

Speech of His Excellency Minister Gebran Bassil at the Lebanese Diaspora Energy Conference in Sydney

9-3-2018

Dear Lebanese, sons of Lebanon,

I am here among you in the first edition of the Lebanese Energy Conference in Oceania and the long hours of travel (which extends for a whole day) made me eager and delighted to meet you and acknowledge this first immigrant from the town of Bcharre who arrived at Adelaide Beach in 1845, taking him about 100 days to reach it. And here I try to imagine the number of days that your Phoenician ancestors might have needed to reach here six thousand years ago, if the controversy over the recent discoveries related to the ancient trade harbor of Queensland is ascertained to be related to them.

How can a man for hundreds of years be able to cross the seas and leave half of his heart there in his homeland and carry with him the other half here in exile, in his eyes tears of separation and nostalgia, and bearing in his memory the lack of freedom and opportunity; how could this man summon that incredible faith and hope to overcome his pain and reach excellence if he wasn't great ?!

Although success after pain is not surprising in a country like Australia, the journalist Philip Adams said:

**"Unless you're willing to have a go, fail miserably and have another go, success won't happen."**

But the extraordinary thing that shows how exceptional our people are is that the former Prime Minister of New South Wales (Naval Ryan) said during the memorial ceremony of the 100th anniversary of Lebanese immigration to Australia: "The centenary is just yesterday if compared to the history of the Lebanese civilization which is rooted in thousands of years back... and it is the right of the Lebanese people to be keen and proud of it in Lebanon and throughout the world. " A senior official of a great country that acknowledges (hundred years for a day) the greatness and pride of the people of a small nation, is a sign of the greatness of this people.

Sons of Lebanon,

I am one of you and your descendants. I am the grandson of the great grandfather who left Lebanon because of the lack of freedom before the year 1900 to New Zealand, where he succeeded and brought his success with him back home with much pride, so we inherited it from him. It is the same pride we all share for our Lebanese origins. We proudly say, "You are the origin and the essence," and no one can take away our origin by revoking nationality or changing identity, by naturalization or resettlement, by refugees or displaced. It is the same pride that we share together, our origin, so we say to you with faith and determination, "The story begins with you and there is no story without you." This pride has made us write the story of Lebanon, Lebanon, Libanite, which is the association of our existence and the

contradictory and complementary words that lie in its meaning: The formula and the charter, the settlement and the dignity, diversity and uniqueness, tolerance and excellence, privacy and unity; dialogue and domination; me and the other; Blood and genes.

Fellow Lebanese,

It is the Lebanity, our only concept of belonging and our only path to the homeland, neither the sect is a fort, nor the party is a safe corner, nor the ethnicity is a refuge, only Lebanon is our sect, our party, our religion and our ethnicity. In Lebanon only, is our salvation and with a viable state in it. It is Lebanon's concept of shared life, a distinctive way of life in this interconnected Middle East, where we wanted to live on equal basis both Christians and Muslims in a unique model that has never been established by the most powerful democracies, nor empires, conquests, campaigns, statuses, mandates, occupations or commands. It is a model that should be preserved and even developed to meet the aspirations of our future generations, so they don't end up at the doors of foreign embassies, that exchange our visas of escape from our sad reality with the cards of displacement of refugees to our land.

It is true that you are the farthest from Lebanon, but you are the closest to it in the way you live.

Your interest in your children's access to Lebanese nationality is proven by the registration numbers in the consular transactions, and your preservation of Lebanese customs and privacy is reflected by your excessive adherence to traditions. Your passion for public affairs and the desire to influence through it is witnessed in your affiliation to many Lebanese parties. This is reflected in the highest number of registration coming from Australia for the upcoming parliamentary election, in comparison to other countries.

For you love Lebanon, to the extent of worship, you brought it with you, so you have created your little Lebanon here.

You must participate in making a political decision and benefit from the law we put to represent all the segments of our society, we did our best and fought that you participate in the elections for this year and we will make sure that you have a member of parliament to represent in the next elections and we will strive for more in the future.

We did our best, we failed in some places and succeeded in most of the cases. The latest achievement to motivate you is providing you with a passport to use it to vote, making sure it reaches your address at a cost of only one thousand Lebanese pounds.

To the Lebanese spread all over the world, there is no more argument not to participate and induce change. Those of you who registered in Australia are welcomed to the 14 centers designated in Australia, and those of you who did not register here are welcomed to Lebanon to enjoy electoral tourism on 6 May and to participate in the local Lebanese Energy Conference on the upcoming 10, 11 and 12 May.

And us, in addition to the activities and activities that we are doing for our Lebanese community abroad, must develop more our foreign economic diplomacy to link the successes and energies of the Lebanese with each other wherever they are at home and abroad, and create for them, not only investment opportunities but administrative, tax and legal incentives. We, on our part, have recently appointed a Director of Economic Affairs on whom we rely to improve the economic ties and we are in the process of

selecting many economic attachés to be dispatched in sixteen countries in the world a thing that has never happened for decades.

We also need to your participation on projects such as Lebanon connect / buy Lebanese / buy Lebanese, invest to stay / Lebanese Diaspora Fund, International Chamber House, and the Federation of World Chambers, and this is where Lebanese Australians can succeed and draw opportunities.

In addition to the passion, the land, the home, the family and the friends who are essential factors to bring you back home, that home should create for you the material and moral interest to communicate with it, if not to return.

To the Lebanese Diaspora

In this sense, we have prepared our project regarding the National Council for Emigration, to be submitted as draft law to the government, a project in which the elected and representative executive body of the emigrants is not subject to the advisory steering committee composed of the President of the Republic, the Government, the ministers and the competent directors. This is to give the diaspora the ultimate national importance and give it its freedom to take advantage from its potential and not to restrict it. The diaspora is greater than any institution or administration and more important than us all and shall never be placed under guardianship.

We say No for the guardianship of the Diaspora and no to the return to the era of guardianship, to the contrary we say Yes for an era in which the Diaspora is responsible for its own issues, self-assured, exerting its free political will, and responsible for the scattered distinguished lebanese potentials who are thirsty for successful conferences, activities and projects.

Dear Lebanese

As we celebrate the International Women's Day, we realize that if it wouldn't have been for them, it would have been impossible for the Lebanese diaspora to endure, to succeed and spread its potential. We can say that in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we have begun to give them their due consideration. It is true that we still have not reached what we wish yet, but the number of women ambassadors has reached today 20, and it is worthwhile noting that in the recent diplomatic exams the number of successful women consists double that of those men counterparts. And we affirm here that they are the best representors of Lebanon by their brilliance, by carrying its message in their thoughts and protecting its being with their hearts.

Lebanese Diaspora

You are the descendants of those who have benefited from difference, and the grandsons of those who taught the world the meaning of communication and exchange. The descendants of those who carried the letter a gift to the world, those who built a city on the lebanese shores and crafted boats a mean to transport thoughts and materials. You are asked as of today to contribute to the transfer of Lebanon from the situation in which it is floundering economically floundering to a stable and prosperous one.

Work for Lebanon, work for those you want, away from any pressure or influence except your love to Lebanon, work for a better Lebanon, for a stronger Lebanon, for a cleaner Lebanon, for a Lebanon that we are proud of and one you wish to come back to, until we meet in our homeland.

Long live the Lebanese Diaspora, long live the Lebanonity, and long live Lebanon.