

LERC Attends International Conference for Lebanese Diaspora
20th-21st July, Four Seasons Hotel, Beirut
Reported by Elie Nabhan



The Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at NDU attended a two-day international conference entitled *World Wide Lebanese 2011*, which called on the Lebanese government to acknowledge their expatriates interested in investing in Lebanon but held back by political and economic instability.

Mr. Eid Chedrawi, President of the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU), along with other expatriate speakers, Lebanese political figures and local personalities, touched on many issues of great interest to LERC, such as the right to grant citizenship to emigrants of Lebanese origin as a means to encourage them to invest in Lebanon as well as the possibility of emigrants voting in the parliamentary elections “a process that will motivate them further in their duties towards the home country,” he said.

The Right Honorable Antoine Issa, Lebanese emigrant and member of the Australian Parliament, echoed the call for emigrant participation in the voting process as well as parliamentary representation for members of the Lebanese diaspora.



LERC meets emigrant Australian MP: (from left to right) Mr. E. Nabhan, The Right Honorable A. Issa, and Mrs. Liliane Haddad (July 2011).

The Right Honorable Roger Haddad, a young Swedish politician of Lebanese origin, urged the Lebanese government to strengthen Lebanese embassies and consuls abroad, to approach the emigrant communities in their respective countries, and to carry a contact list that provided trading and commercial information.

Mr. Ahmed Hariri, representing H.E. former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, pointed out the great wealth of the Lebanese diaspora but lamented the fact that successive governments failed to reach out and connect the Lebanese emigrants with the homeland.

“The economy is the pivotal point,” said international businessman Mr. Ahmad Alameddine, hinting that while Lebanese emigrate for economic reasons, with the right opportunities they could be enticed back, especially when young emigrants are encouraged to invest and create a more competitive Lebanese market.



LERC poses with emigrant Lebanese-Brazilian businessman Mr. Mustapha Abdouni (July 2011).

Remittances are also an area of study with LERC, with Mr. Eid calling them “a great national capital for Lebanon”, and Mr. Saad Azhari, chairman and general manager of Blom Bank, the main sponsor of the event, pointing out that expatriate remittances in 2010 reached \$8.2 billion, a major contributor to Lebanon’s economic growth.

The participants concluded that investment opportunities must be made more attractive, corporate taxes lowered, capital flows eased, incentive packages put forward, the brain drain stemmed and opportunities provided for the young to stay in Lebanon and start their own businesses.

Ms. Liliane Haddad and Mr. Elie Nabhan, who attended on LERC’s behalf, networked with the participants and the organizers and invited them to visit LERC and/or its website to learn more about the Center’s mission and activities.