

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 19, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Mr. John Barsa
Acting Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Administrator Barsa:

We join our fellow Americans and citizens around the world in expressing our deepest condolences to the people of Lebanon following the devastating explosion at the Port of Beirut that has killed more than 220 people and injured more than 5,000. We are grateful for the Administration's quick efforts to deliver relief supplies and we support the immediate delivery of \$15 million in emergency humanitarian aid. We also urge you to lead a longer-term effort to address Lebanon's worsening economic crisis, conditioned on Lebanon's leaders committing to a clear set of reforms.

Lebanon's hospitals are overwhelmed, and the country is dangerously low on basic medical supplies and equipment. Emergency medical assistance should be immediately provided through partners like the Lebanese Red Cross, local hospitals, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with expertise in health. With a USAID presence in Beirut since 1951 and significant long-term investments in economic, security, and humanitarian assistance, the structure and relationships are in place for us to respond quickly and effectively through reputable NGOs.

We should also look to all the tools at our disposal, including the International Development Finance Corporation, and work with our international partners to assist with the massive rebuilding of the port that will be needed to get the Lebanese people back on their feet. The Port of Beirut is central to the supply of essential commodities to Lebanon: more than 80 percent of the country's grain and 100 percent of its fuel is imported. With the port's infrastructure now destroyed a food and fuel crisis could soon erupt in Lebanon. And with up to 300,000 people made homeless overnight by the explosion, temporary shelter and rehabilitation supplies will be needed to help displaced Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian people recover and rebuild.

We join calls for a transparent and independent investigation into the cause of this explosion. We must hold accountable those officials whose negligence enabled this tragedy. This disaster could not have come at a worse time for the Lebanese people, who have suffered for years under corrupt and negligent leadership that has bankrupted the country while protecting the benefits of the few.

It is sadly telling that there is little to no faith in providing assistance directly to the Lebanese government due to its rampant corruption. As such, while responding to the short-term needs of the Lebanese people is paramount, we hope that this disaster will refocus the U.S. and international community on the necessity of addressing Lebanon's deep-seated governance crisis that has brought us to this moment. Fundamentally, the explosion is symptomatic of a corrupt governing system that has consistently failed to provide even the most basic services to the Lebanese people. Lebanon needs leaders who will finally commit to a clear set of economic, public transparency, and anticorruption reforms to rebuild effectively.

It is in the United States' interest to have a stable and secure Lebanon. Iran is eager to exploit this tragedy to further expand its influence, and we know that Chinese financing to Lebanon would not require the reforms that are desperately needed at this critical juncture. Therefore, we urge you to lead a robust longer-term effort to yield the reforms needed to help the Lebanese people suffering under a collapsed economy and gross government mismanagement. We support the aspirations of the Lebanese people to have an accountable and responsive government, and an economy and public services that work for everyone. But in order for the international community to provide in good faith the kind of massive international financial bailout that Lebanon needs, its leaders must first commit to real, substantive economic and political reforms. So far, the country's entrenched political elites have been unwilling to undertake these critical reforms, including specific actions in return for IMF assistance. Even as the international community rallies to support the Lebanese people in their hour of need, it is incumbent on the Lebanese leadership to be responsive to the demands of its people.

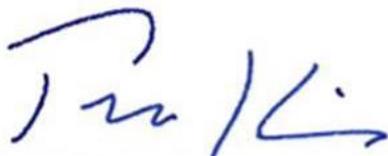
Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy



James Lankford



Tim Kaine



David A. Perdue



Jeanne Shaheen