

The Lebanon Migration Museum at NDU Commemorates the Lebanese who perished on the Titanic

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Reported by Ms. Guita Hourani, Director of LERC

The Lebanon and Migration Nucleus Museum at Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU), Lebanon, unveiled an authentic scale replica of the Titanic, which sank in the North Atlantic Ocean on 15 April 1912 after colliding with an iceberg during its maiden voyage, and a memorial plaque, listing the names of the Lebanese who perished in the tragedy.

The British Columbia, Canada branch of the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU) initiated the event. Mr. Henry Zarifeh, current President of WLCU, and Dr. Nick Kahwaji, former President of WLCU, represented the organization. In addition, Ms. Noeleen el-Hachem, of the Irish-Lebanese Cultural Foundation in Ireland represented the foundation on behalf of its Chairman, Mr. Guy Yunis.

Also present at the event were Mr. Joe Abi-Saab, the grandson of the late Joe Elias Abi-Saab who lost his life on the Titanic; Mr. Camille Lewis, Secretary-General of the Lebanese-Canadian Society in British Columbia, Canada; Mr. Antoine Menassa, President of the Lebanese Businessmen Association in France; Dr. Antoine Khoury Harb; Dr. Assaad Eid, Vice-President of Sponsored Research and Development at NDU; Ms. Guita Hourani, Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at NDU; Mr. Roberto Khatlab, LERC's Liaison Officer for Latin America; guests from Canada and Ireland, and the LERC staff.



Unveiling of the scale replica of the Titanic and memorial plaque at the Lebanon and Migration Nucleus Museum at NDU, Lebanon (2012)

A moment of silence and prayers marked the beginning of the event and was followed by a welcome speech delivered by Ms. Hourani who thanked representatives of the WLCU British Columbia, Canada, branch and the Irish-Lebanese Cultural Foundation for initiating the commemorative event and for donating the replica and memorial plaque.

Dr. Eid took the podium after Ms. Hourani and spoke of NDU's academic, cultural, and national commitment to preserving and promoting the Lebanese national heritage, and supporting viable associations between Lebanese residents and emigrants. Mr. Zarifeh then delivered his speech in which he spoke of the importance of preserving the Lebanese heritage especially among the Lebanese and their descendants abroad, and noted Dr. Kahwaji's dedication and efforts in this regard not only in British Columbia but also across Canada.

For her part, Ms. Hashem said that the gathering was aimed at roll calling, remembering, and recognizing each of those from the historic land of Lebanon and bestowing upon them their "rightful Lebaneseness". Dr. Kahwaji then took the podium and thanked the LERC, and promised to continue contributing toward its mission and to continue populating the museum and archive with cultural items. Trying hard to command his trembling voice and hold back his welling tears, Mr. Abi-Saab delivered an unrehearsed closing speech centered on his late grandfather's migration and tragic death on the Titanic.



Group photo of the attendees from Canada, Ireland, and NDU, Lebanon (2012)

During the unveiling of the memorial plaque, following Mr. Abi-Saab's moving speech, Ms. Désirée Rizk, a new intern at LERC, sang the famous theme song *My Heart Will Go On* from 1997's Hollywood's blockbuster movie *Titanic*. Both the music and Mr. Abi-Saab's story touched the hearts of attendees and added greater significance and meaning to the event.

This initiative, a first of its kind in Lebanon, comes in the wake of a world commemorating the centenary of the Titanic's sinking.

The Lebanon and Migration Museum at NDU opens its doors by appointment only. Appointments can be secured by contacting either the Public Relations Office or the LERC at NDU, Zouk Mosbeh.