

## Lebanese Celebrate 125 Years of Life in Brazil

Contributed by Isaura Daniel  
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Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, opened yesterday the commemorations of 125 years of Lebanese immigration to Brazil, at the Monte Líbano (Mount Lebanon) club, in the city of São Paulo, in southeastern Brazil, pointing out the importance of immigrants to the country development.

"The Lebanese took their energy and knowledge to the four corners of the world, but they reserved a special care for Brazil," he declared. "They helped build a new nation here and became part of the Brazilian society in all spheres," he added.

To the President, the history of the Lebanese and their descendents is directly related to the expansion of Brazil. "Firstly as travelling salesmen, then as engineers, doctors, sculptors and public men," he said.

He added that in the same way in which the Lebanese culture is part of the Brazilian, the Brazilian culture must also become part of the Lebanese.

The Brazilian president returned to talking about the Brazilian House in Beirut, a project that was released during his visit to the Arab country, at the end of 2003. Lula was the first Brazilian head of state to visit Lebanon since emperor Dom Pedro II's visit in the 1870's.

Lula stated that visiting the country had been a dream of his. "I could see the happiness of the Lebanese people. Those who travel to Lebanon cannot see the difference between the happiness of the Brazilian and Lebanese people," he declared.

The President joked with the audience by stating that the Lebanese may have started coming to Brazil way before the immigration in 1880. "I don't know if that is all, or if there were Lebanese sailors on the ship that brought Cabral when he arrived here (in 1500)," he said.

### Summit

He also stated that Lebanon was one of the first Arab countries to open a channel of dialogue with the West. This channel, according to the president, should be strengthened with the summit of Arab and South American countries, to take place in Brazilian capita Brasília, in May.

"The summit is going to offer the opportunity of identifying connections and releasing dialogue between the Latin and Arab countries," he declared.

To the President, distance is not a problem. He stated that not always is the closest brother the best companion, but almost all good companions are great brothers. "What exists between the Brazilians and the Lebanese is more than immigration, it is closeness," he said.

Around 1,700 people participated in the event. Mostly part of the Lebanese community. Among the authorities present were the governor of the state of São Paulo, Geraldo Alckmin, of Rio Grande do Sul, Germano Rigotto, of Bahia, Paulo Souto, and of Goiás, Marconi Perillo, as well as the mayor of the city of São Paulo, José Serra, and the Lebanese consul-general in São Paulo, Joseph Sayad.

Serra recalled that a great part of the Lebanese community in Brazil is in São Paulo, the largest business center in the country, where around 2 million of them live.

"Lebanon sent us daring, brave youths with ease in adaptation, and they crossed 10,000 kilometers to get here," he said.

He recalled the importance of the Lebanese community in the development of one of the main business streets in the city of São Paulo, 25 de março street, in the center of the city.

Serra stated that he had a close relation with Lebanese tradesmen. "I worked in the Municipal Market and there I learnt how to eat Arab food," he said.

During the ceremony, one minute of silence was observed in homage to former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri, killed in February. At the beginning of the event, the Monte Líbano club choir sang the national anthems of Brazil and Lebanon.

Some authorities present, including the Brazilian President, were given sculptures by artist Odette Eid, a Lebanese descendant.

### Exhibition

The event was also promoted to mark the opening of an exhibition of photographs and objects from the time of the beginning of immigration and also for a stamp for commemoration of the event.

The purpose of the exhibition that began yesterday at Monte Líbano is to recall the arrival of Lebanese immigrants.

Up to April 10, historical documents, clothes and objects used by the Lebanese during the first years of immigration will be shown at the club, as well as pictures that recall the matter.

"Even cases used by the Lebanese who worked as travelling salesmen are included in the exhibition," stated Dolly Lahoud, a Lebanese descendant who is in charge of administration of the event.

Apart from the exhibition, part of the commemoration of the 125 years will also include a talk, on April 07 at 8:30 pm, about Lebanese immigration in Brazil.

Geographer and University of São Paulo (USP) professor Aziz Ab'Sáber, is going to discuss the matter, at Monte Líbano theater.

Translated by Mark Ament

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