

# Presidential Election Day Speeches

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President Michel Sleiman  
Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri  
Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani

Michel Sleiman - May 25, 2008 - Sunday

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Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri:  
Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani:  
President Michel Sleiman:

President Michel Sleiman

Mr. Speaker,  
Members of Parliament,

I would have liked to start my mandate with minutes of joy, but I am sure that our minutes of silence will be welcomed by the spirits of our martyrs, standing next to God, who is establishing a promising era for Lebanon, which is overcoming its blunder due to the awareness of its sons, who refused to fall for self-destruction and due to the efforts of its faithful friends and brothers who have aimed at hindering the difficulties and erasing the consequences.

Today, while taking the constitutional oath, I call upon all of you – politicians and citizens – to start a new phase called Lebanon and the Lebanese, in which we make it our priority to commit to one national project with open minds in order to achieve the interests of the country and rise above our sectarian interests and those of others. The sought-after political stability requires of us the activation of the constitutional institutions, wherein political thoughts must be contained and adopted in order to reach common ground and achieve the interests of the country and its sons.

The political dispute and the constitutionally problematic issues that emanated from it should motivate us, not only to find a way out from any problems that we might face in the future but also to achieve the requested balance between prerogatives and responsibilities in order to allow the institutions, including that of the presidency, to perform their pertinent tasks. Lebanon is a country with a message, a country where civilizations and pluralism meet; therefore, we should start working together on repairing our political, administrative, economic and security situation in order to put Lebanon back on the international map in an exemplary role reflecting its individuality and typical glow. Lebanon has chosen to respect what has been agreed to in the Taif Accord and must protect this choice and work on consolidating it, because it emanates from the unifying national will. Supporting any political decision can only be done through that will. Moreover, the Lebanese are willfully connected by the National Agreement Document, the constitution's light. And it has proved to be stronger than any foreign orientation. Our foreign relationships are excellent and most efficient when they emanate from this agreement, which provides for and protects Lebanon's interests, respects its uniqueness and allows it to resume its efficient role on both the Arab and international levels, since it is a living example of the coexistence of cultures.

Members of Parliament,

The people gave us their trust in order for us to achieve their ambitions and not to upset them by our narrow political disputes. The most dangerous issue that prevailed in the last years was the political rhetoric based on accusations of treason and finger pointing, which paves the way for discord and division, especially among the youth. Therefore, we should be aware and work on strengthening the country and our coexistence through agreement, within a culture of dialogue, and not leave it an open battlefield. The major attribute of democracy is the handing of authority through free

elections. It is of utmost importance to adopt an electoral law that provides a sound basis for representation, strengthens the relationship between voter and representative, and ensures the achievement of the people's choices and expectations. Accepting the results of these elections and respecting the will of the people is even more important.

The independence of the judiciary power consecrates justice and it is a climate ensuring a safe haven to every righteous person, a public regulation to all the state's channels, not only to separate between litigants, after all "clean hands" are the attributes of justice, and justice is the foundation of any supreme power.

It is our duty to encourage youthful energy to be involved in the public sector and its institutions, so as to prevent it from growing flabby and allow us all to reach a more able and youthful management. By making the right choice and promoting surveillance instances we reward the meriting, set the negligent right and isolate the corrupted.

Dear assembly,

Diffusing the concerns of young women and men can be achieved by building a country that they are proud of, a country advanced by their abilities, their expertise and participation in finding solutions. Let us allow them, they who have fought the occupation and terrorism, who have stood for the independence, let us let them guide us where we have failed. They are the future, and tomorrow belongs to them. Their wounds have made them stronger, many of them became handicapped and we should ensure their rights and welfare by virtue of law. We should keep in mind an educational reform policy centered on our schools and universities and restoring to them their distinctiveness in this region.

Lebanon's second wing is turning to us today, hoping to see its country of birth strong again. Here we should recognize the emigrants' rights and carry on with the procedures necessary to the promotion of their attachment and integration in the country, using their qualifications to prevent them from staying away from their country. They deserve the Lebanese nationality more than any of those who wrongly received it.

Defeating the stalemate and activating the economy require stability on both economic and security levels, in addition to the care of the state, in order to encourage and push competition and productivity forward. Attracting investments and ensuring them a friendly environment will allow us to fight unemployment and contain emigration. This leads us to the necessity to concentrate on our economy, which is productive on the industrial, agricultural and service levels. It also leads us to the necessity of spreading environmental culture and highlighting the touristic aspects of this country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our respect for the United Nations' charters and resolutions is based on our deep conviction that international legitimacy emanates from the principles of right and justice. By emphasizing our contribution to the formation of the Special International Tribunal to try those responsible for the assassination of martyr PM Rafik Hariri and his companions, as well as subsequent assassinations, we are shedding light on what is right and achieving justice.

The emergence of the resistance was a necessity in light of the state's disintegration, and its survival depended on the fact that the people rallied around it, and the state embraced it both as an entity and as an army. The resistance succeeded in forcing the occupier to withdraw thanks to the valor of its men and the greatness of its martyrs. However, the Shebaa Farms are still under occupation and the enemy persists in its threats and violations of [Lebanon's] sovereignty, hence the need for us to develop a defensive strategy that preserves the nation in parallel to a calm dialogue so as to take advantage of the resistance's energies and put them to the service of this strategy. The aim is for the resistance not to deplete its achievements in domestic disputes, thus preserving its value and national status. This day coincides with the national anniversary of liberation and victory; let it serve as an incentive for us to be increasingly aware of the lurking dangers and renew our attachment to freedom and democracy, which we have offered sacrifices for in order to safeguard the nation. Herein lies the need for strenuous efforts in order to release [Lebanese] prisoners and detainees, uncover the fate of those missing and recover our sons who have taken refuge in Israel. Indeed, there is room for all in the nation's fold.

Lebanon was, and will always remain, attached to consolidating the bonds linking it to its Arab brothers. Hence, we are looking forward intently to building relations between Lebanon and Syria within the framework of mutual respect for the sovereignty and borders of each country and to establishing diplomatic relations that are beneficial to both. The lesson [to be derived] lies in following-up on relations among equals free from any of the previous shortcomings so that we take advantage of and make allowance for past experiences in order to safeguard the interests, welfare and security of the two brother countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The state cannot gloss over any destabilization of security and peace, nor will it allow, in any case, for some to be used as fuel for terrorism and for the sacred Palestinian cause to be exploited as a pretext for armament so as to become a source of insecurity, as was the case a year ago, when the Lebanese army was aggressed. Let us unite in order to tackle the consequences of what happened, reconnect what has been broken, heal the wounds and initiate reconstruction. Pain

has worn us thin, so let us rejoice with hope. Arms are only for targeting the enemy, and we will not allow them to be targeted in any other direction. Our categorical rejection of naturalization does not entail a refusal to host our Palestinian brothers and to tend to their humanitarian rights; rather, it ascertains the right to return until the establishment of a viable [Palestinian] state. Therefore, Lebanon emphasizes the content of the Arab initiative that was launched from its capital Beirut in 2002.

The armed forces, especially the army, have acquired the confidence of the Lebanese people over the past few years due to their important and historical achievements, ranging from safeguarding democracy and civil peace, to their deployment in our dearest South after more than 30 years [of occupation], to confronting the enemy and terrorism. In so doing, they have paid a heavy price with the blood of their finest men. Yet the latest security incidents led to the impression that the armed forces' performance did not live up to the hopes that were pinned on them. Consequently, preserving a minimum level of consensus, hence, providing the necessary political cover, contributes to averting such dangers in the future, consolidating their moral status on the national level, equipping them and encouraging the promising, educated youth to join them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On this occasion, I would like to thank the Arab League and its secretary general for containing the crisis that shook our country and for their fruitful efforts in order to reach the adequate solution. On my own behalf and in the name of the Lebanese people, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to the state of Qatar, His Highness the Emir, His Excellency the Prime Minister and the Arab Ministerial Committee for their honest efforts, for their pan-national commitment to initiating the national dialogue and for hosting and sponsoring it. Our thanks also go out to brotherly and friendly states that have helped the country transcend all difficulties, as well as to those participating in UNIFIL, which is deployed in the South under the mandate of Resolution 1701, for their special performance with regard to the preservation of security in coordination with the Lebanese army. It is necessary to highlight their interest in development and social issues in the areas of their deployment, not to mention the positive reactions of the citizenry towards them.

My fellow countrymen and countrywomen,

We have but a lot to do. This oath I took is indeed a commitment inasmuch as your own will is a commitment. Let us not be showered with promises, but rather tackle reality and its various fields by using our capacities and relying on the support provided by our brothers and friends in order to overcome obstacles. Let us unite in solidarity and walk together towards a deep-rooted reconciliation. Let us sow hope among our sons and launch pioneering, creative and courageous initiatives in order to achieve this purpose while striving for the construction of a capable, civil state based on the respect of public freedoms as well as of the freedom of creed and expression. We have paid a dear price for our national unity, so let us preserve it together, hand in hand, for God is with those who are together.

Long live Lebanon.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri

His Excellency, President General Michel Sleiman  
 President of the Lebanese republic,  
 His Highness the Emir of the state of Qatar  
 Excellencies,  
 Honorable Guests,  
 Honorable Colleagues Members of Parliament,  
 Ladies and Gentlemen,

At first, on my own behalf and on behalf of the Lebanese National Assembly, I extend our sincerest congratulations to His Excellency President General Michel Sleiman for the precious confidence that the National Assembly has placed in you on behalf of the Lebanese people by electing you as consensus president for the country in a historical moment that reflects agreement and tolerance between all parties and that lays the foundation for restoring the stability in Lebanon's public order and the political life and role of this country in the Arab, Mediterranean and international systems.

I ask God almighty to help you, Excellency, in leading the ship of Lebanon to the land of safety and in establishing civil peace and promoting the bonds of coexistence as well as strengthening the elements of national unity and rendering Lebanon an example of cultural dialogue and of the global village where everybody is coexisting under its sky.

I would like at first to record for history that the presidential election session of today is the crowning of our national accord, which we have achieved because of a joint Lebanese desire, interest, necessity and conviction that agreement is the way to Lebanon's salvation. The accord is also the result of a sincere Arab effort — the pivot of which was represented by the state of Qatar and its emir, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, and the prime minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem al-Thani — to release Lebanon from its ordeal and restore its well-being.,

The presidential-election session that is taking place today on May 25, 2008 coincides with the eighth anniversary of Liberation Day, which represents the victory of our people's heroic resistance and the defeat of the Israeli army and its withdrawal from most of our territories, except Shebaa Farms and Kfar Shouba Hills. It also coincides with the first anniversary of the Nahr al-Bared battle and the victory of our brave army over terrorism and organized crime so as to render this day also a day of victory over fear, strife, apprehensions and anarchy and a day of national unity.

Mr. President,

For the sake of history, it is necessary that I mention the great sacrifices that the Lebanese National Assembly had offered for Lebanon and its independence, unity, sovereignty, freedom and democratic-parliamentary system. For it is these sacrifices which enabled us, even by exceeding the constitutional delay, to buy time until this moment to elect you as president of the republic.

And I would like on this occasion to note just once, especially since we have endured so much, that the parliament has not been "kidnapped," and its doors have not been closed, and our choice has always been to respect the constitution and system.

Mr. President,

The former and present National Assemblies sacrificed martyrs of esteemed parliamentary leaders, who were pioneers of building, reform, freedom, unity, sovereignty and independence, in order for the country to reach the phase of the civil state and the state of law and institutions.

The national assembly was not alone in the path of sacrifice for the sake of Lebanon's salvations; distinguished political leaders, opinion leaders, officers, as well as Lebanese freedom fighters, all lost their lives in a chain of assassinations that targeted the security of and the political system in Lebanon. Innocent civilians fell too on this same path after been targeted by a series of criminal bombings that occurred in a number of regions.

Also on the path of salvation, many freedom fighters and brave soldiers lost their lives while confronting the Israeli aggression and terrorism from the South to the North.

In the South, the resistance wrote the most wonderful legends of heroes and proved once more the failure of the Israeli power to meet its goals, distort and marginalize Lebanese, and render it a place for projects of Palestinians settlement by cancelling the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

As for the North, our dear sons in the Lebanese army, including brave officers and soldiers, achieved marvelous heroisms while facing terrorism and organized crime, which was dwelling in Nahr el-bared camp in a bid to make it a base for terrorism in Lebanon.

Today — as voice messages are appearing again, carrying threats to transform Lebanon into an arena of terrorism by threatening our national security, UNIFIL and our brave army — we say: Our unity, as well as our army, is the core of our strength, and no one in the world will be able to make Lebanon a field of death or another Iraq. Lebanon will never be but a garden for flourishing life.

Excellency,

The National Assembly can take pride in becoming a symbol of dialogue during crisis. As I had the honor to convene the National Dialogue of March 2006, which achieved 60% of the issues that were put forth, including thorny issues that were a source of concern, such as the international tribunal, the relation with sister Syria and the regulation of the Palestinian presence.

Of the two issues that remained on the agenda of the National Dialogue, one has been accomplished today: the presidential election. The second issue to be accomplished is the "strategy of defense," and nobody more than you, Excellency, is as capable or worthy of conducting a dialogue on this issue, so as to preserve Lebanon's sovereignty and independence against the Israeli aggression and ambitions.

Mr. President,

This parliament also hosted national consultation meetings that failed to draft understandings on a national-unity government and an electoral law, the two issues whose suspension led to the political crisis that have shaken Lebanon for one-and-a-half-years.

And from this parliament we worked out a road map to achieve the presidential election in accordance with our initiative for national dialogue, and then came the Arab initiative and the mission of the Arab Ministerial Committee, which

arranged the national priorities according to Doha Agreement.

On this particular national day, on behalf of the Lebanese National Assembly, we thank everyone who has contributed with us to make the dialogue road map succeed in reaching an agreement and accomplishing this election, which lays the foundation for our legitimate institutions to restore their presence and role. I would like again to mention specifically the state of Qatar and all Arab kings, presidents and emirs, as well as the cadre of the Arab Summit from Cairo, Riyadh and Damascus and the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers, the Arab Ministerial Committee and the Secretary-General of the Arab League, His Excellency, Amr Moussa. I would like also to specify the Vatican, the Islamic Republic of Iran, represented by its foreign minister, Turkey represented by its prime minister, the European Union, the parliament of Europe and Mr. Javier Solano, the EU foreign policy chief, and the foreign ministers of France, Italy and Spain for their bid to draft solutions. I also thank Russia for its tangible support, the United States of America in any case, considering that it has become aware that Lebanon is not the suitable place for the birth of its broader Middle East project which, in our opinion, will never find a suitable place for labor pain and birth in the Middle East.

Also, I will not forget to thank the presidency of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the parliament of Europe and the presidencies of the Islamic, Arab, Asian, Francophone and Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary unions.

At the local level, I thank the Lebanese for their endurance and sacrifices. I also thank the Lebanese spiritual leaders and the written, audio and visual media institutions.

Mr. President,

I have prolonged a little. But it is one of my simple rights &ndash; I, who suffered anguish and went through anxiety and pressures, and who bore the burden of initiatives&rsquo; concerns due to my national responsibility as president of the Lebanese National Assembly; and I, who the spears of words and intimidation were directed at from everywhere, who cries out at this moment in the wilderness of the world asking peace for my country. And I address my people, the Arabs, via their representatives, who are present here and everywhere, by saying: If you have disagreed because of Lebanon, I ask you to work on reaching an agreement just as has Lebanon witnessed. I regret that Lebanon stirred up discord among you, and I consider that today, it is reuniting you. As such, Lebanon will be protected and preserved, and hence, as such, only the Arabs too.

On behalf of the parliament and my colleagues, the members of parliament, I stretch out my hand to you, Excellency, to engage in a nonstop workshop in order to accomplish the necessary laws to facilitate the execution of the decisions of Paris III and to work on preventing the workforce and production of our people from being eroded in public debt service to complete the liberation of our territories in the Shebaa Farms and Kfar Shouba Hills and to clear mines that are planted in our lands and souls.

Long live Excellency. Long live Lebanon.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I present to you the President of the Republic, His Excellency, President General Michel Sleiman.

Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani

Your Excellency, President General Michel Sleiman,

Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament,

It is an honor for me to have been invited to attend this meeting. Allow me, first and foremost, to give thanks to God for having consolidated the faith of the leaders of the great Lebanese people, regardless of their creeds and confessions, so that they have come to realize that the sole pact binding them to their people is to agree on its security and interests, and that there is no alternative to reaching a consensus over what secures the Lebanese people&rsquo;s security and interests. The aim is for all to be reassured about their coexistence and civil peace and for the remaining part of the Arab nation to be reassured that one of its dearest countries is safeguarded by its people and proud of its freedom as it takes steady steps towards its future and is conscious of its role in the free exchange of benefits and ideas.

I would also like to congratulate His Excellency General Michel Sleiman on his election today in one of the most delicate and dangerous periods in the history of our brother Lebanon.

By the grace of God, a dangerous crisis is over, which very nearly threatened the Lebanese entity under circumstances that cannot tolerate further disintegration of nations. Even though Lebanon has lived through many crises, I hope that this latest one shall represent a turning point leading Lebanon away from strife. As we know, there is a rule in Lebanese politics whereby crises are solved according to the principle of &ldquo;no winners, nor losers.&rdquo; Still, allow me to say that what we have achieved, what you have achieved in Doha a few days ago is certainly a violation of this rule that

calls for reservations, tension and an underlying feeling that strife exists, albeit in a dormant state. The “no winner, no loser” formula actually seems to postpone feuds rather than end them, and move problems aside rather than resolve them. This was indeed possible at the time this slogan emerged fifty years ago in 1958.

In those days, it was possible to talk about parties among which there were no winners and no losers because the state of the nation was different from what it is like now. In truth, the current circumstances, both within and around the Arab world, no longer tolerate the existence of parties between which disputes reignite every now and then. Indeed, we have reached a point where things no longer pertain to a dispute among parties but rather to the fate of nations. Upon being confronted with this danger, i.e. “the security of nations rather than a dispute among parties,” it became necessary for us to adopt definite positions and act boldly based on the fact that this crisis actually ended with a winner and a loser. The winner is Lebanon whereas the loser is strife, and this should be plain for all to see today, tomorrow and for all eternity.

Honorable Members of Parliament,

The state and people of Qatar were pleased to host your meetings, to have their land bear witness to your success and to see Lebanon exiting as the winner and strife as the loser. I want to make something very clear: You and Lebanon have made this success in Doha, and the unmistakable proof of this success is your meeting in this august assembly to start carrying out the plan outlining your consensus and agreement in Doha, which takes its first steps with this meeting today and will be completed, God willing, with further successful stages.

Doha did nothing more than open a space for dialogue free from the pressure of forces or demands and free from the burden of suspicions that are foreign to Lebanon’s interest and security. We believe that this opportunity for free and voluntary dialogue has led to its natural result.

Prior to your meeting in Doha, several attempts were made to resolve the crisis with the participation of brotherly Arab forces and regional institutions with renowned competences and capacity. These states and institutions have indeed made intense efforts and took constructive steps towards resolving this crisis so that the final touches were left up to the Lebanese people alone, who were represented by its conscientious political leaders. Doha has had the honor of bearing witness to this Lebanese final touch, which was added in a creative and responsible dialogue. It has been a pleasure for us to put all our capacities at its disposal, thus securing success for all parties.

The greatest success, of course, is yours and that of the Lebanese people. However, and for the sake of fairness, the meaning of success is much broader and wider. In other words, the Arab system succeeded because it managed to avert the circumstances of danger. Major Arab states succeeded because they managed to overcome obstacles and the [Arab] nation succeeded because it managed to contain the crisis on the brink of collapse and take it away from danger into the arena of dialogue, and away from division into consensus, so that a conscious will was able to emphasize the right to life and progress, the right to freedom and prosperity.

I stood at the Lebanese people’s side during the war two years ago, and I have seen the resistance’s bravery back when resistance was a necessity. Today, I have the opportunity of returning to Lebanon two years later and to this location in order to witness the bravery of wisdom when wisdom became a necessity. In both cases, I am proud, for you have granted me the chance and the honor of seeing Lebanon under both lights. At this time two years ago, it was great in its resistance inasmuch as it is great now in its wisdom, as is proven by this meeting and its significance.

Your meeting in Doha was an honor for both the state and the people of Qatar because you transformed the capital of our country into a place that is open for dialogue without any conditions, pressure or demands.

The Arab world has plenty of legitimate and qualified institutions that can take political decisions, especially the Arab League and the Islamic Conference. This holds true knowing that dialogue requires an open space that does not seek a given decision, but rather seeks to pave the way for a dialogue, which — when confronted with any dispute — allows for awareness of the following truth: Given the extensive human diversity in the Arab world, what brings parties together is far greater than what draws them apart.

This is indeed our conviction and our purpose. God bless Lebanon and every country of this Arab nation.