

Brazil Sends Economist as New Ambassador to Beirut

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
Thursday, 19 January 2006

The economist and minister Eduardo Augusto Ibiapina de Seixas will be taking on the position of Brazilian ambassador in Beirut at the end of this month, with the challenge of making diplomatic relations between both countries as intense as the integration there is between the populations of both regions.

According to Seixas, apart from Brazil having between seven and eight million Lebanese descendants, there are between 40,000 and 70,000 Brazilians living in Lebanon.

"One of the challenges for the country foreign policy is to spread the good relations between both governments to the society. In the case of Lebanon it is the opposite. Due to immigration, we already have this integration between both countries. The challenge of both governments, therefore, is to increase cooperation to the same level as the integration that already exists," stated the diplomat. Seixas will take on the position in Beirut on January 23.

Due to the migratory flow between both countries, the Brazilian government opened a general consulate in Beirut in the first half of last year. The objective is to supply the demand of the population.

According to Seixas, the consulate, whose consul general, Michael Gapp, was empowered in December, is going to create a citizen council this year. The group will be responsible for bringing the problems and needs of the community to the consulate, which operates independently from the embassy.

Seixas believes that there is much to be done for relations between Brazil and Lebanon at the embassy. One of the possibilities, according to him, is studying cooperation in the social security area.

That is, finding a way of simplifying the retirement of Brazilians who move to Lebanon and vice versa, with the recognition, for example, of the period of time spent working in the other country.

In the economic area, one of the targets is to increase the flow of exports and imports. "Trade cannot be a one way highway, it must flow both ways," stated the ambassador.

Seixas recalled that, when Lebanese president Émile Lahoud visited Brazil, in February 2004, he offered his country as a platform for the entry of Brazilian products into the Middle East.

This, according to Seixas, should not replace bilateral relations between Brazil and other Arab nations, but may be one more channel for trade.

According to the diplomat, among the countries in the League of Arab States, Lebanon is the third largest country in terms of the number of Brazilian companies selling products.

"This means that there is a large number of medium and small companies participating in bilateral trade," he said. According to Seixas, Lebanon is a market with a reduced but sophisticated capacity.

He stated that the country is an important option for Brazilian garment producers, for example. There are already various textile industries in Brazil and stylists are exporting their products to the Lebanese market. However, Seixas believes that there is still space for work. "There is enormous creativity and competitiveness between Brazilian companies in this area," he said.

The diplomat also described the information technology sector as one that may be explored by Brazilian companies, and others like furniture and shrimp, in which Brazil is an exporter, but does not sell to the Lebanese. "Lebanon is an importer of shrimp," he said.

The hotel sector is another that is growing on the Lebanese market and, according to Seixas, may bring opportunities to Brazilian companies. "Lebanon invested US\$ 200 million in the hotel sector in the first half of last year," he said.

Tuesday, January 17, the diplomat met with the president of the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce, Antonio Sarkis Jr., as well as with directors and vice presidents at the organization for the promotion of closer ties. He stated that he would like to count on the Arab Brazilian Chamber so as to proceed with his work in Beirut.

Despite not having previous relations with Lebanon, Seixas stated that he was very pleased with this nomination for the embassy in the Arab country. The son of a father from Paraná, in southern Brazil, and a mother from Amazonas, in the

north of the country, he was born in São Roque, in the interior of the southeastern Brazilian state of São Paulo, and brought up in Rio de Janeiro, also in the southeast.

He entered the Brazilian Foreign Office (Itamaraty) in 1976. Seixas was the consul general of Brazil in Paris between the years of 1995 and 2000 and in Toronto between 2000 and 2005. In May 2005 he was invited to be the ambassador in Beirut.

"I think it was due to my wife's rooting," he jokes. According to the diplomat, his wife, Newma de Campos Palma Ibiapina de Seixas, has various Lebanese friends and has always wanted to live in the Arab country.

Newma had friends in the city of Cuiabá, capital of the midwestern Brazilian state of Mato Grosso, where she was born, and in Paris and Toronto, where she lived due to her husband's work.

Seixas stated that he was very pleased with the possibility of living in Lebanon. To justify this, he mentioned the good moment that the country is living and the trade relations with Brazil.

The diplomat was selected for the position of ambassador to the country just before the Summit of South American - Arab Countries, which took place in Brazilian capital Brasília in May last year.

Anba - www.anba.com.br