

Conférence de M. David Quiroga
Consul du Chili à Beyrouth
8 Mai 2017

Lebanese Community in the Chilean Society

Almost two years ago was the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Chile and Lebanon. It was a highly significant date for both countries. Since nineteen forty-five, the friendly relations and cooperation between Lebanon and Chile have been fruitful and very close.

In nineteen forty-eight, the first representation of Chile in Beirut, was established and Chargé d’Affaires Mr. Fouad Saade was designated. He acted as well as Consul General and as Minister Counselor ad-honorem. Dr. Saade, a distinguished Lebanese citizen, who, after expanding his first commercial ties with our country, had developed a true and sincere friendship towards Chile and played a relevant role in this first phase of rapprochement and later consolidation of our ties.

Therefore, this is an opportunity to recognize his important contribution for strengthening the friendship relations between Chile and Lebanon; a contribution that has continued through the permanent support of our common dear friend Dr. Riad Saade, current Honorary Consul of Chile.

The beginning of the diplomatic relations has also counted on the support of the Lebanese community in Chile and of the Chileans of Lebanese origin in Lebanon, who have both encouraged our governments at that time to formalize the establishment of the diplomatic relations.



In this way, under the presidency of Juan Antonio Ríos and Lebanese President Bechara El Khoury a fruitful friendship was built up and persisted until today. At this time, while in San Francisco, United States, the United Nations Organization was being founded, the special envoys of Lebanon and Chile were already expressing the points of agreement of our governments regarding the fundamental principles on which the new international order was founded.

It is in this context that both democracies initiated a process of convergence, despite the geographical distance and cultural diversity, enhancing an agenda of mutual cooperation based on common ideals regarding values such as peace, democracy and fundamental freedom.

The first Chilean Ambassador accredited in Beirut assumed duties in nineteen sixty-eight when the former President of Chile, Eduardo Frei Montalva, designated doctor Alberto Sfeir as the extraordinary and plenipotentiary representative in Lebanon. Dr. Sfeir was one of the founders of the Círculo Libanés the “Lebanese Circle” in Chile and constituted a figure particularly representative within the Lebanese community that, as we know, founded its second home in Chile, since the migratory flow in the beginnings of the twentieth century.

Therefore, this occasion is propitious to thank all those Lebanese and highlight on their valuable contribution for bringing their entrepreneurial spirit into the development of the country through various professions and occupations.

It is worth mentioning that the sixty-one percent of the Arabs who have arrived in Chile took place between nineteen hundred and nineteen thirty and the majority was between ten and thirty years old. With their cultural characteristics, Lebanese got adapted rapidly with the reality of Chile and its people. They quickly created support networks for the most vulnerable immigrants through hosting entities in the different cities or villages where they set their residence. Many of those entities

persisted for decades and their presence has reflected from the beginning the quality and importance of the Lebanese identity.

In this respect, we can mention for example the Sociedad Libanesa de Copiapó “Lebanese Society of Copiapo” (North of Chile), one of the firsts of utmost importance; the Sociedad Libanesa de Coquimbo “Lebanese Society of Coquimbo” (in the North as well); the Unión Libanesa “Lebanese Union”, founded in Valparaiso a port located at one hundred twenty kilometers of Santiago and twinned with port of Beirut since two thousand and five, the Círculo Libanés “Lebanese Centre”, created for cultural and social purposes, and which is still maintaining until today a dynamic cultural agenda, being a frequent meeting point for the community and a pole of attraction for the quality of the internationally well-known Lebanese gastronomy.

As mentioned, distinguished citizens of Lebanese origin have contributed to the political, economic, social and cultural development of Chile.

On this regard, we can mention some names of important personalities such as Alejandro Noemi, former President of the Chilean Senate, the economist Carlos Massad, former Minister of State and President of the Central Bank of Chile; Edmundo Perez Yoma, former Minister of Defense and Interior and who was appointed Ambassador of Chile in Argentina and Consul General in La Paz, Bolivia; Rafael Rosset, President of the Universidad San Sebastián; Alfredo Sfeir, former candidate to the presidency of Chile: he was an important economist in the World Bank. There are also Lebanese descendants among the Chilean diplomatic foreign service, three of them have got the range of ambassador (Juan Martabit Scaff, Fernando Zalaquett and Marta Chalhub, current Ambassador of Chile in Lebanon)

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Although geographically -more than thirteen thousand kilometers of distance separate us- it has never constituted an obstacle for strengthening our ties and deepening our mutual knowledge, thanks to the everyday advances in the information technologies.

There are definitely differences between Chile and Lebanon but there are also interesting similarities: Lebanon is millenary. Our country has only 206 years old. Chile, much like Lebanon, shares a tri-continental projection. We have similar geographic characteristics: sea, valley and mountain. The Lebanese toughness is remarkable, and it is reflected in the strength and capacity of overcoming the multiple adversities throughout their history. Chile had known as well a history of challenges, especially resulting from its geography and nature phenomena.

In another area, culture has constituted an important tool for a better knowledge of the identity of our nations. Lebanon has produced prominent figures in literature. Beirut has had a flourishing publishing industry since the nineteenth century and remains a high quality publishing center in the region. For example, we can't but mention the admiration of the Chileans for Gibran Khalil Gibran, especially for his famous work The Prophet that went beyond the boundaries, becoming an icon of the world literature. I can mentioned also our Nobel Prize Gabriela Mistral who visited Gibran Khalil during his last days in United States saying about him: “Only comparable to Rabindranath Tagore but in many ways the Lebanese was superior”

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Lebanese joined us offering the best of their expertise: Its millenary culture, entrepreneurship, commerce, sciences and philosophy; art and literature. Lebanon, the Cedar Homeland, is and will be the land of liberty, the land of faith, the land of friendship.
