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BEIRUT•LEBANON

May 20, 2011

Media Notice

For Immediate Release

Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman Visits Lebanon

On May 20, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and North African Affairs Jeffrey Feltman visited Lebanon to deliver a message that the U.S. views the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa as an historic opportunity to meet the aspirations of the people of the region, building a stronger foundation for prosperity and showing people the fruits of democratic change. During his visit, Assistant Secretary Feltman held meetings with a number of Lebanese officials including President Michel Sleiman, Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati, former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, and MP Walid Jumblatt.

Echoing the message of President Obama's speech on the Middle East, Assistant Secretary Feltman outlined U.S.'s position on the democratic changes sweeping across the region through clear and unwavering support for a set of core principles: opposition to the use of violence and repression; protection for universal rights including free speech, peaceful assembly, freedom of religion, equality for men and women; and support for political and economic change in the Middle East and North Africa that can meet the legitimate aspirations of people throughout the region.

Assistant Secretary Feltman reiterated the U.S.'s view that the international community will assess its relationship with any new government of Lebanon based on the make-up of the next cabinet, its Ministerial Statement and the actions it takes in regard to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and Lebanon's other

international obligations. Assistant Secretary Feltman reconfirmed that the United States considers the make-up of Lebanon's government to be strictly a Lebanese decision and called on all parties in Lebanon to protect the government formation process from any external interference.

Assistant Secretary Feltman also expressed the United States' serious concern about the ongoing violence in Syria, condemning the Syrian government's continued use of violence and intimidation against the Syrian people. He called upon the Syrian regime and its supporters to refrain from further acts of violence and other human rights abuses against Syrian citizens seeking to express their political aspirations. The Assistant Secretary also conveyed the United States' concern about reports of Syrian civilians being forced to flee to safe haven inside Lebanon and called on the Lebanese government to work with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross to fulfill its obligations under international law to provide protection to Syrian citizens fleeing the violence in Syria.

The Assistant Secretary also noted the United States' concern about events on Lebanon's southern border on May 15. He emphasized the importance of maintaining strong border security on all of Lebanon's borders in order to prevent incidents that increase tensions that can lead to casualties and negatively impact the security of the region.