

## **Lebanese Christian Proposals Document** **Rabieh, December 4, 2007**

Whereas Lebanon without Christians wouldn't be a country, just as it wouldn't be without Muslims,

Whereas Lebanon as a "mission" and a model of coexistence is a joint Christian-Muslim responsibility,

Whereas Lebanon represents the catalyst of the dialogue of civilizations and the buffer of their conflicts,

Whereas the targeting of Christians has put Lebanon on a collision course commanding us to address the roots of the problem rather than its symptoms,

Whereas the Lebanese who refused the rise of a Christian Lebanese state, isolated from its environment, are rightly entitled to expect from their fellow countrymen, to refuse the rise of a Muslim state in Lebanon, in contradiction with the heritage of the Lebanese make-up,

Whereas the Christians in Lebanon have no choice but to blend in their environment and fraternize within their society, while preserving their personality and their cultural identity deeply rooted in the East and open to the West,

Whereas coexistence is more than a compulsory way of life but rather a doorway to citizenship and to a set of rights and obligations voluntarily embraced by Lebanese religious communities, whenever their fears for their future and stability are dispelled.

Following a thorough analysis of the Christian and national reality, after having drawn the lessons from historical experiences, and in view of a series of consultations with General Michel Aoun, subsequent to the presidential void crisis, we submit the following Lebanese Christian proposals:

### **1- On the issue of existentialism**

The Christians draw their inspiration from the Synod, the Apostolic Exhortation, and the teachings of Church.

They are a founding force in Lebanon where their presence is final. And just as freedom, diversity, acceptance of others and living in harmony with them are among Lebanon's principles, an unshakable principle is that Lebanon can never be "left at the mercy of an ideology of the majority", but is rather ruled by a genuine partnership, a balance of powers and a consensual democracy.

And since the Christians seek fraternity and solidarity within their own community, they also seek to remain open to dialogue with other communities, rejecting all forms of inferiority, subservience and subordination, permanently looking forward to strengthening the peace and national unity, refusing the policies of alignment with regional or international influences, seeking the friendship of all peoples and countries.

Therefore, only an active role played by the Christians can consolidate and safeguard their existence, the Christians of Iraq and Palestine being but the painful proof of the contrary.

In this context, the Lebanese in general, and the Christians in particular, are solemnly invited to a careful reading of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Free Patriotic Movement and the Hizbollah.

## **2- The Christian crisis and their current situation**

Bearing in mind that targeting the presence, the rights and role of Christians means in fact undermining Lebanon's unity and uniqueness, we focus our attention on their marginalization, namely stressing on the naturalization decree and its subsequent demographic imbalance; on the displacement and immigration, as well as on the poor representation of Christians in parliament due to an unfair electoral law, in addition to their flawed participation in the government, the public administration, the judiciary system and the security institutions, to which are added persecutions, violation of rights and other misfortunes they had to endure on the social, economic and educational levels. The existential crisis of the Christians in Lebanon, recently exacerbated by the current void of the presidency -which has been void in essence for two decades now- dates back to 1969 when the systematic process of undermining Lebanon as a nation, a system, and a state was initiated.

The current crisis is merely the extension of the one that prevailed under the Syrian occupation, which was fiercely opposed and spearheaded by Christians, who paid the top price to recover Lebanon's sovereignty and independence firmly believing that the end of occupation will restore back a genuine partnership on the one hand, and achieve the building of the state they have long sought on the other.

However, a bitter reality awaited them, as their wish never came true. They realized then that relentlessly, their will was being forged, whether in the elections of 2005, or by the dissolution of the Constitutional Council thus preventing it from ruling in cases of rightful electoral appeals, and again as their true representatives were kept away from the government, crowning it all by the government losing its legitimacy with the resignation of the Shiite ministers.

Whereas the Shiite and Sunni leaderships took office respectively heading the parliament and the government, external forces coupled with internal allies played a major role in denying the Christians this right, thereby clearing the way for external policies targeting the last bastion of opposition, and disregarding the national interests. This is the very essence of the current presidential crisis, amidst fears that the Lebanese people would only realize it a little too late.

## **3- Rules and Principles of Democracy within the Christian community**

The principle of the unilateral thought considered by some as a source of power has not only collapsed in the world, but has also put at great risk its own advocates. Thus, two

principles, two rules and one authority should govern the relations among the different Christian parties:

The first principle is the preservation of the intellectual partisan and non-partisan political diversity.

The second principle is the recognition of others, as well as of a majority and a minority both dedicated to the respect of the fundamental principles of democracy, taking turns in the political leadership.

The first rule is the acknowledgement of the right of the majority to assume the political leadership. The second rule gives the minority the right to either join ranks with the majority on the basis of its democratic representation, or to form an opposition dedicated to monitoring the flaws perpetrated by the majority and proposing alternative solutions within the framework of the democratic process.

Bkerke remains the authority that guarantees the implementation of these rules. Since the Church represents a “high moral authority”, Bkerke was and still is the uncontested national religious authority. In order for it to remain as such, all parties should refrain from using it as a competitive or parallel authority. Bkerke abstains from taking part in political tensions, in compliance with the Apostolic Exhortation that stipulates in Paragraph 112 that *it is not up to the Church to engage directly in the political life; in fact the Church does not have technical solutions and does not propose systems or economic and political programs, it shows no preference for one over the other...However duty falls upon the Church to relentlessly reiterate the principles which can alone ensure a harmonious social life....*

In this context, any talk deploring the divisions within the Christian community is considered as self-destructive, targeting the existence of the Christians and their political entity.

#### **4-The democratic rules and principles in Lebanon**

At a time where we aspire to citizenship as the sole basis of belonging to the State, the reality of the Lebanese political system based on the acknowledgement of the rights of each community, entails the respect of a simple competitive democratic rule within a religiously homogeneous community, and of consensual democracy within a wider heterogeneous and religiously diversified community. This is what makes the president of the republic a Christian figure requiring the consent of the nation as a whole, as is the case in Belgium or Switzerland. In both cases it is unacceptable to question or to sanction the Christians on their choice of political leaders, but it is acceptable to question the Christian leaders on their political choices and performances.

#### **5- The Restructuring of Society**

The resurrection of Lebanon and its Christians lies in the restructuring of the middle class. To attain this goal, all efforts should be focused on solidarity and fraternity within the community in a variety of fields ranging from education to health and housing so as

to achieve a higher level of social justice.

Moreover, it is crucial to grant priority to a wider decentralization, to issues pertaining to equitable and sustainable development and to the brain drain in order to find modern and tailor-made solutions to these problems.

## **6- The Establishment of the State**

Reform and corruption fighting are the corner stones in building a just and strong state where the rule of law prevails; a state capable of reassuring its citizens and benefiting from the characteristics of each and every one of its components.

The Christians reject the principle of self-protection that carries within the seeds of division and partition of the state, and embrace the adoption of a national defense strategy capable of granting Lebanon the necessary immunity and stability to constitute a deterrent force against enemies and aggressors, and to stretch the power of the state throughout the Lebanese territory, as well as safeguard the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon from any foreign interference.

## **7- The Imminent Dangers**

Two imminent dangers threaten Lebanon and the Christians:

The first danger concerns the threat represented by the settlement of the Palestinian refugees, which will disrupt the already precariously-balanced demography, in a country that strives to maintain this balance through the immigration of its own people – knowing that Lebanon lacks resources and has the sixth highest population density in the world- thereby rendering the assimilation of any “human surplus” impossible.

The second danger lies in the “money surplus” represented by the massive buyout of lands and the alienation of their identity, which places Lebanon once again, at the brink of a new tutelage, and violates the principles of sovereignty and free national decision-making.

Topping the above-mentioned dangers is the heavy burden of the national debt that has by far, exceeded Lebanon’s capacity to honor its financial dues, thereby generating a fear of a compulsory tradeoff with the settling of the Palestinians or with any other process detrimental to the national interest.

## **8- The Immediate demands**

- I-** To adopt the principle of equal treatment, and establish political justice as the basis for the balance of powers.
- II-** To rehabilitate the presidency of the republic by ensuring that the president enjoys personal and representative qualifications; and to clarify some of the president's prerogatives.
- III-** To issue a fair electoral law (based on the small constituency) to guarantee a fair

- representation.
- IV- To address the imbalanced Christian representation in the government, the administration, the judiciary system, and the security institutions.
  - V- To solve the issue of the internally displaced Christians of the mountain, of the Lebanese refugees in Israel, and of those missing in Syria.

## **9- The Mission of the Christians in Lebanon**

The crisis endured by the Christians of Lebanon is partly due to the fact that they were lead to believe, in their environment and in the West, that their existence and their mission have actually lost their “raison d’être”, in an era of globalization and direct meeting between the East and the West.

But the facts depict another reality: the encounter between the two worlds on the east side of the Mediterranean has resulted in a collision not in a dialogue. It was violent, exclusive, intolerant and non-interactive. The reasons for this being: on one hand, the absence of a just solution to the Palestinian problem, and on the other, the failure to promote democracy and human rights in this part of the world.

Only the Christians of Lebanon through their presence and their mission can take up these two challenges, because this community living in freedom and fraternizing with other religious groups can provide the required cultural and social model.

## **10- The path to salvation**

The Christians should remember that the wait-and-see attitude equals a slow and certain death, and that being hopeful and bearing witness to the truth are at the core of their beliefs. Therefore, and in order to find a way out of this destructive path and to initiate the resurrection process, they have to move from the status of objection and opposition to that of an ascending political resistance, the sole guarantor of their role and existence.

All in all, if the existence and the preservation of the Christians in Lebanon as a free people is an issue that lies in the hands of the Christians themselves, it nonetheless constitutes a historical challenge that faces their Muslim counterparts, should they wish Lebanon to remain a land of reunion, diversity, and dialogue, thus proving that Islam is indeed a religion of mercy, tolerance, and acceptance of others.