

Patriarch Bechara Rai's Talk at the Consulate General of Lebanon in New York, on June 28, 2016

Honorable Consul General Majdi Ramadan and Vanessa,  
Ambassador Nawwaf Salam,  
Honorable Caroline Ziade,  
Bishop Gregory,  
Archbishop Paul,  
Brother Bishops,  
Chorbishop Michael,  
Monsignor James,  
Beloved Priests, Religious and Civic leaders,  
and Friends of Lebanon

It is my joy, once again, to visit you here at Lebanon's house, and to visit the good people of New York and the surrounding areas. I greet the Honorable Consul General, his spouse and family, and all the staff of the Consulate. I wish also to express my gratitude for this kind invitation, which allows me to meet such a distinguished audience. I thank him also for his kind welcoming words.

We share a great and common love for Lebanon, and we are very proud of our country of Lebanon and of your country of origin. For in Lebanon Christians and Muslims, with the diversity of their cultures and traditions, decided long ago to build together a common identity.

They agreed to live together on equal basis, separating religion and state, in a country where the divine law and all religions are respected on an equal basis. We gave each other a guarantee to share power in the government and the administration on an equal basis, in accordance with the National Pact and the Lebanese formula of 1943, and this is clearly determined by the Constitution. This made of Lebanon a parliamentary democracy, a consensual democracy, which abides by the Charter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and guarantees freedom for all citizens.

Lebanon distinguishes itself by its openness to both East and West, builds a cultural bridge between them, and adopts the principle of unity within diversity, hence the famous saying of Pope Saint John Paul II: "Lebanon is more than a country, a message and a model for East and West". This all tells the story of a nation that is truly worthy of respect and admiration, even though we are passing, at the present time, through a difficult and delicate political, economic and social circumstance, as a result of the events taking place in the countries around us.

These days Lebanon has received hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria and Iraq, those fleeing their countries where wars and instability continue. They feel they can count on Lebanon for help in time of need, and although this is a great compliment to Lebanon, it remains however a heavy burden that threatens Lebanon's identity and future.

I came to the United States to make a Pastoral visit to our many parishes and two eparchies of Brooklyn and Los Angeles. But I also came to urge your continued efforts and assistance for Lebanon. This small country, still somewhat paralyzed politically with the sad inability to elect a president, and an unwillingness for political parties to put the country first before personal interests, is trying to respond to so many needs for the poor and for the now nearly two million refugees living there.

The United States can be helpful politically to resolve the crisis in the entire region. You, her citizens of America and of Lebanon, can help by engaging your political representatives to look favorably on

Lebanon. You can also help by continuing your assistance in the many charitable and humanitarian efforts that make life a little better for the poor and refugee alike.

We look forward to your continued cooperation in order to foster development in Lebanon through investment in projects that promote economic growth and offer new job opportunities for its citizens. In that way you contribute to stopping the hemorrhage of emigration, which is draining our country of its human potential. Let us not forget that Lebanon has an indispensable role to play in the peace and stability of the region, and in strengthening the spirit of conviviality among its various cultures and religions.

We call upon you to safeguard your Lebanese nationality and be sure to register your marriages and your children in Lebanon. We also turn to our Diplomatic Mission with gratitude and thank in a special way the Honorable Consul General who has been extraordinary in his steadfast support and encouragement of this effort. By registering our marriages and children we safeguard our identity and tradition, and we contribute to maintaining a proper blend and balance between all the components of Lebanon, and between its two wings, Christianity and Islam.

I once again greet the Honorable Consul General, his spouse, family and the staff of the Consulate, and I wish to express my gratitude for this kind invitation, which has allowed me to meet such a distinguished audience. God bless you. God bless America and God bless Lebanon. Thank you.