

65 Lebanese-Argentines Repatriated their Ancestors to Lebanon by Donating their Photos to the Lebanon and Migration Museum at NDU

By Maritta Sislian, LERC

The Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) in cooperation with the Centro Argentino De Investigacion Sobre La Inmigracion Libanesa (CAIL) and under the auspices of the Argentinean Ambassador to Lebanon, H. E. Mr. José Gutierrez Maxwell, organized a ceremony, whereby 65 Lebanese-Argentines repatriated their ancestors to Lebanon by donating their photos to the Lebanon and Migration Museum at Notre Dame University-Louaizé.



H. E. Ambassador José Gutierrez Maxwell

The national anthems of both Argentina and Lebanon initiated the ceremony after which the director of LERC, Ms. Guita Hourani, welcomed to NDU, LERC, and the LMNM, H. E. Mr. Maxwell, the President of CAAIL, Professor Walter Muller, former Lebanese Ambassador to Argentina, Mr. Farid Samaha, Secretary- General of the World Lebanese Cultural Union, Mr. Tony Kaddissi; Dr. Michel Nehme representing Vice President For Sponsored Research and Development Dr. Assaad Eid, and the 65 guests from Argentina. Ms. Hourani stated that the journey of the Argentinean group to their ancestral land is an indication that the flame of love for Lebanon remains alive among the descendants of the pioneer Lebanese emigrants.

Dr. Michel Nehme said that the pictures of their relatives which they had brought back represented a noble gesture. The pictures, he explained, were symbols of human experiences in cultural integration and value oriented indicators of a marvelous tradition. He stressed on the importance of family bonds and the sincere commitment of family members to one another. He concluded that it crucial for people to know their identity in order to understand who they are.

Mr. Roberto Khatlab, LERC's Liaison Officer for Latin America and Director of the Centre des Etudes et des Cultures de L'Amérique Latine (CECAL), introduced the collection at LERC and explained the methods and policies LERC had followed since 2003. He also praised the cooperation between the two centers, given that both play a significant role in attaining contacts with the Lebanese Diaspora especially in Latin America.



The visitors in the Lebanon and Migration Museum

A short documentary introducing LERC, which was prepared in Spanish by Ms. Victoria Huerta, was projected and was followed by a presentation by Dr. Walter Muller who traced the early migration of the Lebanese to Argentina. He said that the Lebanese in Argentina proved themselves to be well-educated and hard-working, and the chief indicator of their success has been the recognition received for their endeavors in every district of Argentina. The Lebanese had established several clubs and societies to reaffirm their attachment to their ancestral land. He concluded by thanking LERC and NDU and by stating that having the pictures displayed at the Lebanon Migration Museum was a source of pride and honor.

Afterward, H.E. Mr. Maxwell took the podium. He thanked and congratulated NDU for the excellent initiative in organizing such an event, which would strengthen relationships between Lebanon and the diaspora in Argentina. He considered this exercise “a great example for everyone present given that many of our compatriots have either lost touch or broken bonds with Lebanon”. He further commended Argentineans of Lebanese descent by recognizing their efforts in integrating well into their adopted society, which he described as being receptive and unprejudiced toward others. His Excellency added that he hopes that this ceremony would serve as a stepping-stone to help maintain the current momentum of contacts with Lebanon - a country blessed by both God and Mother Nature.



Group photo of the visitors at NDU

Following the ceremony, certificates were distributed to Dr. Walter Muller; Ms. Nieves Abdallah; Mr. Jorge Saba; Mr. Nestor Hage, and Mr. Victor Nicolas Barbari in recognition for their donation of material to the Museum. The rest of the group members, as well as H. E. Maxwell received Certificates of Visit to the LMNM.



Pictures from the Argentinean Collection

The Lebanese-Argentinean group afterwards toured the Museum, admiring the collections from around the globe, each one telling a story of Lebanese immigration from different periods in history, ranging from the early Ottoman Era and the Greater Lebanon period to the French Mandate and Lebanese Independence. The visitors took pictures and were visibly deeply moved throughout their visit. Consequent to this effort, the Argentinean collection has become the largest collection in the Lebanon and Migration Museum.