



Cedarwatch

Human Rights for Lebanon

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LIBERATED BY OCCUPATION

By Stephen J. Stanton

INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you this evening to a human rights interactive workshop to consider developments concerning Lebanon's pathetically perpetuated plight by the Syrian regime acting through the lackey thugs of the Lebanese Government under the presidency of Emile Lahoud.

The purpose of tonight's lecture is not to berate nor to bemoan the constant consternation that one must feel and react to in terms of the perils that our brothers and sisters in Lebanon continually suffer and are exposed to through the government and the Syrian presence.

Rather, tonight we have selected or have certainly hoped that in directing these comments to the youth of our diaspora they will take up the struggle and continue the ferment to re-invent and restore Lebanese pride from afar in our beloved homeland.

It is with this singular purpose in mind and this direct appeal to the deliberate demographic of the young people that these comments are based. Nevertheless, those among us who are in the milieu of what is known as the grey power brigade are equally welcome to share with us the initiatives that we hope will be brought forth in a concerned consensus to resolve to enlist all government and humanitarian agencies to focus upon Lebanon and its people and ultimately the restoration of social justice and democracy.

RECENT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

It is convenient to look at three current crises in terms of human rights breaches concerning foreign and Lebanese citizens to remind us of just how pernicious this perfidious regime of faceless fascists operates within Lebanon. The examples that we propose to concentrate on are:

- (i) Pastor Bruce Balfour;
- (ii) Dr Mohommed Mughraby; and
- (iii) Ms Samira Trad.

It is proposed to deal with each of the recent casualties of the regime of repression to both highlight and to identify and for the record, to remind all who are here tonight that the pervasive presence of the Syrian and Lebanese security apparatus in Lebanon which is ever vigilant as these cases will show.

PASTOR BRUCE BALFOUR

This hapless individual, in the service of the Lord found himself in a Lebanese military prison. His crime? He was charged with spying for Israel because despite his protestations that he was in Lebanon for the rather innocuous yet noble pastime of replanting and/or reforestating cedartrees to re-establish a grove of them in Lebanon he was charged with spying for Israel.

Regrettably, the good Pastor had had the misfortune of travelling to Israel as one would certainly expect of a Christian Evangelist who would want to see the Holy Land and for this he suffered the ignominy of incarceration in a Lebanese gaol. It was no ordinary gaol and more to the point, it was no ordinary judicial process that he was about to be subjected to. In what was a scene reminiscent from the Mad Hatter's tea party, with no disrespect to Lewis Carroll, the Lebanese judiciary turned on a tour de force in terms of harassing, haranguing and literally making a mockery of their so-called system of justice in seeking to charge and

detain him, despite diplomatic protests from both the Canadian Government and human rights organisations throughout the world.

The baselessness of the charges and the fact that there was no foundation whatsoever for them meant nothing to the Lebanese judiciary. What was of concern was that here was an 83 year old Evangelical worker who regrettably hailed from the northern hemisphere and with which they automatically assumed, on account of his visit to Israel, he was an espionage emissary for the Zionists.

The fact of his age, his antecedents and the horrific detention that he had to endure all compounded to make the matter a very sad state of affairs. The Lebanese Ambassador distinguished himself in Canada by acting out the fool and giving an utterly thorough disgraceful display. He was nothing short of a "diplomatic dipstick" to use a phrase more colloquially common to Australia.

On 1 September 2003 Pastor Balfour was acquitted on the espionage charge by a unanimous verdict of the five member Military Tribunal. The charge of collaborating with Israel was dismissed but, on the charge of spreading "dangerous ideas" he was convicted and time spent in custody was the sentence imposed. Accordingly upon the verdict being announced he was deported immediately. He had remained in custody since his arrest at Beirut Airport on 10 July and his trial was held in August. His charge related to information gathering concerning Lebanese military positions together with those of Hezbollah and allegedly disseminating the same to the Israelis. If convicted of the serious charge he would have been gaoled to a term of 15 years.

What is to be said of this spectacle? Nothing short of a gross abuse of human rights but what is more important is that it is now quite common for foreigners, as Pastor Balfour's case has revealed, to be the subject of the Lebanese "lash". It is this development which is both startling and foreboding.

DR MOHAMMED MUGRAHBY

Dr Mugrahby has for some time been a prominent Lebanese lawyer who has taken action and supported the cause of human rights against the regime in Lebanon which has resulted in him being arrested on several occasions prior to the more recent incident which we wish to bring to your attention tonight. Dr Mugrahby is a world-renowned human rights activist. He had indicated his candidacy for the Bar Association Presidency in Beirut and upon announcing that he would stand, he was arrested. What was his offence? That he was practising law without being either qualified or licensed. This was indeed an absolute travesty of justice to allege against a lawyer of his stature and his competence that he was neither qualified nor licensed to stand in an effort to ensure that he would be disabled from holding himself out for office of the Lebanese Bar Association. It is noted that he has sued on behalf of many people who have lost their land on account of the Solidere Corporation which is nothing more than a fraud perpetrated by Harriri to dispossess many Lebanese landholders.

Dr Mugrahby's incarceration came to an end conditionally on 30 August 2003 in effect representing a 21 day incarceration. His release resulted in a ban on him practicing law which still exists subject to the charges being determined. In short, his incarceration and his conditional release which effectively prevents him from practicing law is but a further example of the manner in which human rights are trampled by the Lebanese Government. Of course, ever present is the Syrian input to silence men like Mugrahby who are both professionally placed in positions where their exercise of the skills they possess are seen as a threat to the Syrian and Lebanese Governments.

MS SAMIRA TRAD

Samira Trad is a British-based and long time resident of Lebanon who has been a prominent defender of human rights. She is responsible for the Frontiers Centre, an organisation dealing with rights of non-Palestinian refugees and marginalised people in Lebanon. On 10 September at 8am she was arrested and taken to the Security General-Directorate in Beirut after she had returned to Lebanon on 4 September. She had been on a visit to Europe where she had met human rights representatives from prominent international organisations together with donors whom she addressed as they were interested in her work. This publicity receiving prominence did not, as it ultimately occurred auger well for her on her return to

Lebanon. At 2pm, having not returned, her staff called the office of the Security General and they were advised that the General Prosecutor had ordered her arrest. Presently she is detained in a centre for illegal immigrants in Beirut charged with participating in illegal organisations and damaging Lebanon's "reputation abroad".

Lebanon, as a signatory to the international covenant on civil and political rights has notably breached Article 19 that provides and ensures that:

"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice."

We sincerely hope that Ms Trad will be released. It is important that we all understand that since the beginning of 2002 she has been continually questioned on arrival at Beirut Airport or certainly on departure from Beirut Airport. She has had her passport confiscated, she has been hounded, intimidated and continually put under pressure. In November 2002 she was warned that if she did not cease and desist her activities she would be dealt with by the authorities. Her organisation on the 20 December was suspended despite the fact that she subsequently has become legally registered as a notary public on 27 February 2003. In short, we are concerned as to her incarceration and the fact that she is still, despite protestations, held in less than human conditions and on charges that have no basis.

These people are perfect exemplifications of the proposition that no one who exhibits civil courage in the face of nationalism could ever be said to be undertaking an easy task.

These people, representative as they are, along with well-known Lebanese notable patriots such as Dr Samir Geagea and General Michel Aoun are but the proper and responsible reflex, seen all over the world, of liberal intellectuals who have been asked to stand up for the true interests, both of their country and of world civilisation, against the forces of national chauvinism. Syria and its supporters, including its supplicants in the form of the government of Lebanon cannot claim exemption from this demand. Nor can they seek to hide from the justifiable retribution and condemnation that must be heaped upon them for the manner in

which they have arbitrarily treated, incarcerated and condemned people of the calibre of Dr Geagea.

Lebanon is no different from any other State which is deemed to be sovereign in its own territory; that is, secure in law, although not necessarily in fact, against aggression by another State.

Where Syria fits neatly into this equation is that the badness of a State is not grounds for attacking, it is only its aggression, actual or expected, against another State. Self-rule is better than foreign rule. These remain the bedrock principles of international sentiment and law.

The task of concerned Lebanese citizens in the diaspora is to maintain the purpose and application of these principles of international sentiment and law. We tonight are challenged to participate in the system of international relations to which these principles gave rise. They are sometimes known as the Westphalian System, taking its origins in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This was the forerunner for the establishment of the European State System on the basis of national political sovereignty and religious toleration, as opposed to dynastic rule and religious monopoly.

Syria and in turn its influence over Lebanon is a perfect example of the doctrine of national sovereignty in retreat. The apathy of the world in terms of the disregard of Lebanon is what we, must be motivated to ensure, is both revived and renewed to the point where intervention is deemed not only necessary but inevitable. Recently the events in Iraq have seen the need, or so it would seem, in the Middle East of a project of creating democracies which in turn run up against the culture of Islam. Nobody has failed to realise that Lebanon was one of the first and if not the first, then certainly the most successful democracy in the Middle East which could both accommodate democratic institutions and cater for the Islamic religion and its adherents.

Experts in Middle East studies such as Fred Halliday have argued strongly against the "demagogy of cultural confrontation" and he in turn has dismissed the "faultline babble about unbridgeable gulfs".

Most commentators have failed to realise that one can dismiss the tendency to theocracy in Islam. That this can be put to one side or the seeming inevitability of it not being able to be performed has precluded the development of secularism and led to the suggestion that Islam may well be impossible to secularise on western terms.

This of course is not true and it must be said that in the circumstances Lebanon is and always was, whilst it was justly and truly sovereign, a brand of democracy that would both accommodate Islamic adherence and yet nationally serve all creeds under its parliamentary parapet. In other words, it did not require a brand of democracy to be derived from Islamic principles. It is this disregard of Lebanon and the failure to reformulate and restore it to its democratic form of government by the removal of Syria that in turn has been an impediment to the consolidation of the region generally. No doubt the legions of Washington think-tankers would do well to revisit the model of Lebanon and more importantly, how it should be restored.

In seeking to address here tonight the concerns that I have, it is imperative that one understands that if there is to be a regime change in the Middle East, Lebanon cannot be left out nor can it be regarded as being a candidate too late in the picture. Its treatment must be co-extensive with that of the Palestinian question. There is no doubt that the very keen discussion that preceded and accompanied the removal of Saddam Hussein and the fact that his departure would have a "domino effect" has all but dissipated when one looks at recent events in Iraq.

Leaving aside awkward questions as to whether the war was justified, some commentators have viewed with disdain America's tough guy approach when it branded Syria as a "rogue nation". Yet what was failed to be understood was that Syria was justly so condemned and so categorised.

Recently events in Falluja have borne out the wisdom of the American commentators in branding Syria a rogue nation indeed.

The Martyrs of Islam, an organisation that has Al-Qaeda links proudly boasted that they had trained in Syria where they had learned to make bombs, set booby-traps and fire weapons ranging from AK-47 assault rifles to rocket-propelled grenade launchers in camps within Syria. The 140 strong force taken from across the Arab world including Lybia, Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait all recounted their training in Syria with a view to going into Iraq to kill American servicemen and any other persons who had US links. This development should come as no surprise to those who understand the Syrian presence and its equally sinister significance.

One can recall in 1982 President Reagan's speech to the British Parliament where he redefined human rights as the promotion of democracy.

The organisation Human Rights Watch used this as a basis on which to challenge the administration's close relationships with Marcos in the Philippines, Pinochet in Chile and "baby Doc" Duvalier in Haiti. Equally, America was embarrassed to support or be seen to support such despotic regimes as those in El Salvador and Guatemala with their notorious death squads and government sponsored atrocities.

The condemnation of Syria is precisely what Reagan was referring to when he indicated that human rights was a spring board for democracy because Syria is indeed the deathknell of democracy.

It is important to focus on Syria internally to understand how it is that the Lebanese psyche on a national level has been manipulated, not only by Syria's occupation but by the proliferation within Lebanese society of Syrian citizens, bureaucrats and its armed forces. It is as permeating as a carcinogen with terminal consequences.

When the former president of Syria passed away it was hoped that this would usher in a time of renewal in Syria.

There was sensed the possibility of escape from the deadening, if steady, hand with which Assad Senior had governed most aspects of their lives.

Charles Glass had referred to the Syrian regime as a "hereditary republic" which he had passed on to his son, Bashar Assad without civil war, sectarian violence or a military coup d'etat, it was anticipated that times might change for Syrian citizens.

To understand Lebanon's malaise one need only look at what Syrian society must endure in terms of the secrecy and the repression that is a hallmark feature of their daily lives. In a country where owning a fax machine requires security clearance, it was only recently that mobile phones and internet connections were tolerated. In fact, the first private newspaper since the declaration of martial law in 1963 was set up soon after Assad's death.

However, it was not long before the typical winter of Syrian discontent returned with the young Assad taking the all too familiar familial footsteps of his dictatorial dad which saw him instruct the police to arrest scores of activists, including two prominent MPs and shut down newspapers and open discussion generally.

As many commentators have noted, survival is a pre-occupation in Syria. While there are sympathies for Syria what is always forgotten and it would seem is the last item on the agenda of most foreign powers who are singularly minded to ensure a Middle East peace is negotiated and/or brokered is that Syria through its army and intelligence services are playing their own imperial game in Lebanon.

The purpose of reminding all of us here tonight of this very real and salient fact is that the Syrian presence must be highlighted and protested for that very feature of the hegemony that was brokered and maliciously mutated as a result of the Taif Accord.

We urge all concerned citizens of the Lebanese diaspora, and for that matter citizens generally, to highlight to all foreign governments who are concerned with a restoration of peace and stability to the Middle East to react to and condemn Syria's occupation of Lebanon

and to ensure that the Syrian Presidency feels that their presence in Lebanon has become as vulnerable to foreign power subversion as surely as any occupying force would be to indigenous resistance.

Mercifully, not so much to deride the citizens of Syria but rather their government, the precarious military position of Assad is matched by the economic weakness of his national economy.

Unlike his dear dad who presided for 30 years over financial incompetence surviving on soviet subsidies, hand outs from Arab oil States and remittances from the very many workers who have illegally infiltrated Lebanon the country is effectively bankrupt and has taken Lebanon along the road to financial ruination with it.

Prominent economists and in particular, Nabil Sukkar, an American-educated former World Bank official has opined that by the year 2010 Damascus would be a net importer of oil. Such is the escalation of ruination and economic mismanagement.

It is not as if nations have been insensitive to the Syrian presence but regrettably in Australia no such protestations or for that matter, public condemnation of Syria's role has been heralded despite the seemingly unified stance on the war against terrorism. For the record it is of course noted that Secretary Colin Powel in a report on his meeting with Assad relied on and referred to the report published in 2000 which was a Presidential Study Group under the title "Navigating through Turbulence: America and the Middle East in a New Century". The incoming president was advised that Syria was a particularly emphatic focus and in the report it stipulated that:

"Specifically, the United States should clarify to Assad that the key indicators of his intentions are policy his towards Lebanon and terrorism".

Taking this matter in hand Secretary Powel repeated the demands made during his meeting with Assad soon after the Iraqi invasion and it is recorded that he in his discussion with Assad made the following comments:

"Important benchmarks would include permitting the deployment of Lebanese troops to the border with Israel, the closing down of terrorist training camps in the Bekaa Valley, the expulsion from the Bekaa remaining Iranian revolution regards, the termination of Iranian flights into Damascus carrying arms for Hizballah, the redeployment of armed Hizballah personnel from the Lebanese-Israel frontier zone, the disarming of Hizballah, especially to long-range rockets, and eventually the phase-out and withdrawal of Syria's troop and military intelligence presence in Lebanon".

The reaction to this statement was seen by some as appeasing Israel. It could hardly be further from the truth when in effect what it was and should have been seen as an acknowledgment of the plight of the Lebanese people and more importantly, a source of comfort to the diaspora throughout the world that finally their clamouring for justice was being acknowledged and monitored in circumstances where at last someone was prepared to tell Assad that it was time for Syria to go.

Certainly history will record that regrettably the US enabled the Syrian army to enter Lebanon in 1976 under the approval of the then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. In turn Syria expanded its military dominance to Lebanon's Christian heartland in 1991, again with the approval of the then Secretary of State James Baker which was seen as a reward for Syrian participation in the American war to expel Iraq from Kuwait in 1991.

Such a double benediction cannot remain so steadfastly sanctified in these current times and in the face of Syrian-sponsored terrorist cells being trained in its borders for deployment against US troops in Iraq - or so one would hope.

The recent response by the US Congress or certainly some of its members in sponsoring the Syria Accountability Bill to make nearly all dealings with the country illegal unless it responded to the need to curb terror is a step in the right direction, but not enough.

Syria, the ever sly snake that it is, responded to the promulgation of such legislation by giving into American pressure - handing over Al-Qaida suspects and voting for UN Security Council Resolution 1441. It was also noted that when the US proclaimed victory in Iraq, Assad ensured that Iraqi exiles from Saddam Hussein's regime went back home and he also expelled many other Iraqis as well as closing the offices of the Popular Front for the

Liberation of Palestine as well as the Popular Front General Command, Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Notably, Syria has neither disarmed Hizbollah nor compelled it to abandon its bases in the south.

What causes one to have a feeling of revulsion is the incredible naivety of commentators such as Charles Glass who recently reported on Damascus in the London Review of Books. Mr Glass, a writer who no doubt was researching his new book to be called "The Tribes Triumphant" wrote of Syria and its treatment at the hands of the American administration that it was effectively being disregarded by the USA likening the US State Department style to diplomacy by diktat.

His hopes for Syria and its rehearsal of its case for a rapprochement with the United States was again a matter of some mirth to readers and in particular, concerned Lebanese who would view his reaction with utter bewilderment. He opined, waxing and waning lyrically, that the USA was disregarding the fact that the Palestinians were waging a legitimate, legal struggle to end military occupation. What of the Lebanese who are similarly attempting to end an occupation by the Syrians in their home land? Without any disrespect to the Palestinian cause, where does Mr Glass see the Lebanese?

He also referred to the Syrian people, like Arabs elsewhere who believe in Palestinian national rights - but what of our "Arab brothers" and their belief in the Lebanese national rights? Are we any less deserving of a legitimacy for national sovereignty?

He referred to the Hizbollah as a legal political party in Lebanon with nine elected members of Parliament. What a joke when one considers that the pork barrel tactics of the Lebanese electoral system, "gerrymanded" electorates (colloquially an Australian expression for rigged) dynastic deputies and the fact that because Hizbollah is the only political party allowed to bear arms outside the security forces, is it any wonder they have nine or for that matter ninety seats in the Lebanese Parliament?

For a man who is writing a book - we would presume a serious book - one could only hope that he will get his facts right, otherwise Mr Glass will be writing from an opaque opinion as opposed to an open and transparent text which of course will in turn demean the serious deliberations that he would lead us to believe he has brought to bear upon what is a subject of much concern to citizens of Lebanon and its many equally concerned members of the diaspora throughout the world.

Glass' incredulity and his utter naivety is reflected in his comments on the fact that the Syrian Government has been waging war against Islamic fundamentalists referring to the campaign 20 years before 11 September, in Aleppo and Hama. What he fails to mention is the mass murder of Islamic resistance by Assad's father using weapons of mass destruction and the genocide that was perpetrated in Aleppo in particular and the thousands of Syrian citizens who were murdered in what was a crime against humanity for which the Syrian leader escaped justice on earth but one hopes has ultimately paid the price before the higher tribunal to which he inevitably must come before.

He also opined that an abrupt departure from Lebanon could free the Muslim fundamentalists who are ever receptive to the call of Osama bin Laden thereby re-igniting the Lebanese civil war. What utter rubbish! Does he not appreciate that Lebanon was and is a repository of a citizen mix made up of different creeds and for that matter, a combination of races as diverse as Armenian, Jew, Arab and Phoenician all proudly under the banner of Lebanese. Mr Glass obviously was on a mission when he wrote his article and one thing is certain, his mission was not to highlight the plight of the Lebanese or give it a juxtaposition but rather to ignore it with the insensitivity and the indifferent impetus that he was hell-bound to bring to bear as the thrust of his article.

Certainly in Syria its own citizens have not taken lightly the foreboding presence of the USA in Iraq. There are civil society networks seeking to make declarations of public protest which are not highlighted by the Syrian press but certainly receive some publicity in Lebanon.

On 3 June 2003 287 Syrian citizens published an appeal to Assad in the Lebanese Daily as-Safir. In it the petition warned Syria that it faced two enemies - Israel and the United States and that it was too weak to defend itself against either. Wise words indeed.

It made very erstwhile propositions seeking the demand for an end to martial law and the release of political prisoners and it argued for something more fundamental, namely: "The authorities have no remedy for our ills" the petition stated. It then went on to appeal to Assad to deliver democracy in Syria. Its text is worthwhile quoting and I set it out in part for its obvious emphasis:

"What is happening in Iraq and in Palestine is just the beginning of what America calls the new era. The characteristic of this era is the use of force by America and Israel. We should stop them from achieving their goals by repairing our society and making our country strong. The way to do this is to have a free people. The masses have been ignored and excluded from public life. You should let them come back and use their power to protect the country."

It was signed by, amongst many people, Professor Sadek al-Azm a recently retired professor of philosophy.

It is important to quote from Professor al-Azm's petition when he said "There is a difference between defending the regime and defending the country". How true that is of our own beloved Lebanon. These words are equally applicable to Lebanon.

One is also reminded of the civil rights activist A. Philip Randolph who said at the height of the US civil rights disturbance that: "It's easy to get peoples' attention; what counts is getting their interest". How true it is with the current apathy that has set in with the indifference of both the world governments to the Lebanese lament and her own citizens throughout the world and their descendants who have chosen to insulate themselves from a more caring response.

When politicians and pundits lament that the public has no interest in politics, they are wrong. What they are really lamenting is that the public has no interest in them - not in their parties, their pontificating, or their power-mongering. For whichever way we vote, it seems likely they always end up winning. It is this indifference in the general populace that has

marked the inability of the Lebanese protest to be both effectively voiced and more importantly, ventilated. It is to focus on that failure to achieve and realise the promulgation of the plight of the Lebanese that we must be vigilant to resolve here tonight.

Recently, Lebanon is a casualty of what has been the hallmark of regimes in the past. Gone are the grand philosophies that fuelled the revolutions of the past - the Enlightenment values of equality, liberty and the rights of man of the French and American revolutions and equally the Marxism of the Russian revolution and the Maoism of the Chinese revolution.

Whatever legacy remains of such revolutionary forces is as in China, only the remnants to reinforce the redundancy and moral bankruptcy of alternatives to capitalism.

Even more worse, is the vacuum left by the death of an alternative ideology that is now being filled by religious fundamentalism and racism and particularly so in the Middle East and recently exhibiting itself in India and to our north, in Indonesia.

What can we as citizens do to reverse or certainly set about seeking a reversal of the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Quite simply we as citizens have power.

The etymology of the word power is of course derived from the French word *peire* and its modern version *pouvoir* which of course means to "be able".

Power is always in relationship to something or someone else. The dictionary definition concentrates inevitably on authority and its various permutations as evidenced in the State, religion or other ruling figures.

However, there is another form of power which is, if not entirely neglected, certainly unnoticed and non-referenced. It is for the greater part largely invisible, unremarked, and unnoticed and yet it is everywhere. If the power to dominate is the ability to exercise power over, then what we are interested in might be categorised as power to.

"POWER OVER" AND "POWER TO"

The concept of empowerment suggests that someone is giving power to the oppressed or powerless.

However, as we have seen in countries such as Lebanon, power cannot be given it can only be taken. Lebanon is but a manifestation that invading forces, sponsored by the blind indifference of super powers inevitably use their power to subjugate and not to free those they are sent in to protect.

We as a group would rarely, if ever, say that we have joined a power elite yet our lives are blighted with the stress of competing and an abiding sense of failure as a result of that very power elite in enslaving and emasculating our daily lives.

Syria is such a power elite and equally in terms of its categorisation and characterisation, it is not filled with the brightest and best but with the scrupulous and the most privileged. The endowment of the privileges can be seen in the ascendancy of lightweights like Lahoud, his brother who is head of the judicial council of Lebanon and the General Prosecutor, together with the Security Chief General Ghazi Kanaan and General Rustom Ghazali. All are equally consummate crooks and cretins in the service of Syria. One can only hope that events of recent times and the constant reminding of our citizens both within Australia and throughout the world of Lebanese ancestry that they would be hardened by this call to ensure and realise that power is restored to the Lebanese populace through the ballot box. In other words, we are hoping that a protest can be propounded and mounted by people prepared to put themselves out either in word or in writing to confront and to condemn at every possible stage and opportunity the Syrian dominance of Lebanon.

In other words, in the words of the native American poet John Trudell who spoke of the concept of authority with which we would do well to embrace it was as he saw it:

"Authority is not power. Authority is authority. All authority is usually based upon aggression or implied aggression or active aggression. Authority is authority. Power is something else. Power is what we come from. It is part of the natural order of the universe - power..."

In other words, we have the power and we are empowered. Inevitably, what brought Marcos down was people power, or what some referred to as "mob rule".

In the everyday scheme of things people power goes unnoticed. It is only when it gets in social rebellion that it is seen to enter the realm of the political, where it is usually met with repression or silence. This has the effect of fooling us into believing that this power is ineffectual. Often, we never realise how powerful we really are. As Catherine Ainger has aptly referred to the concept of people power, writing as she does in the New Internationalist, September 2003 she refers to the African Revolutionary Thomas Sankar who once said: "Autonomy is the right to invent one's own future".

We have that right and we must take control of our own lives, devising a system through which our Lebanese community can organise themselves by direct democracy, decentralisation and popular participation.

What we must bring about is a democratic renewal of the system itself so that Lebanon will be restored from the ground up because power from below is re-inventing politics.

Accordingly, these sentiments are given to you tonight to show that there is a need and certainly a long way to go before the violation of human rights in Lebanon can become a regular concern of governments as well as a basis for international action.

However, there must be a beginning and only vigilance and a determined devotion can increase awareness and support to build on the foundations of many organisations that exist in the Lebanese diaspora who are all collectively clamouring for peace and a return to democracy in Lebanon. Equally in terms of a return to peace is the long awaited release of Dr Geagea from his prison cell, the return of General Aoun and all political leaders both within and outside Lebanon who are and have been for many many years repressed and forcibly silenced or alternately exiled or imprisoned. In order that their voices will be dimmed. Hopefully the populace will never forget to hear their call for freedom and justice.

If I may conclude the sentiments by expressing that if the comments have found favour with you and you are prepared, then the first step, and it at least requires a step to be taken, is for each and everyone of you who are committed to contact a human rights forum of your choice to make an effort to write that letter or convene that discussion group and thereafter project your protest forcibly, lawfully and constantly until your goals are achieved.

One likens Lebanon to Io, one of many young women who fell foul of the god Zeus in Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Bound* and when she was speaking of her rape and subsequent suffering at the hands of Zeus she tells the chorus of her own plight, a plight similar to our beloved Lebanon and words which should not be lost on those of us here tonight when she says:

"That is my story...

do not out of pity comfort me

With lies. I count false words the worst

plague of all."

We must realise that Io's plight is that of Lebanon's but our vision for Lebanon like Aeschylus' vision of history itself is one grounded in personal trials and tribulations of which Lebanon is not so much a mere casualty but a constant reminder of the fact that casualties occur but they need not be constant casualties. So reminded I now urge each and every one of you to as they say in the modern vernacular to "get real".

24 September 2003

S.J. STANTON
Convenor Cedarwatch