

Following is text of President Reagan's reply to Mrs Thatcher, sent by the hot line on 18 June.

'Dear Margaret:

I appreciate your message about Lebanon. We have been hearing the same strong concerns from our Arab friends that you describe. In addition to the meeting with Foreign Minister Saud in Bonn, King Hussein has twice written me about Lebanon and the subject has been a central concern during Mr Hassan Ali's talks here this week.

There is no question that we must try to deal effectively with the Lebanon tragedy. We have been making every effort to consolidate a cease-fire as a first step. That has been Ambassador Habib's first priority. We are particularly concerned how to avoid further fighting in and around Beirut, which will cost additional innocent lives if it continues or escalates. We are also doing everything possible to help alleviate the human suffering caused by this tragic war. I have asked Congress for special funds for relief, and we are working to provide a twenty-five million dollar package to finance at least some portion of what we hope will be a broadly supported international effort.

Beyond the cease-fire and relief, however, we too believe that the present tragedy offers the opportunity to create a better future for Lebanon. That country's independence and unity must be preserved and its government's authority must be strengthened.

Phil Habib is presently in Beirut. He has met with President Sarkis and has had good talks. I believe there is a hope that the Lebanese themselves are working toward reconciliation and that they understand the need to work together. It is also clear they share the desire for a future without outside military forces in their country. These are also our objectives. We hope others will also encourage and support Lebanon's national leaders as they work toward a new national consensus.

We are aware that it is vital to create conditions in which the Lebanese government can act within its constitutional procedures and without intimidation from any quarter. I am concerned about the presence of Israeli forces around Beirut and the problems that can create for Lebanon's leaders. Phil Habib is making every effort to gain Israeli cooperation in steps which will permit Lebanon's leaders to act freely.

I agree that we need to stay in close contact regarding this and other developments in the Middle East. I fully endorse the idea that our people should consult closely in the near future about how we can cooperate in achieving a solution to the Lebanon crisis and to the broader issues, including the Palestinian question. We will have to be closely in touch concerning humanitarian relief and a formula for peacekeeping forces which will be essential to ensure rapid Israeli withdrawal.

Sincerely, Ron''