

EU) EU/LEBANON: “Paris III” conference on mobilising reconstruction aid for country recently devastated by recent war with Israel

Paris, 15/01/2007 (Agence Europe) - A conference on reconstruction aid for Lebanon (known as “Paris III”) will take place on 25 January in the French capital. Participants will include the new UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Condoleeza Rice for the US, and very possibly several EU ministers, including acting president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and Javier Solana. A meeting of senior officials will take place at the beginning of the week to prepare the meeting themes. The definitive list will then be known, which will incorporate senior representatives from Gulf countries.

The president of the host country, Jacques Chirac, informed the Lebanese newspaper “*L'Orient-Le-Jour*” on Friday that the conference would be presented “*in a positive way*” and that “*the broad mobilisation from Europe, the USA and the Middle East*” ensures the success of the conference. President Chirac asserted that, “*I will do all I can for it to succeed - we need it to*”.

According to the newspaper, the governor of the Bank of Lebanon began preparatory discussions on Thursday with Jean-Pierre Jouyet (the main coordinator for Paris III) to examine the variety of aspects to tackle during the conference, and the aid mechanisms called for from Lebanon (as well as the re-scheduling of the public deficit). As part of the preparatory meetings, the former president of the Lebanese republic, Amine Gemayel, met the Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, and UN Envoy, Terjé Roed-Larsen, on Thursday in Madrid. The High Representative of the CFSP, Javier Solana, had a telephone conversation on Thursday 11 January with the Lebanese prime minister, Fouad Siniora.

Brussels asserts that this conference will also have a political goal as well as focusing on the economic and financial aid chapter. There is a desire to support Mr Siniora to emerge from the current crisis, characterised by fractures in his ministerial team following the recent defections and erosion of his parliamentary majority.

On Thursday 4 January, in anticipation of this conference, the Lebanese government adopted a programme of economic reforms. In return, it hopes to receive financial aid and a rescheduling of its debt, estimated to be \$41bn. In a press statement, Mr Siniora highlighted the need to obtain financial aid which, if not forthcoming, could contribute to greater debt and “*put the economy in great peril*”. Paris III follows a similar conference in Paris in 2002, which helped Lebanon collect \$2.6bn. A donors' conference took place on 31 August that focused on Lebanon receiving emergency aid rather than long-term reconstruction aid. In Stockholm, Lebanon obtained promises of emergency aid amounting to \$940 million (€735 million). The Paris conference on 25 January is expected to complete