**Lebanon's Business Innovation and Enhance Exports (BIEEL) Project Concludes with Grand Closing Ceremony**

Beirut, Lebanon — June 23, 2023

The highly successful Business Innovation and Enhance Exports for Lebanon (BIEEL) project led by Fair Trade Lebanon-Commerce Equitable Liban and initiated by the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), concluded today with a momentous closing ceremony held at the Le Royal Hotel in Dbayeh. The ceremony celebrated the project’s achievements, which focused on supporting Lebanese SMEs and cooperatives in gaining access to international markets and exporting agri-food products.

This event, attended by US Embassy representatives, esteemed guests, participants, BIEEL cluster members and representatives from various Food and Beverage (F&B) sectors, press, and media, was a testament to the BIEEL project’s remarkable accomplishments. It provided a platform for key figures to reflect on the project's objectives and its impact on empowering local producers, expanding market opportunities, and elevating the quality standards of Lebanese agri-food products.

The closing ceremony commenced with the Lebanese and U.S. national anthems, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration. Fair Trade Lebanon President Samir Abdel Malak said: “During the period of BIEEL project (2019-2022), agriculture and agro-food exports exceeded 270 million USD. Through BIEEL project, Fair Trade Lebanon was able to empower 68 MSME’s buy giving them access to international markets and to ensure economic inclusion of 32 cooperatives. We are grateful to the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) that helped us to build a sustainable model of efficient actions, by creating seven clusters to support agrifood exports in Lebanon (Olive & Olive oil, Wines & Spirits, Spices & Specialty Foods, Tahini & Byproducts, Nuts & Coffee, Pastries & Sweets, Fruits & Vegetables). We hope that this closing event will be a continuum towards future collaborations that can consolidate and build on all the efforts we made together. We will keep on acting together to address the multiple challenges Lebanese producers are facing and continue supporting and promoting Lebanese cuisine and its excellent reputation around the world”.

Deputy Chief of Mission Richard Michaels delivered inspiring opening remarks that highlighted the United States’ partnership with Lebanon and its commitment to fostering a conducive environment for SME growth, including easy access to business financing, efficient export activity, improved corporate governance, and enhanced access to finance and international markets. He added, “This project is just one in a long series of efforts to strengthen the bond between our nations, as we endeavor to help the Lebanese navigate through the current economic crisis toward a brighter future. The United States remains committed, through assistance amounting to over $3.8 billion dollars since 2018, to supporting the Lebanese people by enhancing Lebanon’s security, stability, and sovereignty.”

The opening remarks followed presentations that showcased the BIEEL project’s achievements and milestones. Fair Trade Lebanon’s Economic Affairs Manager Mr. Laurent Gharzani, presented the export data for 2020-2022. The data demonstrated the substantial growth in agri-food exports during the project’s period, noting the increase in agro-food exports from $50 Million to $270 Million.

Project Manager Mr. Alex Salha shared empowered companies and cooperatives’ success stories of. He highlighted the notable increase in headcount and revenue, indicating their enhanced competitiveness in the international market.

Public Private Partnership Manager Ms. Carmen Nohra, provided insights on the project's collaborations with the public sector. She underscored the importance of the strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with the Ministry of Economy and Trade, the Ministry of Industry, and the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Steering Committee’s establishment to foster partnerships and ensure sustainable growth.

Projects Director Mr. Christian Kamel continued by reviewing the project's collaborations with the private sector, particularly the Association of Lebanese Industrialists. His presentation highlighted public-private partnerships’ importance in advancing the agri-food industry.

Senior Communication Consultant Dr. Zeina Tohme, provided a glimpse into the nation branding campaigns and events promotion initiatives under the BIEEL project. The audience had the opportunity to learn about the creative strategies employed to promote Lebanese agri-food products globally and support cluster members’ access to international markets by enhanced labeling and branding.

The event concluded with Fair Trade Lebanon CEO Mr. Philippe Adaime’s closing remarks and an announcement of the vision for a sustainable future by. His inspiring speech reinforced the BIEEL projects on Lebanon's agri-food sector and its potential to shape the future of the industry.

Following the insightful speeches, attendees engaged in a cocktail reception and networking session. The relaxed atmosphere fostered meaningful discussions and collaborations of potential partnerships among participants.

The closing ceremony served as a platform to acknowledge the remarkable contributions of Fair Trade Lebanon (FTL) and express gratitude to the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) for their invaluable support and funding. The partnership between FTL and MEPI has been instrumental in driving the success of the BIEEL project, propelling Lebanon's agri-food sector onto a path of sustainable growth and international recognition.

In conclusion, the BIEEL project made significant strides in achieving its objectives, empowering Lebanese SMEs and cooperatives, and positioning Lebanon as a key player in the global agri-food industry. The project's legacy will continue to shape the sector’s future in fostering economic growth, promoting sustainable practices, and amplifying the voices of local producers in international markets.

**About Fair Trade Lebanon & BIEEL initiative**

Fair Trade Lebanon is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting fair and ethical trade practices that guarantee fair remuneration and decent income to small producers and cooperatives. Founded in 2006, Fair Trade Lebanon is member of the World Fair Trade Organization, a global community of social enterprises spread across 76 countries that fully practice Fair Trade and put people and planet first in everything they do. Through various initiatives and projects, Fair Trade Lebanon aims to create sustainable opportunities and improve the livelihoods of marginalized communities and local producers.

BIEEL stands for **“Business Innovation and Enhance Export for Lebanon”.** The project is led by Fair Trade and initiated by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). The initiative aims at creating an environment which enables business development and **empowers 100 Lebanese SMEs and cooperatives** by increasing their competitiveness internationally through 3 pillars: access to market, standard and access to certification.

Website: <https://www.fairtradelebanon.org/>

**About the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)**

The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is a program initiated by the United States to promote partnerships and opportunities for economic and political progress in the Middle East and North Africa. MEPI supports initiatives that empower local communities, strengthen civil society, and promote economic growth in the region.

Website: <https://mepi.state.gov/>