

Sfeir calls attention to dangers of civil strife

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Patriarch urges all to adopt 'nationalist' stance, returns from Vatican, urges Lebanese to give Berri's initiative a chance, Warns against slicing Parliament

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By Maroun Khoury
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Sfeir calls attention to dangers of civil strife

BKIRKI: Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Butros Sfeir on Sunday urged the Lebanese to draw lessons from the past and "remember that the use of weapons can only lead to violence, hatred, and divisions." "The dark years of the Civil War, as well as the numerous Lebanese Army soldiers who were killed when fighting at Nahr al-Bared should forbid any Lebanese group from re-arming and plunging Lebanon back to chaos," Sfeir said at the Notre Dame Church in Bkirki during his first Mass since his return from the Vatican.

Reports circulated in the media last week said that various Lebanese groups were rearming and training in camps across the country.

Sfeir described the heated debate over the quorum to elect the next president as "futile," adding that "the debate does not reflect proper nationalism."

Sfeir has repeatedly said that a two-thirds quorum is required to elect a new president, as is stipulated by the Constitution.

"It is crucial that the most nationalist scenarios be adopted because it is Lebanon's interests rather than the interests of various presidential hopefuls that ought to be taken into consideration," Sfeir said.

Sfeir told An-Nahar newspaper after meeting Pope Benedict XVI on Friday that the head of the Roman Catholic Church had "promised to exert every possible effort to restore stability to Lebanon."

Sfeir was quoted Saturday as warning that if a new president were not elected on time, Lebanon could face a division of government.

"Things usually start with two presidents and two cabinets. Later on, if they insist on maintaining their delusion, that could lead to two parliaments and two states. That would ruin Lebanon," Sfeir warned.

Sfeir returned to Lebanon on Friday after a visit to the Vatican during which he held a series of meetings with spiritual and political officials.

Sfeir had voiced disappointment over foreign meddling in Lebanon and said he hoped the warring sides would agree over presidential elections and a consensus candidate.

"Foreign interference in Lebanon's internal issues is the worst thing happening to Lebanon," the patriarch told the Italian news agency.

"Lebanon's neighbors are constantly meddling in our domestic issues and this is an unhealthy sign," he said, adding that these states "constitute a threat to the country's stability."

"We all hope that feuding Lebanese groups will start considering their country's interests rather than their own interests and reach an agreement about the identity of Lebanon's next president," Sfeir said from the Vatican.

Sfeir said "we must resort to elections" if Lebanese leaders do not agree on a consensus presidential candidate.

He said any president "should win the majority of the deputies' votes to be elected as president and in order to be a true

representative of the Lebanese."

Sfeir also said that "both Muslims and Christians in Lebanon are emigrating to seek better opportunities, not only Lebanese Christians." - With Naharnet

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Sfeir returns from Vatican, urges Lebanese to give Berri's initiative a chance
Saturday, September 15, 2007

BEIRUT: Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir returned to Lebanon on Friday from the Vatican, where he met with a wide range of regional and international officials to discuss the ongoing political crisis in Lebanon. Upon his arrival on Friday afternoon, Sfeir listed the officials he met while accompanying Pope Benedict XVI, from the UN Middle East envoy Terje Roed-Larsen to Syrian, Lebanese and Saudi officials.

"The pope expressed his great concern over what is happening in Lebanon," Sfeir told reporters on Friday.

Sfeir also mentioned that the pope met with Israeli officials, while the Patriarch was there.

"The officials we met in Italy expressed their support to Lebanon," he said.

Throughout his visit to the Vatican, Sfeir reiterated the importance of electing a president who embodies the characteristics "acceptable" by all political sides in Lebanon.

Speaker Nabih Berri said in an interview on Thursday with Kalam al-Nass that he is planning to meet with Sfeir and narrow down the list of candidates for the presidency.

"Berri's initiative might hold positive points so let the Lebanese give it a chance," Sfeir said on Friday.

Prior to his arrival, Sfeir voiced disappointment over foreign meddling in Lebanon and said he hoped the warring sides would agree over presidential elections and a consensus candidate.

"Foreign interference in Lebanon's internal issues is the worst thing happening to Lebanon," Sfeir told the Italian news agency on Thursday.

Sfeir stressed the importance on agreeing on a president who "unites" the country.

"The candidate should win the majority of the deputies' votes so as to be elected as president and in order to be a true representative of the Lebanese," the patriarch said.

"We all hope that warring Lebanese groups will start considering their country's interests rather than their own interests and reach an agreement about the identity of Lebanon's next president," he added.

Sfeir said "we must resort to elections" if Lebanese leaders did not agree on a consensus presidential candidate.

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Sfeir Warns against slicing Parliament

Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir was quoted Saturday as warning that if a new president was not elected on time, Lebanon could face the slicing of authorities into two Presidents, two parliaments and two cabinets.

Sfeir told the daily an-Nahar after meeting Pope Benedict XVI on Friday the holy pontiff "promised to exert every possible effort to help Lebanon regain normalcy."

If a head of state was not elected along with the constitutional time line that might lead to slicing authorities, Sfeir warned.

"Things usually start with two presidents and two cabinets. Later on, if they insist on maintaining their delusion, that could lead to two parliaments and two states. That would ruin Lebanon," Sfeir warned.

Sfeir returned home Friday from a visit to the Vatican during which he held a series of meetings with spiritual and political officials.

Sfeir had voiced disappointment over foreign meddling in Lebanon and said he hoped the warring sides would agree over presidential elections and a consensus candidate.

"Foreign interference in Lebanon's internal issues is the worst thing happening to Lebanon," Sfeir told the Italian news agency.

"Lebanon's neighbors are constantly meddling in our domestic issues and this is an unhealthy sign," he declared, adding that Lebanon's neighbors "constitute a threat to the country's stability."

"We all hope that warring Lebanese groups will start considering their country's interests rather than their own interests and reach an agreement about the identity of Lebanon's next president," Sfeir said from the Vatican.

Sfeir said "we must resort to elections" if Lebanese leaders did not agree on a consensus presidential candidate.

He said any Presidential runner "should win the majority of the deputies' votes so as to be elected as president and in order to be a true representative of the Lebanese."

On the future of the Christians in Lebanon, Sfeir said he was not worried since "both Muslims and Christians in Lebanon are emigrating to seek better opportunities, not only Lebanese Christians."

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