

***LERC Attends Nigeria's Golden Jubilee Celebrations***

***LENIFRA acknowledges Nigeria's role with emigrants***

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010, BIEL, Beirut

Reported by Elie Nabhan

The Lebanese Emigration Research Center at NDU was invited to attend Nigeria's 50<sup>th</sup> Independence Day celebrations held by the Nigerian Embassy in Beirut in collaboration with the Lebanese-Nigerian Friendship Association at the BIEL Center in Downtown Beirut.

The Lebanese-Nigerian Friendship Association was launched on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 2007 to maintain and promote socio-economic activities and relations between Lebanese and Nigerians, and push forward the process of economic and cultural cooperation between Lebanon and Nigeria.

LERC is the only academic institution in Lebanon that is a member of LENIFRA and in the past has participated in many of its activities including the Nigeria Week in 2008, the visit of the Nigerian Trade Delegation to Lebanon intended to help the Nigerian business and executive communities interact with their Lebanese counterparts, and LERC's hosting of a research affiliate, Dr. Peter Adebayo, from the University of Ilorin.



A welcoming line to greet the guests: (from left to right): Mrs. Abdullahi, Mr. G. Nabhan, Mr. M. Hamza, Consul Abdullahi, Mr. H. Saffieddine, Chief W. Zard Abou-Jaoude, H.E. O. Ayodeji, Lady Ayodeji (Oct 2010).

The Nigerian Embassy was represented by Nigeria's Chargé d'Affaires Lady A.A. Sonaike Ayodeji, her husband retired Ambassador H.E. Okun Ayodeji, Nigeria's Consul Mr. Abdullahi and his wife, and other members of the embassy staff.

LENIFRA was represented at the event by Mr. Hani Saffieddine (Chairman), Mr. George Nabhan (Treasurer and Past Chairman), Honorary Chief William Zard Abou-Jaoude, and Mr. Essam Fayez Moukarem. Also present was Mr. Mounir Hamza, World Bank Consultant for Africa and spokesman for the LENIFRA Board of Trustees.

Personalities who attended the event included Honorable Minister Adnan El Sayed Hussein representing H.E. President Michel Suleiman; Honorable MP Elie Aoun representing Honorable Speaker Nabih Berri; Honorable Minister Abraham Dayan, representing H.E. Prime Minister Saad Hariri; and Mr. Haitham Jomaa distinguished representative of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Shami.



At the reception: (from left to right) Mr. E. Nabhan, Mr. M. Hamza, Mrs. L. Haddad, Mr. R. Haddad (Oct 2010)

LERC was represented at the event by LERC Indexer and Website editor Mr. Elie Nabhan, and LERC Chief Indexer and Archivist Mrs. Liliane Haddad, who was accompanied by her husband NDU Associate Professor Mr. Robert Haddad.

They joined in the jubilee celebrations with various dignitaries and personalities, heads of diplomatic and consular missions and international organizations accredited to Lebanon, members of the Nigerian-Lebanese community and Nigerians living in Lebanon.

As the guests mingled over drinks at the reception, Nigeria's Chargé d'Affaires, Lady Ayodeji, delivered her Jubilee address, which highlighted Nigeria's march to democracy, stating that Nigeria at fifty is a young nation and still stands strong as a state.

Nigeria, she said, has been influential in global affairs and has undertaken reforms in the electoral process, banking sector, oil and gas, and the power sector, which have drawn the admiration of the international community. Likewise, Nigeria's private sector has expanded worldwide with its telecommunications market and airline industry, and its world class businessmen and entrepreneurs, who have invested heavily in the country.

Lady Ayodeji paid a tribute to Lebanon and the special bilateral relationship existing between the two countries.

"It will be recalled," she said, "that the first set of Lebanese arrived in present-day Nigeria in the year 1885 and the Lebanese Community in Nigeria was actively represented when Nigeria became independent, 50 years ago.

"We take great pride in our diversity as a country, which brings with it a very rich cultural heritage and gives us uniqueness as Nigerians. Our policy of friendliness and good neighborliness has been tested and we are proud to say that we never waver," she said.

Lady Ayodeji concluded by thanking the Trustees of LENIRA and their support for the celebration. The Association, she said, the friends of Nigeria, and those who believe in Nigeria, have always supported the Embassy.



Mr. M. Hamza delivers his address on behalf of LENIFRA while Lady Ayodeji listens on (Oct 2010).

Mr. Mounir Hamza then delivered a speech on behalf of the LENIFRA Board of Trustees, the Lebanese people and emigrants, congratulating “the leadership, government and citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for successfully building a modern state, free and sovereign, culminating in economic, cultural and social progress attracting investments and foreign ventures.”

He reiterated that the Lebanese-Nigerian relationship dates back to the first emigrant landing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century “welcomed by a warm African hospitality and followed by thousands who over the years comfortably settled in, and established companies, factories and successful enterprises.

“It is no surprise that these Lebanese emigrants genuinely proclaim Nigeria as their second home as they share ties of love, friendship and solidarity with the Nigerian people,” he said.

“The Lebanese people and emigrants express their deepest appreciation and gratitude to the Nigerian state and its compassionate people,” he concluded.

The celebratory 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary cake was then cut amidst much applause by Lady Ayodeji, the guest dignitaries and members of LENIFRA Board of Trustees. This was followed by a cocktail and a show of traditional Nigerian folklore dance.



Celebrating the event in traditional Nigerian style (Oct 2010).



Nigerians taking it to the dance floor (Oct2010).