

LAF Commander in Chief General Joseph Aoun's Speech at the Ceremony declaring Jouroud Aarsal and Ras Baalbek free from the remnants of war on 8/9/2023

Distinguished Ambassadors,

Esteemed Governor,

Esteemed Audience,

On August 30, 2017, we announced the end of the "Fajr al Jouroud" battle against terrorism and the liberation of areas occupied by ISIS and Al Nusra. Today, after six years, we declare full liberation with the announcement that "Jouroud Aarsal and Ras Baalbek are free from remnants of war." This commitment towards our people in Aarsal, Ras Baalbek, and Al Qaa is reflected today by returning their lands to them following liberation from both occupations. We invite them to invest in these lands and transform them from barren areas into vibrant green spaces full of life and hope.

Two years ago, we also declared the Northern Governorate "free from the remnants of war," enabling its residents to regain their agricultural and investment activities. We made a promise to pursue our mission of clearing the remaining Lebanese areas from all that hinders their owners' access to them.

Esteemed Audience,

There is no doubt that confronting this hidden enemy is a difficult and complex task, especially in this region due to the lack of maps and sufficient internal funding. However, the support of friend countries and various non-governmental organizations, with all their capabilities, has significantly aided us in accomplishing the mission. Your presence among us, esteemed ambassadors and representatives of these organizations, is best proof of that.

This support enabled the Army to initiate the clearing of Jouroud Aarsal, Ras Baalbek, and Al Qaa from explosive ordnance following their liberation from the grip of terrorism. This facilitated the establishment of military centers along the border and connecting them through a wide network of roads made available to the region's residents for easy and safe access to their lands. Here, I renew my gratitude to the friend countries and all individuals who contributed to the completion of these roads that became the region's lifeline.

Esteemed Audience,

There is no doubt that my military service in this region as the Commander of the Aarsal Front prior to assuming the Army Command allowed me to witness the suffering of the people due to the occupation of their lands by terrorism. I saw their eagerness to return to the realm of legitimacy and the army. We have fulfilled the promises made to

them. Our people in this region, like the rest of the Lebanese regions, deserve to enjoy security and stability, to invest in their lands, and to establish themselves there. They deserve our utmost sacrifice, no matter the challenges we face.

Our presence along the border is not without challenges, including the rugged geographical terrain and various resource limitations. However, our military personnel are exerting their utmost efforts to protect it, prevent smuggling operations, and deter illegal migration.

They are facing various types of rumors and accusations of negligence, while the daily facts on the ground prove their tremendous efforts. From here, I invite every skeptic to visit the border and witness firsthand the situation that warns of impending challenges. Let us move beyond speculation and baseless accusations and stand behind the army, which has been and will continue to be the safeguard of Lebanon. It will not deviate from its oath and responsibilities.

Despite the difficult circumstances we are facing, our troops continue to demonstrate determination and execute their missions with passion and professionalism. They are driven to fulfill their duty, no matter the challenges and dangers, as they are sacrificing for the sake of their people, their families, and their homeland.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to all friend countries and non-governmental organizations for their support to the Army

through the Lebanese Mine Action Center. I commend the efforts of the center's personnel, the Engineering Regiment, and all who contributed to this achievement, leading to the declaration of the area as free from the remnants of war. I also thank the residents and prominent figures of the region for their continuous support to the Army. We stand by your side to preserve your security and stability, and we will continue to do so to ensure your safety and steadfastness in your land.

Long live the Army – Long Live Lebanon