassy in Beirut, now, in part two of the program. Deepening and enhancing the cooperation will lead to more policies that will help serve as a path to recovery and as an effective action plan to avoid the country’s free fall”.**

**Together, she said, we should construct a new social contract that enables everyone in Lebanon to live a decent and respectful life. We, at the MCF-MI are hopeful that in the long run the country’s sovereignty and democracy will win out, and that the ability to reach compromise and consensus will build national cohesion. To achieve this alternative version will require nevertheless collective action, the rule of Law, and the implementation of the Security Council Resolutions 1559, 1680, 1701, to expand the State Authority.**

**In her speech, the Former Minister and President of the foundation, Dr. May Chidiac expressed her sincere gratitude to all the attendees as well as her pleasure to speak about the MCF-MI team great performance and that in cooperation with the Public Affairs Section at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, in implementing the first phase of the project from October 2021 and up till this date.**

**The panels and Fireside Talks brought together highly experienced local and international distinguished speakers, who addressed several interrelated issues regarding the situation in Lebanon, its bottlenecks, and the possible path to recovery.**

**All panelists agreed that the crisis in Lebanon started as a debt crisis, with the nationally regulated Ponzi scheme, where new money was borrowed to pay existing creditors, until all fresh money runs out. It then became a banking crisis, turned into an economic, and ended up as a social and humanitarian**

crisis, especially after the additional tragedy that took place two years ago, and was one of the worst non-nuclear explosions in history, the catastrophic Beirut port bomb, which devastated numerous districts in the city's center, killed and injured hundreds of people.

The President of the MCFMI Foundation Dr May Chidiac added that if the financial and economic crisis is likely to rank in the top 3 most severe crises episodes; the social impact of the crisis was catastrophic as more than half of the population is currently below the national poverty line.

The multilevel crisis collapsed the most basic public services, mainly the electricity, sanitation, and education. The meltdown or “Depression” shackled all institutions, while it is currently putting unprecedented pressure on the sole institution that is left, as putting at risk the Lebanese armed forces (LAF).

But according to some of the panelists, the good news is that the United States is still seeking to help Lebanon, and preserve its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Therefore, despite all odds, it is still aiding, supporting, equipping, and training the LAF. Indeed, the U.S. security assistance for the LAF had always been a key component of the U.S. policy towards Lebanon. It aims to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty, secure its borders, and counter internal threats.

She also pointed that the panelists who discussed the US policies in the region exposed how Lebanon is far from being a central subject in the Vienna talks but revealed that the Iranian nuclear deal can be a game-changer in Lebanon, as it can determine Iran's future role in the region and its proxy's role in Lebanon. There is no doubt that Hezbollah is already wielding significant power in the country, *holding sway over the Lebanese state* and its institutions, playing the role of a state within a state, and monopolizing strategic decision making; and that the only way to change this, is by getting back Lebanon's identity with the support of the international community.

She followed that the innovative solutions that our speakers discussed and shared were summarized into seven Key interconnected strategic areas: 1) The rule of Law; 2) The course of the Parliamentary Elections; 3) The LAF and the Borders security; 4) The Economic and Financial Reforms; 5) The Energy Crisis; 6) The International Humanitarian aids; and 7) Women Mediation role in peace processes.

**Adopting and implementing these policies is a very difficult task given the country's internal and external complexities, but it is a challenge worth pursuing. She also considered that the rule of Law should prevail; because Lebanon would not be able to operate properly if one of the four universal principles that can build a country: accountability, just Law, open government, and accessible and impartial Law, lacks. If implemented, these pillars guarantee a reformed judiciary. All the rest will then follow.**

**She also considered that to reinvent the future, there is a strong need to focus on reducing the significant political and economic unrest that is exacerbating social polarization, undermining the national security, and eroding trust in government leaders.**

**However, although trust in government has fallen, yet it is the government itself who must bear the political responsibility to solve the fundamental problems, achieve safety, and ensure democratic governance of citizen security**

**She then stated that the challenges that the country is facing in the areas of security, economy, and politics can be overcome if this policy paper and recommendations are adopted and implemented by the parliament members who attended today and other parliament members who believe in the sovereignty of the country. Two months after the Lebanese Parliamentary elections that moved most seats to the opposition parties, there is a need to work on a common agenda, on a national strategy to restore confidence, and on a shared sense of direction to pave the way for a more sustainable future for the country.**

**Dr. Chidiac insisted on the need for commitment, diligence, and follow-up, and on the need to fostering a revolution in the way we think and act, to win the battle. She said: "We need a more democratic functioning. We need to learn from our mistakes and bad experiences. And most of all, we need to learn to think "Lebanese" in terms of internal and external security. In this regard, securing the borders and our resources while generating prosperity must be our absolute priorities."**

**At the end of her speech, Dr. May Chidiac thanked all attendees and extended her special thanks to the Public Affairs section of the United States Embassy in Beirut for making the project possible and for providing the opportunity for the May Chidiac Foundation-Media Institute and for the Lebanese community**

to promote healthy building principles and practices that can lead to *"the renewal of political structures and economics in Lebanon"*.

She also thanked US Ambassador Dorothy Shea, a dear friend who never failed to be by Lebanon's side, while investing in its people, building its human capital, and prioritizing youth and women's empowerment. Long live the exceptional relation between our two countries, and may we always pursue the path of prosperity together."

**Then the US ambassador to Lebanon, Ms. Dorothy Shea, delivered her speech and said:**

During the ceremony, a series of three video reports concerning the first part of the "Renewing the Political and Economic Structures in Lebanon" project were projected.

The first report introduced the first phase of the project. It shed light on its specificities, and on the number of people who followed the eleven panels and the 2 fireside talks that gathered 64 panelists, speakers, and field experts.

The number of followers of the panel discussions reached more than 25,000 followers in the first panel, 32,000 in the second, 26,000 in the third, 35,000 in the fourth, 28,000 in the fifth, 27,000 in the sixth, 15,000 in the seventh, 57,000 in the eighth, 15,000 in the ninth, 6000 in the tenth and 11,000 in the tenth. As for the fireside talks, the number reached 18,000 followers during the first talk and 32,000 in the second.

Moreover, the number of activists on our YouTube special channel reached 17.000, while the Facebook page reach was around 3.400.000.

The second report selected some of the panelists' discussions, while the third report provided evidence-based solutions founded on the diagnostic of the different key challenges detected by the panelists who proposed some policies and recommendations for a political economy reform.

A brief report on the discussed policies and recommendations was distributed at the end of the event.