

Moroccan and Tunisians Foreign Affairs Delegates Visit LERC

Reported by: Youssef el-Helou

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A delegation from the Moroccan and Tunisian Foreign Affairs Ministries visited the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU) on July 3, 2013. In attendance were: Mr. Jaafar Debbarh of the Department of Cooperation, Studies and Prospective, and Mr. Bakkour Hafid of the Service Section for the Moroccan Communities in the Arab World, Mr. Fadhli Amor of the Division of Economic Activity in Tunisia and Mr. Bilel Abidi, of the Office of Tunisians Abroad the Studies' Section in Tunisia. In addition to Mr. Hussein Abed Asater, Responsible for Cultural Affairs at the General Directorate of Emigrants and Ms. Diana Younes, from the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Dr. Salwa Karam, an Associate Researcher at the LERC, as well as the LERC members of staff, and interns, and University staff members.

Mrs. Liliane Haddad initiated the meeting by providing an in-depth introduction on the history of Lebanese emigration and the reasons behind the founding of the Center. Mrs. Haddad then listed the essential elements for research, which include the largest collection on Lebanese migration around the world, a specialized library, a museum and archives, totaling more than 40,000 indexed documents and including visual and auditory material. Dr. Guita Hourani, Director of the LERC, began her lecture by providing the audiences with an overview of the continuous efforts and contributions that the Center makes concerning Lebanese migration worldwide.

In response to a question about the exact number of Lebanese expatriates in the world, Dr. Hourani said, "The importance of Lebanese emigrants is not measured by their number, which ranges from six to eight million; rather, by their effective contribution toward the countries in which they reside, on so many levels, ranging from politics and medicine to art and other diverse fields. Dr. Hourani also added: "Exaggerating the number of Lebanese expatriates demeans their achievements and overshadows their initiatives. This is a crime against them."

A Q&A session followed the lecture with Dr. Guita answering numerous questions.

Representatives of the Tunisian and Moroccan delegation expressed their admiration for the Center's tremendous work to date. The delegation was particularly captivated by the fact that the Center had skillfully combined academics with cultural and archival work. The delegation hailed the LERC as a private initiative and not a public one.

The delegation also expressed its willingness to exchange expertise with the Center, given its unprecedented and profound experience in the field of migration. For their part, the Tunisian and the Moroccan delegation noted that migration centers are still lacking in both countries when compared with the LERC.



Delegation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia with Dr. Hourani at the Lebanon Migration Nucleus Museum (July 2013)

A visit to the Museum followed the meeting where the items on display delighted the delegation.