

Bishops voice support for Lebanese Army

Contributed by Administrator
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BKIRKI: The Council of Maronite Bishops extended support on Wednesday to the Lebanese Army in its fight against Fatah al-Islam militants at the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp, near Tripoli. "The national cohesion and courage displayed by the Lebanese Army during indispensable fights deserves acknowledgment from all the Lebanese, especially since the army has shown a strong sense of patriotism," Monsignor Youssef Tawk, secretary to the Maronite Patriarchate, said.

Tawk was reading the minutes of the bishops' monthly meeting held in Bkirki and headed by Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Butros Sfeir.

Tawk urged the Lebanese to "despise" all attempts aiming to incite conflicts and reinforcing "blind sectarianism."

"Lebanon is characterized by its sectarian diversity, manifested by the 18 Christian as well as Muslim sects cohabiting in an atmosphere of cultural as well as religious freedom, which makes this country a true model for coexistence; thus all attempts to expose such atmosphere are totally unacceptable," he said.

Tawk hoped the Lebanese would be able to enjoy their summer vacation "away from the sounds of shells and gunfire and the smell of gunpowder."

The council expressed fears that the cancelling of the contest for recruiting new staff at the Internal Security Forces (ISF) "put the performance and standing of this institution at risk."

"Canceling the exam to recruit new ISF personnel is likely to lower standards and introduce incompetent members on the sole basis that they are affiliated with one political group or the other rather than their qualifications, and whereby those members might be taking the place of more competent ones," he said.

Tawk also said that since the issuing of laws "some 14 years ago," allowing the selling of real estate to foreigners, "more than 7 million square meters of land were sold to non-Lebanese."

"We fear that there will come a time where the Lebanese will feel they are outsiders in their own country," he said, "and such form of alienation is the bitterest of feelings."

Meanwhile, at its own weekly meeting, the Liberation and Development parliamentary bloc headed by Speaker Nabih Berri, endorsed the outcomes of the meeting of the Council Maronite Bishops.

"The bloc agrees with the contents of the statement issued by the Maronite bishops following their meeting, and endorses all recommendations made by the council," MP Ali Hassan Khalil said after the meeting.

Also on Wednesday, the Druze Council held its monthly meeting at the headquarters of the Druze sect in the Beirut neighborhood of Verdun, where recent developments on the Lebanese political scene were examined. - Additional reporting by Maher Zeineddine.

By Maroun Khoury, Daily Star correspondent
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