

United States Senate

April 28, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
United States Secretary of State
The State Department
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to ask you to engage with your counterparts in Lebanon and urge them to hold parliamentary elections scheduled for May 15 on time and in a fair and transparent manner. These polls can be a critical first step to restoring legitimacy to Lebanon's political process and laying the foundation for enacting critical economic reforms. And yet, concerns remain that some officials may seek to postpone the upcoming elections in an attempt to preserve their own political power.

As you know, Lebanon has been enduring interrelated political, economic, and health crises since at least 2019, when hundreds of thousands of Lebanese took to the streets to protest against political elites widely seen as responsible for decades of corruption and mismanagement. Protests and ensuing political gridlock resulted in the lack of a functioning national government from October 2019 to September 2021. A deadly explosion at the port of Beirut on August 4, 2020 killed more than 200 people and injured and displaced thousands. As a result of the ongoing financial crisis, Lebanon's currency has lost more than 90 percent of its value since 2019 and more than 75 percent of the country's population is living in poverty. Shortages of medicine, water, food, and fuel—compounded by Russia's invasion of Ukraine—are further complicating efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic and a severe energy shortage. While there are important efforts underway to increase Lebanon's energy supply and implement necessary financial reforms, upcoming parliamentary elections that restore popular legitimacy to the government will be essential to implementing the structural reforms Lebanon needs.

Against this backdrop, in December 2021, Lebanon's Interior Ministry scheduled its parliamentary elections for May 15, 2022. On February 4, 2022, the United Nations Security Council emphasized "the importance of holding free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections as scheduled on 15 May 2022, ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation of women as candidates and voters in the election, and called on the Government of Lebanon to enable the Supervisory Commission for Elections to carry out its mandate, notably by providing it with adequate resources and initiating the process of nominating candidates." On February 15, Lebanon's government approved the allocation of \$18 million to hold the parliamentary elections – a positive step, although concerns remain that some officials may yet seek to use the country's financial crisis as a pretext to postpone the vote.

The importance of Lebanon proceeding with these parliamentary elections on time cannot be

understated. This vote will be the first since the popular uprising in October 2019 and would be a critical step to restoring confidence and stability in Lebanon's political process. We ask you to engage with your Lebanese counterparts to urge them to proceed with these elections on May 15, with appropriate funding allocated, and in a fair and transparent manner. Thank you for your attention to this timely issue.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Senator



Todd Young
U.S. Senator