

The Monthly

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A RAMADAN “DIALOGUE” IN THE CEDARS FOREST

“They” decided to meet in what is left of the Cedars’ Forest to discuss what is left of Lebanon. The dialogue started with interventions from representatives of the Phalanges Party and the Lebanese Forces stating that the oldest cedar tree today in “Ain Al Rab” is 1,000 years old according to a carbon testing report and that the oldest tree in Lebanon is the endangered Lizab (Juniper), which is threatened with extinction, especially following the construction of the Dinnieh-Hermel road and the Brissa dam. Hezbollah representatives objected and demanded the verification of the laboratory tests. As a result, the attendees decided not to discuss this issue and agreed to only discuss matters affecting daily lives of people that could be tackled. Therefore, there shall neither be talk about the international tribunal nor the weapons. There shall be no talk regarding “international legitimacy”, “alliances with Saudi Arabia or Iran” or even debates about the age of the Lizab and the cedars, thus avoiding any escalation.

The discussions focused on the following:

Electricity: They agreed on the necessity to immediately grant a treasury loan to Electricité du Liban amounting to \$2 billion to enable it to initiate the construction of new gas powered stations in Deir Ammar, Al Zahrani and other areas, and rehabilitate the electricity networks. They also agreed on closing down the pollutant Zouq station, which is harmful to Lebanon, Keserouane, the Maronite patriarchy, the beauty of the shore and ofcourse people’s health.

Full medical insurance: They agreed that the death of poor patients on hospital entrances and the inability of most people to receive or have access to good healthcare is humiliating. As such, around \$500 million should be secured for healthcare. Since real estate profits have multiplied by tenfolds in the past few years, it should not be a problem to introduce a real estate tax profits by 20%, after calculating inflation. This would provide the necessary amount to ensure that around two million Lebanese who are currently uninsured become medically covered.

The Lebanese University and Public Education: They agreed that the amounts spent on public education should ensure the provision of a good level of education but this is not the case. Support provided to private education, be it from religious institutions or the assistance granted to cover the fees of children of public sector employees, namely teachers, will be halted and priority should be granted to the Lebanese University and public education.

Cheap Labor and Emigration: The agreed that money transfers from abroad, along with the emigration of youth and the import of cheap labor, are issues that should be of the utmost priority. Thus, measures will be put in place to increase the cost of hiring foreign labor so that it does not become a form of slavery, while ensuring better opportunities for nationals. Organizing money transfers from abroad so that they do not cause an imbalance in the economy, is also something to consider.

Road accidents and Public Transportation: They agreed that the death of two Lebanese daily due to road accidents is unacceptable and therefore speed violations should be stricter, roads should be improved and the use of public transportation should be generalized (buses, trams and maritime transport) as is the case in all other countries around the world.

Environment and Construction: They agreed that environment and construction are intertwined issues and that Lebanon, from its shores and beaches to its mountains, should be treated like a vast beautiful garden. There should be no polluting factories, quarries, or garbage thrown in its valleys.

Conclusion: The Zua’ama, our princes and kings and “tarabeesh” on our heads, pledged that they would immediately implement the matters on which they reached an agreement. One of the attendees tried to discuss the electoral law and the independence of judiciary but he was told that these topics would be discussed in the next meeting. Another put forward the issue of the international tribunal and the weapons and the answer was that these two important matters would be discussed when what was agreed upon has been implemented.

Now came the time for iftar and Samir Geagea insisted on inviting everyone to his modest residence in Bcharri, remembering the quartet agreement and looking for a quintet agreement.

Suddenly a scary sound was heard. It was Humbaba, the guardian of the Cedars’ Forest, screaming “the hero has died... he has fallen and he will no longer rise. Like a fish in a net and a gazelle in a trap the hero has died, perhaps the nation has died”. The dream is short and the nightmare is ongoing...

Samir G. Geagea

