



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

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CANBERRA, A.C.T. 2600

29 March 2005

Mr Tony Yacoub
President
World Lebanese Cultural Union
Geographical Region Council of Australia and New Zealand
PO Box 86
TULLAMARINE VIC 3043

Dear Mr Yacoub

Thank you for your letter of 8 March 2005 to the Prime Minister about the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. The Prime Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf.

As the Prime Minister said in Parliament on 7 March 2005, the recent announcement by the President of Syria of a phased Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon is an encouraging development. That said, the Australian Government recognises that this announcement is only a beginning and that further dialogue is required to bring about an immediate withdrawal of the Syrian forces, the end of external support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and the disbanding of militias. The government will continue to urge all parties to work towards a peaceful resolution of this issue in the interests of a more stable and prosperous Middle East.

As a matter of record, the Australian Government has long-shared the commitment of Lebanese Australians to supporting Lebanon's sovereignty, independence and national unity. It is a matter of principle that the Government fully supports the withdrawal of foreign troops, including those representing Syria, from Lebanon. To this end, Australia supports the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 which calls for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and the disbanding of militias. We strongly support the right of the Lebanese people to determine their own political future, and to participate in free and fair elections without foreign interference in accordance with democratic processes.

Regarding the formation of a new government, I understand that following consultations with parliamentary factions President Lahoud has re-appointed Omar Karami as Prime Minister. The international community will continue to monitor the political situation in Lebanon in the lead up to legislative elections, to be held in May 2005.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a stylized initial 'H' followed by a horizontal line.

Hugh Borrowman
Assistant Secretary
International Division