

Rome Declaration

The Executive Committee of the Maronite League of Lebanon led by President Pierre Helou, the Executive Committee of the International Maronite Foundation led by its Chairman Edward Salem, and representatives of national Maronite Leagues, having met in Rome on the occasion of the Jubilee 2000 anniversary celebration under the leadership of His Beatitude Patriarch Mar Nasrallah Sfeir, on the basis of papers and dialogue issue the following declaration::

- 1- Representatives of the Maronite Catholic institutions and organizations who have met during this celebration thank His Holiness the Pope for declaring the “**The Maronites’ Day in Rome**” in conjunction with the celebrations of the 2000 Jubilee.
- 2- The participants express their spiritual allegiance to His Beatitude Patriarch Sfeir as well as their support to His positions and guidance.
- 3- Confirms the importance of creating a mechanism for coordination, cooperation, and collaboration among the national Maronite Leagues around the world in collaboration with the Maronite League in Lebanon and the International Maronite Foundation .
- 4- Declare the need for a task force to find a means of mobilizing Maronites in Lebanon and worldwide to support the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon as a state and nation.
- 5- Calls upon the Lebanese authorities to assume their responsibilities in relation to the security and dignity of all Lebanese. and calls upon them to exercise their duties and assume their responsibility regarding Lebanese sovereignty, freedom of expression of the people, their right to self-determination, and a return to normalcy among the people of Lebanon.
- 6- Reaffirm their commitment to national unity and their deep belief in coexistence while affirming the need to safeguard the balance between all communities that are part of the Lebanese society.

- 7- "Calls special attention to the current regional situation and stresses the necessity that Lebanon plays a full role in the comprehensive and just peace process while preserving the right of the Lebanese nation and strengthening its people's security.
8. The Meeting calls upon the Lebanese authorities not to let Lebanese citizens in the South and the West Bekaa bear the burden imposed by the Israeli occupation especially with the absence of the State in those areas and the problem of displacement.
- 9- Condemns atrocious and savage Israeli attacks against Lebanon as well as military operations causing the death of innocent people and the destruction of civil facilities.

Signature:

Maronite League in Lebanon: Pierre Helou

Union Maronite-Canada: Alexandre Salame

International Maronite Foundation (USA): Edward M. Salem Dr. Eli Saadi Dr. Paul Wakim, Antoine Raheb

Ligue Maronite- France :Vincent Wehbe

Union Maronite de Mexico: Antonio Aboud

Maronite League- Bulgaria: Joseph Feghali

Maronite Society Australia : Antoine Raheb

Romania

The Rome Meeting
Pace Helvetzia Conference
February 7-10, 2000

A series of meetings was held in Rome, Italy to explore cooperation among the various groups supporting Maronite causes around the world. This meeting was a watershed in the history of the Maronite Church and Laity. For the first time in memory the Maronites met with Maronite Laity from many areas around the world as represented by Maronite organizations from their respective countries including Lebanon. The meeting was held sponsored by the Maronite League of Lebanon with the blessing and cooperation of the Patriarch. Furthermore the meeting was held in conjunction with the Jubilee Year St. Maron Day celebration for the year 2000 in Vatican City as officially designated by Pope John Paul II who himself received the delegations. Those who attended the conference now can step back and take note of their participation in this momentous occasion for Maronites and Lebanon. The deliberations, discussions and decisions may well mark this conference as one of the most important milestones in Maronite history.

Preparations for the meeting were extensive on all parts. Working papers were exchanged by the International Maronite Foundation and the Maronite League of Lebanon. Formal agreement on the content of the discussions was reached beforehand. Further, for the other meetings in which the Foundation participated, position papers were created and distributed to the interested parties in advance of the scheduled meetings.

The Maronite Organizations. The Maronite League of Lebanon sponsored and arranged the details of the meeting. The ground was prepared well in advance with the Patriarch, the Maronite League of Lebanon and the International Maronite Foundation. Issues and positions were prepared by a free and substantive exchange of ideas in advance thereby giving the deliberations a strong air of cooperation.

It was clear from the outset that the old formulas could no longer be applied to the present conditions. What emerged was a strong sense of common understanding of and approach to, the basic issues that concern the Maronite Church in Lebanon. There was near unanimity on working together without personal agenda for the welfare of the Maronite Church and its people under the leadership of the Maronite Patriarch. The governing conduct was summarized as: Communication...Cooperation...Collaboration. This phrase was coined by Dr. Saadi.

These three words describe the decisions and form the foundation of the agreement. The Maronites of Lebanon, being on the ground and on the scene, have much data and information to provide. It was agreed to provide early information and analysis on major issues prior to general news releases and change in policy positions. Turnaround time on information requests will be accurate, professional and timely.

The Maronite League of Lebanon will take upon itself the responsibility of organizing study groups and specific specialists in areas where important information is required on an "as needed" basis. As part of this understanding, we will provide each other with

information on the principals along with job descriptions where necessary. Major position papers will be exchanged for background and shared opinions on major issues.

There was near unanimity on the role of the International Maronite Foundation (IMF) since it is well advanced in organization and structure. Its formula appears to fit the needs of a worldwide organization. Special note is made that because of the US laws under which it is founded, the majority of the IMF leaders must be US citizens.

There will be a census of Maronite organizations outside of Lebanon to determine who and where they are and their stated agenda, affiliations and objectives. The Internet will be the primary means of resource for communication. Important documents will be translated into Arabic, Spanish and English. The IMF will create a Council of Maronite Leagues under the auspices of its Board to facilitate the effort.

President of the Maronite League of Lebanon, Pierre Helou welcomed the IMF and challenged us to work together with the Maronite League of Lebanon and other leagues. The future of Lebanon and the Maronites lies through Washington. It is most urgent that the IMF efforts move on to assure liberty and freedom of the Lebanese people and the Maronites. He highlighted the issue of Palestinian citizenship, refugee distribution, and the issues of sovereignty of Lebanon, liberation of the south, and the re-appropriation of water.

Ed Salem responded for the IMF, thanking them for their sponsorship of the meeting as we opened channels of communication and cooperation. Our efforts must be discreet work with those that count: the Congress and the state department. We will work mostly by e-mail. We want to be a clearing house for applicable information. The Maronite League of Lebanon must provide us analysis of that information. The IMF will provide the distribution.

We exist to support the Patriarch and the Patriarchy in the goals of saving Lebanon for all its people. We are on an urgent mission and need all of the help we can get in restoring Lebanon as a fully sovereign nation with full rights to address the issues of its future. Dr. Wakim expanded on the lobbying effort and the work we have to do to further develop political strength through assured political viability.

Patriarchate. Meetings were held between His Beatitude Nasrallah Butros Cardinal Sfeir and the IMF Executive Committee. The meeting was prepared in advance and a working paper was developed for this session. The Patriarch was forthcoming and cooperative on all levels. He agreed to continue communications on a timely turnaround basis. The Liaison to the IMF remains Archbishop Roland Aboujaude. Daily communications, especially through the Internet, will be assigned to Father Joseph Tawk who runs the Patriarchate's web page. Confidentiality was assured.

The Patriarch expressed his concerns about the present situation in Lebanon especially for the future of the Christians and all Lebanese citizens: The status of the Palestinian

refugees, the security of the South and the sovereignty of Lebanon. The Patriarch stated that the coexistence of Christians and Muslims is Lebanon's vocation.

The IMF reaffirmed to His Beatitude their unwavering support to him as the sole representative and spokesman for all Maronites and pledged to carry his message to the world.

Vatican. The Pope. His Holiness Pope John Paul II received the representatives of the Maronite world. He personally received everyone of the group as the Patriarch stood by His side. It was an extraordinary moment. His Holiness spoke of the history of the Maronites and mentioned their new saints. He said that "Lebanon is not only a country, it is a 'message' of coexistence." He added, "I wish to tell you today with the strength of love: 'The Pope is always close to you.' I am at your side as a father in this period when intolerance leads, at times, to the revival of the spirits of hate, which we would like to have disappear forever." He was most pleased to reopen the Pontifical Maronite College, created by Pope Gregory XII in the 16th century. This had been closed for many years.

Secretary of State. A delegation was received by Archbishop Torran. He was impressed by the representative Maronite group, especially since this year it contained Americans. He said that Lebanon would never disappear, but what kind of Lebanon? Lebanon is presently absent from the scene. He stated that Lebanon cannot always rely on others for its defense as in the past. "Lebanon must defend itself." He promised cooperation and would be willing to respond to any initiative, Bottom line he said the action is in the US and this is where we must apply our work and pressure. He further stated that Lebanon must speak for itself. The Vatican has not heard from the present government since its formation.

Cardinal Silvestrini, Prefect of the Congregation of Eastern Churches. A small IMF group met with the Cardinal who was well versed in the Maronite condition and with the situation in Lebanon. He is aware of the needs of the Maronite Church worldwide. He promised an open door to us.

Lebanon. The issue of Lebanon in the context of the present situation was discussed at multiple levels both in official meetings and appointments and also with specific individual leaders, both clerical and lay. Lebanon has paid the greatest price of the war. It does not want to pay the biggest price for the peace. The main issues are the refugees, water, borders, and security of the South. All of these are represented by "sovereignty." The impression of Lebanon by the West as a radical and dangerous country must be dissipated. Lebanon must be present to determine its future. The present tone of the "peace initiative" is not a formula for permanent peace. The status quo cannot be legitimized by a "peace agreement" at the expense of Lebanon and its sovereignty.

Conclusion. The meeting was overwhelmingly successful. The pledges of cooperation were unanimous. Support from the Patriarch and the Vatican is assured. Follow-up is the present agenda to put in place the agreements. This primarily falls on the IMF and the Maronite League of Lebanon.