

Maronite International Congress
June 20-23, 2002
Los Angeles, CA
Resolutions

At the invitation of the International Maronite Foundation, and in conjunction with the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, a Maronite International Congress was held in Los Angeles from June 20-23, 2002 under the auspices of His Eminence and Beatitude Cardinal Nasrallah Peter Sfeir, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, who sent as his personal representative, His Excellency Bishop Youssef Bechara. Bishops, Lebanese Congressmen, and representatives of Maronite organizations from Lebanon and all around the world participated.

After listening to the words of His Beatitude, they studied the following issues:

- + the role of the Maronite Church in Lebanon and throughout the world,
- + the strategic vision of the Patriarchate for the twenty-first century,
- + the marginalization of Christians in Lebanon, as well as the Lebanese political and economic situation.

Thus they publish the following resolutions that address the concerns of the Church, Lebanon, and the communities abroad:

I. Church Concerns

- 1 They reaffirm their perpetual allegiance to the universal Catholic Church, and to the Holy Father, the Pope of Rome. They express their gratitude to Pope John Paul II for his relentless efforts aimed at the preservation of an independent and sovereign Lebanon, and its unique character of freely chosen Islamic-Christian conviviality. The Holy Father believes that a democratic, pluralistic Lebanon gives the Lebanese Christians a vital role conducive to the preservation of Christianity in the Middle East.
- 2 They reaffirm their loyalty to the Maronite Patriarchate, their obedience to the person of the Patriarch, their support of his positions and initiatives. They pledge their continued support for his remarkable, courageous and constant stand. They desire to stay always close to their Patriarch.
- 3 They commit themselves to Church membership in their dioceses, and to work actively with their bishops, and parish priests throughout the world, in order to preserve their spiritual and moral values, their heritage and traditions. In doing so they bear witness in the countries in which they live, and contribute through their various activities – social, cultural, economic, and political – to the development of man and society.
- 4 The Congress stresses the importance of strong ties and collaboration between Lebanon and the communities abroad, especially with regard to providing dedicated priests to serve these communities, and to the encouragement of local vocations in the parishes abroad.
- 5 The Congress has taken special interest in the Maronite youth who have expressed their concerns and aspirations: the youth are the “hope of the Church” and the “nucleus of the

society.” Since our youth are “the renewal force in the Church and society”, the Congress recommends that we provide them the necessary spiritual and moral formation, and encourage and support their involvement in the life of the Church and its mission. Likewise, they pledge to work tirelessly in assisting them in the building of their spiritual and cultural future, to encourage them to maintain strong ties with the youth of Lebanon, and to be pro-active participants in their community.

II. Lebanon Concerns

- 6 They see in Lebanon their spiritual motherland, where the inculturation of the gospel took place in the region where the “Prince of Peace” was born, and from where the “Light of the World” proceeded. They value Lebanon’s mission to be, for the East and for the West, a country of consensual democracy, built on conviviality and dialogue between various cultures and religions, as well as on public freedoms - mainly of speech and religion - on equal participation in the government and administration, and on the fundamental human rights. Therefore, they recommit themselves to:
 - a. unify their ranks through communication and cooperation among the various entities in Lebanon and abroad, according to the rule of unity in diversity. Their unity would thus become a forum for political activism on behalf of Lebanon.
 - b. take practical initiatives to implement the principles and directives of post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “New Hope for Lebanon” concerning the mission of Christians in Lebanon, the Middle East and Africa and, the implementation of pastoral links between the Church in Lebanon, the communities abroad, and communion with the other churches.
 - c. work to capitalize on the initiatives that His Beatitude made during his pastoral visits to strengthen the bonds between Lebanon and the Maronite Church abroad.
 - d. adopt the founding document of the Cornet Chehwan Gathering, and support its national positions.
 - e. demand the Lebanese Government overcome all that stands in the way of national reconciliation, activated by the visit of His Beatitude to Mount Lebanon in August 2001. They ask the Government to correct the deficiencies in political life, which target Christians for “political” and “security” reasons, politicize the Justice System, and militarize the regime; They demand the release of Dr. Samir Geagea, Dr. Toufic Hindi, the journalists, Antoine Bassil and Habib Younes, all the prisoners of South Lebanon, and all other political prisoners, as well as the return of General Michel Aoun and others exiled.
 - f. the Congress urges the Lebanese Court to decide on the pending lawsuit submitted by the Maronite League to nullify the controversial and unconstitutional elements of the naturalization act that gave Lebanese citizenship to thousands of ineligible people.
 - g. ask the Lebanese Government to amend the present electoral law so it would serve the true democracy, and it will ensure proper representation of the people.

- h. call on the Lebanese Government to eliminate corruption at all levels and to make sure that government services are efficient with fairness to everyone.
- i. appeal to United Nations, and governments throughout the world, especially the United States, to support Lebanon in its efforts to regain its national sovereignty through the total withdrawal of Syrian and all foreign troops from its territories, and the end of Syria's political, judicial, military and economic hegemony over Lebanon. This withdrawal would constitute a beginning for the establishment of sound relations and full diplomatic representation between the two countries and two peoples for their mutual interests, so that these relations would balance, to a great degree, better cooperation and solidarity, as well as clear sovereignty and independence for Lebanon. To this end this Congress supports those elements of the "Syria Accountability Act, HR 4483 and S 2215" that pertain to the withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon.
- j. demand that the Lebanese Government be accountable for control of all its land, requiring the deployment of its army to assume responsibility for all security and the control of its borders according to U.N. resolutions. The disputed matter of Shebaa Farms should be resolved by less costly means thus sparing Lebanon from further Israeli retaliation. The Congress calls for the taking away of every weapon on the Lebanese soil so that only the weapon of the government would remain.
- k. affirm the Palestinian refugees' right to a just solution for their cause according to international resolutions, and to establish their own independent and sovereign Palestine; affirm the unanimous Lebanese position to refuse their permanent settlement in Lebanon because of the grave consequences at all levels. The Congress asks the United States to expedite in finding a final solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict according to the U.N. resolutions.

7 To condemn terrorism, in any and all of its forms, as a totally unacceptable mean to pursue political objectives. And we support the efforts of the U.S.A. to combat terrorism all over the world, in the wake of September 11, 2001 so that all societies may enjoy their right to stability, security and good life.

III. Communities Abroad

8. In view of the importance of the Lebanese presence in the world, and to insure the continuity between Lebanon and the communities abroad, the Congress appeals to the government of Lebanon to give the citizens living abroad special consideration by responding to their following requests:
- a. Give Lebanese citizens abroad the right, and the means, to vote their representatives in the Parliament, as do all other nations.
 - b. Facilitate and expedite the registration of birth certificates in the Lebanese Census Bureau of those who have been recorded in the Lebanese Consulates.
 - c. Strengthen the diplomatic and consular corps in the countries abroad, facilitate their work in a way that deepens the political, economic, cultural, and tourist ties between Lebanon and other countries.

- d. Ask the Lebanese Government to inform the communities abroad about the proposals of privatization in the productive domains in Lebanon through the commercial institutions and the diplomatic consulates, in order to give them an opportunity to get involved in the economic and social life in their homeland Lebanon.
9. The Congress pledges their people the proper help to confront the economic and social crisis that has deteriorated to a dangerous point, and to curb the emigration out of Lebanon through some initiatives such as:
 - i. the creation of a business council to promote joint ventures in key industries,
 - ii. the award of university scholarships to the needy who excel,
 - iii. the support of academic and vocational education, hospitalization, and housing initiatives,
 - iv. the organization of matching “twins” at the level of the various social groups, families and individuals.
10. This body strongly encourages the Lebanese communities in the countries abroad to organize visits to Lebanon where businessmen, youth, and others would travel for reasons of relaxation and strengthening the bonds among the Lebanese in and outside Lebanon. This would give them an opportunity to know first hand the actual political, social and economical situation, and to explore ways to help the Lebanese citizens to remain securely in Lebanon and to hope for a better future.

IV. Conclusion

11. The Congress thanks and appreciates the Lebanese journalists and the printed and audio-visual media, especially the satellite television stations, who render a great service at the informative, cultural, social and national levels. By means of their programs, they introduce Lebanon, its unique characteristics, heritage and mission. At the same time, they warn everyone from threatening the freedom of speech for all Lebanese media. They also thank all the local and Lebanese media who covered the meetings of the Congress. Because the *Voice of Charity*, and *Tele Lumiere* are two ecclesiastical institutions, the Congress asks all to support them financially for the sake of a greater and wider mission.
12. The Congress thanks the International Maronite Foundation, and all the participants who came from different parts of the world, especially the Christian and non-Maronite organizations and entities who participated effectively in this Congress, and contributed to its success. They emphasize the importance of coordination and continuity with regard to all the Eastern Churches in Lebanon, the Arab world, and abroad. The International Maronite Foundation is willing to serve as a catalyst, along with all Maronites of good will, with the task to follow-up on the implementation of these resolutions, along with all the other suggestions and hopes expressed during the Congress. They ask their fellow Maronites all over the world to unite and collaborate in order to safeguard their faith, traditions, and belonging to Lebanon through the implementation of these resolutions.