

## **Elections 2013: Will Lebanese Expats Vote?**

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Representatives of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) invited MP Naemtallah Abi Nasr to Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU) on November 28, 2012, to deliver a lecture on “Out-of-Country Voting” and to assess the new Electoral Law proposed by the Lebanese government in June 2012, which allocates six parliamentary seats for Lebanese expatriates.

The Vice President for Public Relations and Cultural Affairs at NDU, Mr. Suheil Matar, welcomed Mr. Abi Nasr, thanking him for accepting the invitation and praising the MP’s dedicated legislative efforts in always proposing draft laws, which are aimed at modifying the present Electoral Law by allowing Lebanese expats to participate in parliamentary elections. Among the audience were Mr. Farid Samaha, former Lebanese Ambassador to Argentina, Dr. Guita Hourani, Director of the LERC, and a number of professors and staff members of the University.



*MP Abi Nasr at NDU, 2012.*

Mr. Abi Nasr said that Lebanon is indifferent towards its expatriates, which is a deliberate tactic that has existed since the post-independence French Mandate era (1924-1958). During this period, the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants received thousands of applications from Lebanese abroad, requesting for Lebanese citizenship, but the government failed to register them.

In 2000, when Mr. Abi Nasr was sworn in as a Member of Parliament, he raised the issue for the first time and based his systematic examination on a final and enforceable law promulgated in 1998, calling for the review of all incoming applications from Lebanese emigrants to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prior to 1958. The debate led to an investigation, and shortly thereafter, 5,480 applications of the 12,000 applications held in the records of the ministry were registered based on the fact that Lebanese citizenship is granted on the principle of *jus sanguinis* (*right of blood*) and not *jus solis* (*right of the soil*).

Mr. Abi Nasr also discussed the challenges faced in agreeing on a fair and just Election Law in Lebanon. He talked about one of his proposals in 2003, which dedicated 12 parliamentary seats to expatriates elected by the emigrants themselves in addition to the 128 deputies. This proposal, however, was deemed unconstitutional and its modification required the approval of two-thirds of Parliament.

Mr. Abi Nasr considered the new Election Law (drafted by the cabinet in 2012) as unjust and controversial because it allocates only six parliamentary seats to expatriates and is not truly representative of their needs. He continued by questioning the proposed mechanisms that allow for Out-of-Country Voting and the technical and logistical preparations with which Lebanese embassies should proceed.

As an expert on the issue of Out-of-Country Voting, Mr. Abi Nasr's input created a thought-provoking lecture, benefiting all attendees. Following the presentation, the floor was opened for group discussion.