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Speech of Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil at the Public Budget and "Finance Forum in Saida's Serail

I am honored to witness today an advanced example of the actual partnership between civil society and the Lebanese State. Such an experience, when perfectly organized and based on scientific rules, definitely s momentum and strength to the work of the government and the State that needs first and foremost an effective integration between the civil society and its executive bodies. This is what Ms. Bahia Hariri is doing by organizing this exceptional forum, which represents the integration between the roles of the youth, their predecessors and those occupying positions of responsibility. If we dive into the experiment before us today, we would see an actual lack of understanding when it comes to the details, status and role of the public budget in people's lives. This drives us to work hard to spread awareness, awareness of the management and steering of public finance so it serves the development project for regions and people.

I am happy today because this event is not the result of theories only, but we are witnessing a living experiment with actual results on the ground through what has been accomplished in terms of organizing, arranging and legislating what we call “Taamir Region zones”. This raises a central question: how does the State deal with its accumulated issues and problems? Can we continue to leave real gaps in people's interests and lives for decades? Those whose rights were disregarded for decades represent, according to the information given to us, 3.400 families in “Taamir Region buildings”. This in itself is a condemnation of the government’s efforts, a condemnation that requires we assume our responsibility and admit failure. However, we were clear when discussing the matter with MP Bahia Hariri

and stressed that it needs exceptional attention in terms of decisions, financing and follow-up until completely solved. I am pleased to announce that this has been fully achieved and all the Taamir bonds have been issued; around 3400 bonds in the name of the Public Corporation for Housing and the ownerships will be transferred to those concerned exempted from all taxes and fees and other dues, as a contribution from the State to promote the stability of this large segment of Lebanese citizens.

Today we are witnessing a complementary experience. Saida, the bride of this beach, Saida, the gate to the resisting South, Saida with its inhabitants, its diversity and its embrace of the comprehensive Lebanese scene with all its affiliations, sects and political orientations, needs to be free of real problems related to its reconstruction, markets and ancient areas. Our commitment is clear today and is reflected in the decisions that were prepared and that will be pursued and implemented by initiating works in old Saida as a whole to solve all real estate issues and classify the area so we can fight the battle for developing old Saida, while preserving its heritage and history that cannot be ignored.

This service to Saida is not specific to a particular area because the development of Saida means first and foremost its people and residents, but more importantly it means Lebanon, all of Lebanon. When Saida is enhanced, this means that we have added a positive factor to our economy, tourism, public finance and Lebanon's relations and position on the shores of the Mediterranean. We pledge to pursue the topic of this meeting, especially that we will launch in the coming days, under the auspices of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, the Citizen Budget prepared by Basil Fuleihan's Institute of Finance at the Ministry of Finance for the second year in a row. The Budget will be accessible to all those interested in a concise and scientific manner, explaining the objectives and promoting the financial culture that many have lost at the economic and fiscal levels. Lebanon is facing the stances of credit-rating agencies toward the prevailing situation in the country. I assure you that we can overcome this crisis and that we are not a bankrupt country. We are capable of overcoming difficulties and crises, regardless of the ratings or external stances.

But this requires from the government a high sense of responsibility to launch serious reform workshops to complement 2019 Budget. It requires bold and clear decisions serving the interests of the people and promoting their trust in the State and its institutions. If we do not take advantage of this time, then we are indeed facing a major challenge that cannot be met in the

future. We must trust that the will of these young people can help us overcome our ordeal and help our beloved country Lebanon succeed.

At the end of his speech, Minister Khalil answered the public's questions. In his answer to a question about the funds of the Cooperative of Civil Servants, Minister Khalil said:

"I promise you that there is no delay in the funds allocated to civil servants. We have deposited in the employees' account on Wednesday, 34.800 billion LBP and on Monday, we will pay them around 40 billion LBP. Moreover, before the end of September they will receive 60 billion LBP."

Minister Khalil then went on a surprise visit to Saida and Tyre's Real Estate and Surveying Departments, located in Saida, where he checked the work undergoing there.