

Speech of Dr. Nick Kahwaji - Ghana Celebration - May 2011

Distinguished Guests, Dear Friends

We have met here today to unveil the statue that commemorates the Lebanese-Ghanaian friendship and to celebrate the 127 years of the arrival of the Lebanese to the Gold Coast.

The records show that WILLIAM IBRAHIM CHEBIB came in 1884 followed by a number of his countrymen. But one may ask, "How did the Lebanese come to west Africa?"

Many Lebanese in the 19th century dreamed of going to America, but the boat in which they were travelling had to stop in MARSEILLE, FRANCE, some of them; having used the little savings acquired, could not afford to pay for the long trip and so ended up on the coast of West Africa.

At that time, the European Companies and the small cities around were only at the shore. The Lebanese peddlers ventured into the deep area and became the middle men between the town and the remote villages, travelling long distances on foot to sell light goods and bringing back local primary products to the trading companies.

Could we for a second try to imagine the overnight stops inside the deep? The darkness, the danger, the fear and the fatigue!! A big admiration and respect to the early Lebanese who accepted to do the difficult work under harsh conditions alongside the local population and subsequently learned a new language and quickly integrated in Ghana.

The Lebanese are spread out far and wide across the regions being connected by a common language and many family ties, succeeded in trades, industries, medicine and science, arts, journalism and educations.

It is worth to mention that during the 1930 economic depression, much Lebanese escaped bankruptcy because of the strong solidarity among them, we should always remember that they helped and supported each other.

In 1957, the independence day of Ghana, Lebanon was among the first few nations to recognize it. The old members of the community might still remember the Lebanese delegation headed by AMIR MAJI ARSLAN, who attended the celebration in Accra.

Since that time, Lebanon and Ghana has kept a close relationship and true friendship. We salute the sacrifices of the Ghanaian army who served under the blue flag of the UNIFIL

The WLCU in Africa strives to unite all Lebanese in this continent and to create a working relationship between the various communities in West and South Africa, as well as connecting them to the worldwide Lebanese Community.

The WLCU in Ghana played a key role in helping our people in the last flood that occurred in Northern Ghana and also welcomed our displaced country men from the Ivory Coast.

The Union in West Africa started to play a new role on the international scene by opening new working relationship between the WLCU and UNIC in Accra and Mr. Chakib Rammal-the president of the Board of Trustees is already in contact with the officers of the UN office.

I would like to salute the Heritage and Cultural Affairs Committee headed by Mr. Antoine Ghanem, who initiated the world wide celebration of the Lebanese emigration by erecting a statue of the Lebanese emigrant in BRISBANE in February 2010 and hence encouraged the WLCU in Quebec who erected in June 2010, a monument to celebrate the arrival of the Lebanese in Montreal. Today we are here in Ghana and later in the year there will be other celebrations in Melbourne, Australia, Caracas- Venezuela, and Halifax-Canada.

Special thanks to Mr. Chakib Rammal and the organizing committee for their hard work and hospitality, your name is not only engraved in the granite of the pedestal but also in the heart of every Lebanese.

Please join me to thank the people of this beautiful country who have opened their doors wide to our people by asking them to accept this statue as a sign of gratitude and our everlasting friendship.

THANK YOU GHANA, GOD BLESS WLCU GHANA AND LEBANON.