

Strategy to end sectarianism in Lebanon

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The demonstration of about 2,000 people in Beirut on Feb. 27 calling for an end of sectarianism in Lebanon was wonderful news. Lebanon is finally awakening from a phase of political cynicism and the belief that nothing will ever change. The demo showed that the potential to unite around one essential demand can bring Lebanese from all walks of life and from all sects together. They want to build a truly democratic Lebanon. They want to end the rule of incompetent family dynasties, corrupt businessmen and criminals of war.

In leaflets, the organizers demanded a “secular, civil, democratic, socially just and equal state.” Music!

We all agree that the Lebanese sectarian system fails to provide peace and stability, social justice and a future for our children. We know that this anachronistic system allows regional powers like Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia to interfere via their local cronies and degrade Lebanon to their fighting ground.

Almost all our current politicians – the above mentioned incompetent family dynasties, corrupt businessmen and criminals of war – are responsible for plundering the state, keeping institutions inefficient and corrupt, for impoverishing the people and for pushing the country into regular cycles of violence and war.

No, our problems and tragedies are not planned in Tel Aviv, Washington, Damascus, Tehran or Riyadh. They are homemade. Lebanese need to take their destiny in their hands. We need to take responsibility.

The end of the sectarian system is off course our core demand. But what is our strategy to make that edifice crumble? What main section of the foundations must be pulled down so that the rest collapses as a result?

The current election law:

Lebanon needs a modern and fair election law that gives secular parties and independent candidates a fair chance of getting into Parliament. The current Parliament must scrap the current elections law that monopolizes power into the hands of the current rulers and pass a law allowing proportional representation.

Secular parties and independents should be able to field candidates all over Lebanon to convince people vote for their policies to reform institutions and solve the many problems we suffer from – unfair taxation system, health care, public schools, environment, transport, energy, weak judiciary, etc.

The demand for a modern and fair election law would be the rallying point for all – even for many March 8 and 14 supporters. Yes, I truly believe that a large majority of the Lebanese would support this demand.

Intifada against sectarianism:

How do we ignite a non-violent intifada as a follow-up to the demonstration in Beirut on Feb. 27? I suggest open-ended, peaceful demonstrations and sit-ins in Beirut's Martyrs Square – and in squares in Sidon, Tripoli, Zahle, Nabatieh, Tyre, Jounieh, Baalbek, Hermel, Beiteddine, etc. Let us get our tents and sleeping bags, and let us save Lebanon.

Let us follow the example of the 20 young people who on March 1 erected a tent in Sidon's Martyrs' Square and said they will not leave until the sectarian system is down.

Suggested rules of the game:

- *All protests are peaceful and non-violent (the mother of all rules).
- * We are inclusive: People who support March 14 or March 8 parties, religious people, priests and sheikhs are more than welcome to participate and unite in the call to end sectarianism, separate religion from state and to demand a modern and fair election law.
- * Please, no party flags and no religious symbols.

Focus on the following demands:

- *End sectarianism
- *Parliament must pass a modern and fair elections law now
- * MPs vote to hold parliamentary elections in maximum six months, then Parliament dissolves itself as it does not truly represent the people!

Suggested broad lines for next steps:

- * Network with groups all over the country and agree on a strategy and an action plan.
- * Formulate a draft election law along the lines of the recommendations made by the Boutros Commission
- *Organize workshops and lectures to educate activists about this law
- * Mobilize, plan and prepare
- *Start the peaceful intifada to end sectarianism

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