

Senator Brownback, Members of the Commission, I have the honor to appear in front of your commission today, to testify on the current situation in Lebanon after the declared Syrian military withdrawal

My name is Joe Bains, I am Australian from Lebanese descent and I am presently the President of the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU), an international non-governmental organization founded in 1959, with the full support of the Foreign Ministry in Lebanon as the sole legitimate representative of the Lebanese Diaspora worldwide.

There are between 12 and 15 million people from Lebanese descent around the world, and communities established in more than 50 countries. About 2 million Americans are from Lebanese descent. As Lebanese around the world, we have been very concerned about the Syrian occupation of our mother country for more than a quarter of a century, and also about the presence of Terrorist organizations such as Hizbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other similar groups. The Lebanese Diaspora was and remains also concerned about the fate of Lebanese detainee in Syrian jails.

The 12th and 13th World Congresses held in Mexico city in 2001 and in Miami in 2003, called on the international community to intervene in Lebanon to evacuate the foreign forces including the Syrian occupation army, the Iranian revolutionary guards and foreign Terror networks.

We hereby thank the US Government, for the passing of UNSCR 1559 of September 2004 and for the signing of the UNSC Presidential letter which endorsed the resolution,

We however call the immediate attention of the US Congress and the Helsinki Commission to the dangerous developments which have occurred in Lebanon since the voting of the said resolution, and which dangers intensified since February 14th when the former Prime Minister of Lebanon M Rafiq Hariri was assassinated along with his companions in a barbaric manner.

The Syrian regime ordered its troops to withdraw from Lebanon, and declared it has accomplished the pull out by the end of April. But we do not believe that UNSCR 1559 was fully implemented: First, the disarmament of militias, such as Hizbollah and the Palestinian Jihadist organizations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others didn't take place yet. Second, we have grave concerns that the legislative elections, decided for this month won't be held in a democratic context. The gerrymandering of electoral districts by a pro-Syrian Government, even in the presence of international monitors will lead to a misrepresentation of Lebanon's democratic trends, which were expressed to the world this winter through the popular demonstrations in Beirut.

Hence, the Lebanese diaspora, which count in numbers at least five times the size of the Lebanese population inside the homeland, calls on the US Government and the international community to the following:

1. Ask the Syrian regime to free all Lebanese prisoners detained on Syrian territories
2. Requesting from the Syrian forces a list of all Lebanese citizens or residents who have died while in their custody, or with their knowledge since June 1976, both on Lebanese and Syrian territories
3. Requesting an accounting of all public treasure and archive, taken from the Lebanese Republic, such as artifacts, monies, Government files, etc. To be returned to the new Lebanese Government under the auspices of the United Nations
4. Requesting a full report from Syrian authorities as to their knowledge of all or any illegal military material hidden in Lebanon by their personnel or by organizations with direct ties to the Syrian Government
5. Requesting the formation of an international commission of investigation for all war crimes committed by the Syrian forces and security services from June 1976 till this date.
6. Requesting the dismantling of all paramilitary networks established by, or supervised by or funded by the Syrian occupation army. Including but not exclusively the military installations and weapons of Hizbollah, the Syrian Baath Party, the Syrian National-Social Party, the Palestinian Saika units in Lebanon, as well as the smaller militia armed and trained by the Syrian intelligence.
7. Extend the right to vote to all Lebanese overseas so that the legislative elections would represent the will and aspirations of the entire Lebanese people.