

**Speech of Ambassador Sandra De Waele,
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

**Launch of Justice Forum**

Thursday, 29 February 2024

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*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

Excellency the Minister of Justice,

Excellency the President of the Administration and Justice Commission of the Parliament,

Esteemed Presidents of the High Judicial Council and of the State Council,

Honourable Judges, representatives of the ISF

Representatives from civil society and academia,

Partners, friends, and distinguished guests,

It is a pleasure to be among you here today for the launch of the Justice Forum, fittingly hosted in the Beirut Palais de Justice.

Today’s launch brings together key stakeholders in the justice sector working to ensure that justice remains a major pillar of Lebanon’s democratic traditions. A functioning justice sector will make an essential contribution to rebuilding the trust of citizens in the Lebanese State. We therefore warmly welcome and strongly support the launch of this new process today.

We invite the constitutional authorities responsible for the justice sector, the judiciary, the executive, the Parliament, the governing bodies of the lawyers, the Beirut and Tripoli bar associations, specialised civil society and the academia to come together for this ambitious, yet urgently needed process.

It is heartening to see the dedication shown by many in ensuring that Rule of Law continues to govern the relationship between the State and its citizens. All this despite the difficult conditions in which the institutions administering justice have had to operate in the last few years.

An impartial, empowered, and independent judiciary remains critical for Lebanon, not only to guarantee a system with strong checks and balances, but also to regain people’s trust, investors’ trust, and the trust of the partners and institutions that can support the country on its path to recovery.

And this forum is certainly a conducive platform to lead the discussions on the needed reforms. It is inclusive, comprehensive, structured, but above all… Lebanese-led.

We share your wish that the outcome of the Justice Forum would set the vision for the future of Lebanon’s judiciary.

As the European Union, we have strongly engaged with Lebanon in the sector. We have provided technical expertise and financial assistance, and even sought to alleviate some of the logistical challenges facing those working in the judiciary. We made possible Lebanon’s engagement with the Venice Commission, and supported Lebanon in undertaking a Functional Review of the justice sector. Yet we are ready to do more, if the Lebanese authorities fully embrace the path of reforms.

We are looking forward to the success of the forum. We hope this will be a constructive and inclusive process that will lead to the implementation of structural reforms. The key starting point of this is the adoption of the laws on enhancing the independence of the judiciary.

These structural reforms will require courage, something that many in the Lebanese judicial ecosystem have proven to have an abundance of.

These structural reforms will also require compromises. And the essence of compromises is that nobody loses everything but everybody wins something. In the European Union, we strike compromises every day. This is not easy, but it has allowed us to move forward since our foundation, imperfectly at times but still forward.

Finally, these structural reforms require communication, at the right time and in the right way, to inform all stakeholders and the public about the important developments relevant to them.

For Lebanon, sticking to the status quo cannot be an option. With the many challenges that Lebanon is facing, the time to act is always now.

We sincerely hope this wide-ranging forum will serve as a blueprint for dialogue and concrete action across other vital sectors.

Thank you.