

## **The Lebanese Initiative against Discrimination and Racism**

One needs no further contemplation into the conditions in Lebanon and the conditions of those living in this country in order to see the escalation in past months, against several backgrounds, of several sectarian and confessional divisions, both overt and covert, and the escalation of the tone of discrimination and hatred in the rhetoric accompanying these divisions. This is true whether among the Lebanese themselves or among the Lebanese and the refugees and the displaced who were forced by conditions that they have no power over to seek security and safety in Lebanon and among the Lebanese.

Of course, for each of the backgrounds that deepened these divisions and fed discrimination and hatred in the political discourse and among the public, there should be examination and scrutiny to expose intertwined facts and illusions. And, of course, Syrian refugees, as well as Palestinian refugees, are in the forefront of these backgrounds, but... But the fact that these backgrounds need to be analyzed – something that is being addressed by a number of research institutions, which deserve to be thanked for their efforts – doesn't eliminate moral and civic responsibility for rapid response by the media, by law, and by various peaceful means available, to public positions and statements that incite discrimination and racism and to acts, symbolic or otherwise, that are being inspired in one way or another by such positions and statements or stem from them.

In response to this equally moral and civic duty, a group of public workers (both individuals and bodies), civil activists, lawyers, and media have come together. The group decided to launch an initiative called **the Lebanese Initiative against Discrimination and Racism** to confront hate rhetoric, discrimination, and racism (due to color, sex, religion, race, citizenship, lack of citizenship...) and denounce their holders to the extent of legal prosecution. The initiative is also meant to defend any victim of such rhetoric or its consequences.

The launchers of the initiative – **the Lebanese Initiative against Discrimination and Racism** – aren't unaware that its launching today, with the pluralism of its members, may bring about short-sighted political interpretations against its participants. As such and while they aren't unaware of this, the clarity of the moral and civic principles they rely on in their coalition under this initiative exempts them from making any justification, feeling any embarrassment that others may intend them to feel, or needing to come up with any excuses.

Therefore, as this initiative is today launched with the active support of the signatories to this declaration, it welcomes all the physical and moral persons who share its principles. It even invites them to consider **the Lebanese Initiative against Discrimination and Racism** as a national platform dedicated to tireless reminding, by the means already stated, that the values of diversity, freedoms, and human rights are among Lebanon's *raison d'être*. The initiative believes that any denial of these values, or any relativization in their observance, amounts to denial of Lebanon

and to repudiation of Lebanon and of these values, of which Lebanon is considered a habitat and beacon.

Beirut, August 22, 2019