

**Statement of His Eminence and His Beatitude Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir
Patriarch of Antioch and All the East
St. Anthony's Maronite Catholic Church, Lawrence, Massachusetts
Thursday July 13, 2006**

The following is a statement of His Eminence and His Beatitude Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East:

"I began my pastoral visit to the United States on June 29, the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. I have visited St. Louis, Chicago, and Detroit. After these two days in Lawrence, I will proceed to New York. I have met thousands of Maronites and friends from throughout the United States. The Lebanese and Maronite people are proud contributors to American society.

"I have come at the invitation of Maronite Bishops Robert Shaheen and Gregory Mansour who have undertaken the planning and details of this visit, which is made in honor of the forty years since the appointment of a Maronite Bishop in the United States. Much progress has been made in 40 years. We look forward to a brighter future.

"I am grateful for the solidarity that exists between the Catholics of Lebanon and the Middle East, and those of this country. I am also grateful for the solidarity expressed by the international community, and especially President Bush and the United States, towards Lebanon.

"I have come to strengthen the bridges between East and West, Christians and Muslims. I have come with the demand that Lebanon steer its own course, without the tutelage of any other nation. I have come to say that the Lebanese are determined to live far from terrorism, tyranny, corruption and despair.

"The Lebanese are proud people and have inherited the oldest democracy in the Middle East. They are well-educated, accustomed to hard work, and eager to work in harmony with the community of nations.

"In Lebanon we have difficult issues to resolve. We have been working at these issues in the National Dialogue, which still awaits a positive outcome. Syrian troops have left Lebanon, but their influence is still there. We therefore ask again that our two nations develop proper relations befitting of states, which means among other things, delineated boundaries, embassies, respect for international law, and friendly relations.

"The tragic events of recent days give us pause to pray and ask the Lord's help. I am very concerned and anxious. As we have said in the past and reassert again today, we are against all aggression wherever it comes from. We condemn Israel's recent retaliations against Lebanon's people and infrastructure. We also hope that Hezbollah will finally lay down its arms and join the other citizens of Lebanon in reaching political solutions to all of the Lebanese problems.

"We look forward to a united, sovereign, free, and truly independent Lebanon, where the Lebanese government exerts its sole authority over all of Lebanon's territory.

"We have known war first hand on our own soil. We have had enough. We need the help and support of all our friends in the world, especially the United States. We are determined to work together, through dialogue, for peace and justice in the region.

"I ask you to pray for Lebanon and help us to show in the news the true Lebanon, the Lebanon that longs to reclaim its former glory. As Pope John Paul II says, 'Lebanon is more than a country, it is a message of fraternity for the entire world.'

Thank you for coming today.