



The First World Socio-Economic Forum

November 9-11, 2018

Closing Statement

At the generous initiative of His Beatitude and Eminence Mar Bechara Boutros Rai, the 77th Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Maronites, President of the “World Patriarchal Maronite Foundation for Integral Development” (WPF), WPF held its first “Work Socio-Economic Forum” in Bkerke, Lebanon on November 9-10, 2018.

The Archbishops of the Maronite Archdioceses in the world, business and industry leaders from Australia, the U.S.A., Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Europe, and Africa, and a large number of their Lebanese counterparts, honored the invitation to Bkerke’s Forum.

His Beatitude presided the forum, and urged the participants, at the eve of the centennial commemoration of the establishment of the new Lebanon, to “draw the inspirations from the past in order to build the future together”.

During the panels numerous experts, immigrants and residents, presented their views and projects exploring current challenges and upcoming opportunities. The participants discussed the difficult economic conditions the Lebanese people, particularly the Christians, are going through. They stressed on the necessity to provide the latter with the means and support to carry their civilizing mission in Lebanon and the Middle East. This support will help sustain the diversity that has transformed the Lebanese nation into a land of interaction between religions and cultures. All Lebanese communities, Muslims and Christians, welcomed this founding mission and marked their attachment to the culture of dialogue and atonement as well as their condemnation of violence and extremism. Throughout its history, Lebanon, and its Christians, have established a culture of pluralism, democracy and mutual recognition.

The participants have expressed their admiration for the scientific, cultural and economic work Lebanon was able to achieve, despite the surrounding tumult and notwithstanding the many challenges it faced not the least of which is the recent refugees’ crisis. Lebanon has fulfilled in this regard his humanitarian duty in anticipation of return of all displaced to their homeland. The participants marked their admiration for the education level in Christian schools and universities, as well the health services provided by Lebanon’s hospitals and medical institutions. They emphasized role of these institutions in producing a generation of leaders and pioneers who championed economic and cultural development in Lebanon and the region.

In addition, the participants discussed a series of economic, educational and social projects aiming at strengthening the social safety net, and boosting sustainable development in remote

areas, in order to minimize the youth migration. These projects aim as well at safeguarding the unique contribution of longstanding institutions that for more than fourteen centuries have been carrying their mission, in the service of people and humanity.

The participants made the following recommendations:

1. Institutionalizing the Forum to become a permanent entity that thrives to support the mission of the Maronite Patriarchate that consists of anchoring the Christian presence in Lebanon, in cooperation with the Lebanese Christian community spread all over the world, in order to safeguard the image of a pluralistic and diverse Lebanon.
2. Establishing a secretariat-general for the Forum. It was also unanimously decided to appoint Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay, bishop of the Maronite Diocese of Australia, as Secretary General and to nominate representatives of the various countries of immigration. The step to follow is to develop a strategic action plan for the upcoming phase. The Secretariat-General will be working at the same time to transform the Forum into a functioning body that works to hold its conference in Lebanon on an annual basis. The Forum objective is to increase the level of participation to integrate all the Lebanese capabilities in the world, in order to strengthen the Christian community capacities to face up to the challenges and difficulties and pave its way to the future. It was also decided that Secretary General will be the spiritual guide of the Forum.
3. Emphasizing the role of the youth in Lebanon and abroad, maintaining with them and among them a constant communication, encouraging them to engage in collective and voluntary work that aims at boosting their patriotic spirit and their attachment to the Motherland. Such efforts aim at developing mutual trust and enhancing nation credibility.
4. Promoting the importance of Lebanon Existence and Presence, as a necessity for the survival of the Christians in the Middle East. The forums stresses on the active role of the immigrants and the Churches in the immigration countries to promote this idea and incite the new generations to understand the richness of their ancestors' heritage, and encouraging the immigrants and their families to increase their visits to their Motherland.

The participants thanked His Beatitude for his initiative, as well as the WPF for its efforts, and the immigrants for their extensive participation in this conference, which reflects the personal attachment to Lebanon and a rejection of despair. The participants have also wished to pursue this ambitious plan aiming at creating a mutual interaction dynamism, working to strengthen the existence of Lebanon as an example for cultural diversity and richness, and safeguarding its previous and future role as a pioneer for cultural, economic and social advancement.