

March 14 Declares Refusal to Join New Govt: We Reject to Legitimize Coup

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As expected, the March 14 forces on Sunday officially announced their refusal to take part in the country's new government.

The March 14 forces "reject to legitimize the coup … and reject to turn into observers who cannot prevent violations," the coalition said in a statement recited by ex-PM Fouad Saniora after an extraordinary meeting for its 60 MPs at the Bristol Hotel in Beirut.

Outgoing premier Saad Hariri, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea and Phalange Party leader Amin Gemayel also took part in the meeting.

On January 12, Hizbullah and its allies toppled Saad Hariri's cabinet in a long-running feud over the U.N.-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

Hizbullah-backed Najib Miqati was then appointed to form a new government, which Hariri's alliance has refused to join and has labeled "Hizbullah's government".

Hariri had refused to join Miqati's government without guarantees that his cabinet will see the tribunal through.

Hizbullah meanwhile is demanding Lebanon end all cooperation with the court, which it says is a U.S.-Israeli conspiracy.

While Hariri and his allies won Lebanon's last parliamentary election in 2009, shifting alliances today have positioned the Hizbullah-led camp as the majority after Druze leader Walid Jumblat moved closer to the Shiite party.

"The way the national unity cabinet was toppled and the atmospheres of intimidation … created by the March 8 camp during the process of parliamentary consultations and designation (of Miqati) have confirmed our doubts that the March 8 camp is pressing on with its coup," March 14 said in its statement.

The coalition accused the Hizbullah-led camp of "undermining all attempts to form a balanced government through crippling the mechanism of cabinet formation by impossible conditions."

The March 14 forces also accused the rival camp of "infringing on the powers of the president and the premier-designate, which threatens the role of constitutional authorities and the powers, image and efficiency of state institutions."

The alliance stressed that "it considers what happened during the designation process, and what is happening during the formation process, as a coup against the Constitution and the democratic system which is taking place under the influence of (Hizbullah's) arms."

The March 14 camp vowed to confront the alleged "coup" through "all means available in the framework of its commitment to the practice of democracy."

"Out of their insistence on confronting and thwarting the coup, and in light of the PM-designate's inability to provide clear answers, the gathered MPs have decided to announce their refusal to take part in the upcoming government and to launch a peaceful, democratic opposition movement in order to defend the republic and protect the Constitution," March 14's statement went on to say.

On Saturday, Lebanese daily An-Nahar reported that another meeting for the March 14 forces will be held in order to outline the components of the new opposition, which will be comprised of parties, movements, and individuals.

March 14 General Secretariat Coordinator Fares Soaid told As Safir newspaper in remarks published Saturday that the March 14 leadership will hold a meeting on March 6 at the Bristol Hotel to announce a political document and roadmap that the forces will adopt.

Meanwhile, a March 14 source told An-Nahar that the camp did not sense any new position in Miqati's recent statements in Tripoli, "but he repeated the same wooden statements on justice and the truth while the March 8 camp is preparing a ministerial statement devoid of any reference to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and the arms possession outside the state."

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 March 14 shuns Mikati Cabinet, vows to confront 'coup'

By Hussein Dakroub
 Daily Star staff
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BEIRUT: The March 14 coalition announced Sunday it would boycott the government to be formed by Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati and vowed to confront what it called the Hezbollah-orchestrated "coup"; that led to the ouster of Saad Hariri.

In a strongly worded statement issued after a special meeting held at the Bristol Hotel and attended by caretaker Prime Minister Hariri, who is also an MP, and 54 of the coalition's 60 lawmakers, the March 14 groups said they will move to "a peaceful opposition" to defend the Lebanese Republic and protect the Constitution.

Mikati refused to comment on the March 14 coalition's statement. "Prime Minister [designate] Mikati said that each party has the right to express the views it wants," a source close to Mikati told The Daily Star. But earlier Sunday, Mikati said he would consider other options with President Michel Sleiman if the March 14 coalition decided not to participate in the government.

A source close the Cabinet formation process said the March 14 coalition's statement would lead to "an intensification of contacts between Mikati and [March 8] parties in order to speed up the government's formation."

Meanwhile, Hariri will address the Lebanese at 6 p.m. Monday to talk about Hezbollah's weapons, a major divisive issue between the March 8 and March 14 groups, a March 14 source said.

The statement, read out by former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, accused the Hezbollah-led March 8 alliance of staging a "coup" with the resignations of its ministers that led to the toppling of Hariri's Cabinet on Jan. 12 and later to Mikati's nomination to form a new government.

The March 14 coalition accused the March 8 groups of violating constitutional traditions and rules by putting conditions on the government's formation. It also accused Mikati, who is backed by the March 8 alliance, of failing to respond positively to the coalition's demands for making a public commitment not to end Lebanon's cooperation with the U.N.-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), which is probing the 2005 assassination of Hariri's father, statesman Rafik Hariri.

"In light of these dangerous developments represented in the March 8 groups' insistence on a coup against the institutions, and the prime minister-designate's failure to adopt a clear stance on constitutional and procedural issues, the March 14 groups announce their rejection to participate in the proposed government because they refuse to legitimize the mentioned coup and refuse to serve as a witness unable to stop deviations, excesses and violations," the statement said.

"In their confirmation to confront and thwart the coup and amid the prime minister-designate's inability to provide clear answers, the attending lawmakers have decided to refuse to participate in the next government and to launch a peaceful democratic opposition to defend the republic and protect the Constitution," it added.

The statement said that instead of reacting positively to the March 14 coalition's demands, "the country has been witnessing practices by March 8 groups amounting to a continued violation of constitutional norms and rules and an imposition of conditions on the shape and policy of the government."

It added that the March 8 groups' actions also trespassed on the prerogatives of both the president and the prime minister-designate that threatened to plunge the country into "a constitutional and national crisis whose consequences the Lebanese cannot bear."

The statement was clearly referring to Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun who is demanding a large Christian representation in the government, including the key Interior Ministry portfolio.

"While registering their condemnation and rejection of these ongoing practices, the March 14 groups would like to

confirm that they consider what happened in the designation process and what is happening in the formation process is a coup against the Constitution and the democratic system carried out with the force of arms and its luster," the statement said.

"Therefore, the March 14 groups cannot accept nor keep silent on what has happened and is happening. They will confront it with all available means in the framework of their commitment to all means of democratic practices. They hold all the parties concerned responsible for this coup and its consequences," it added.

Referring to the circumstances that led to the toppling of Hariri's Cabinet, the statement said: "The manner in which [Hariri's] national unity government was toppled and the atmosphere of intimidation with the threat of arms used by the March 8 groups and the subsequent intimidation that accompanied the consultations [to name a new premier] and [Mikati's] appointment, have confirmed doubts that the March 8 groups are bent on consolidating their coup and undermining all attempts to form a balanced government by putting conditions that cannot be fulfilled and that run contrary to constitutional principles and traditions and contradict with the March 14 groups' principles."

It said the March 14 groups' principles were aimed at defending the Constitution and maintaining national unity and the parliamentary democratic system which protects the citizens' freedoms and rights.

The March 14 groups are also demanding that "justice be served and putting an end to terrorist crimes that targeted distinguished leaders in the country by upholding the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and putting an end to non-state arms, which are spread in neighborhoods, towns and villages and which are threatening the citizens' lives and the country's security and stability," the statement added.

Asked to comment on the March 14 camp's decision to boycott his government, Mikati said in Tripoli earlier in the day: "My firm position is to call on all [parties] to participate in the government. This participation is not a personal issue as much as it is necessary to resurrect the country and its institutions and cooperate to solve the many problems we are suffering from."

He added that one of the options he had in mind was to form a government comprising the March 8 and March 14 groups. "But if the March 14 team decided to boycott, I will discuss with the president the other options and choose what's the best for the country's interest," Mikati said.

A senior March 8 source said the March 14 coalition's decision to become an opposition would undoubtedly facilitate the government's formation. "The March 14 decision will help Mikati's Cabinet formation efforts," the source said.

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