

Arab Expatriate Exchange

Volume II

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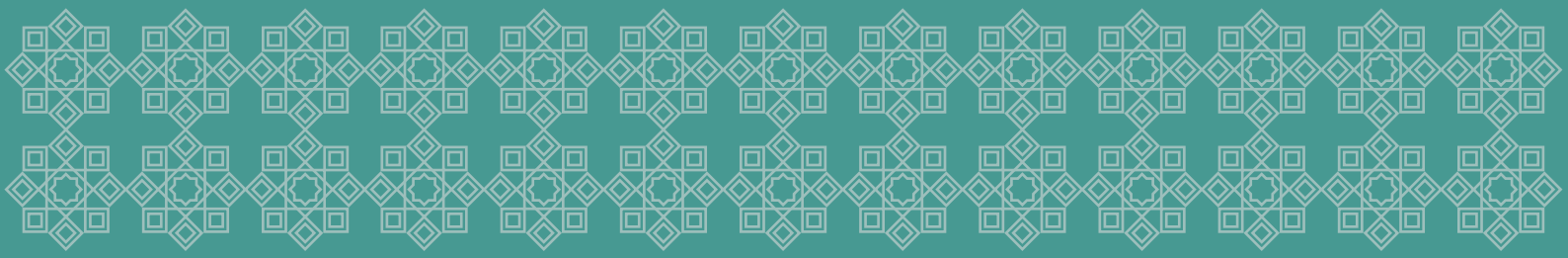
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ARAB ENERGIES ACROSS THE GLOBE





Reaching out and welcoming back: the Lebanese Diaspora Energy Initiative

On 24 and 25 November 2017, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants HE Mr. Gebran Bassil inaugurated the second edition of the Lebanese Diaspora Energy (LDE) regional conference for Latin America in Cancun, Mexico. This represents the ninth LDE conference organized, since 2014, by the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants in order to motivate the Lebanese community abroad to stay connected with Lebanon, to encourage their registration for citizenship and voting, and to invest in the country.

Since the first LDE conference in Beirut in June 2014 which was attended by more than 500 invitees, the initiative has grown beyond the annual conferences in Beirut to include regional conferences around the world. In 2016, three regional conferences were held in New York, Sao Paulo, and Johannesburg to facilitate the participation and focus on the needs of diaspora populations in North America, Latin America, and Africa, respectively. This initiative has continued in 2017, when the annual LDE in Beirut reached 2000 participants and the conference for Latin America in Mexico which followed one in Las Vegas for North America. Further regional conferences have been organized in 2018 in Ivory Coast, Australia, and France.

In his welcoming message to the regional LDE Conference for Latin America, HE Minister Gebran Bassil highlighted the importance of the Lebanese community by stating that,

“[t]he participation of each and every one of you is valuable to transmit a strong message of union and commitment in order to build a homeland distinguished by its Lebanese people and a nation of achievements, excellence, and creations.”

In his message he also referenced one of the key achievements of the last annual LDE in Beirut. Namely, he mentioned the signing of a decree granting expatriates the Lebanese citizenship, the first to gain a passport under Law 441 passed in 2015 with the aim of encouraging them to reclaim their Lebanese citizenship. During this conference, IOM Lebanon had the opportunity to support the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants through the provision of technical and logistical assistance. Diaspora members that came by IOM's booth spoke of the importance of giving back to their country of origin, to explore new possibilities and opportunities with the government, and on the need to establish connections with their homeland.

Sharing the gift of language to the Arab community around the world

Interview with Mr. Nabih Chartouni, Director General of Grupo Inmobiliario

As part of the Lebanese community abroad, how do you believe that you contributed to your community?

My relationship with the Lebanese community is excellent in general. I am part of this dear and successful community. I was born in Lebanon; there I studied Arabic literature and law. I joined the bar in Beirut on 5 January 1966. I visited Mexico in 1969; after travelling through many places in the USA and Latin America, I settled in Mexico in 1970. Since then, aside from my daily work, I dedicate my time to the field of culture.

Since I arrived, I noticed an immense gap that separates those of Lebanese descent born abroad from their homeland. I proposed a programme to close that gap with language as the principle vehicle considering that it is the tool that most brings us together while we talk to family members back in Lebanon. I had positive results which were reflected in better comprehension and the revival of hidden patriotic sentiments.

How did you begin teaching colloquial Arabic?

First I tried opening my own school in 1971, but to make a long story short, since 1972 I have been giving classes of colloquial Arabic in the Lebanese Centre of Mexico and I'm pleased to say without ever charging for my services. I did it simply out of love for Lebanon and the Lebanese community, as a way to reinforce the intellectual and sentimental links with our country of origin and that would serve as a strong bond that brings us closer together.

Firstly, I wanted to bring together those Lebanese born abroad closer to their families through the common language as I already mentioned. But now I have a variety of students. Many students are of Lebanese descent or from other Arabic speaking countries as well as other nationalities, the majority of which work in diplomatic missions or businesses in Mexico. They are speaking excellent Arabic, which many confessed to me they were not able to achieve while studying literary Arabic.

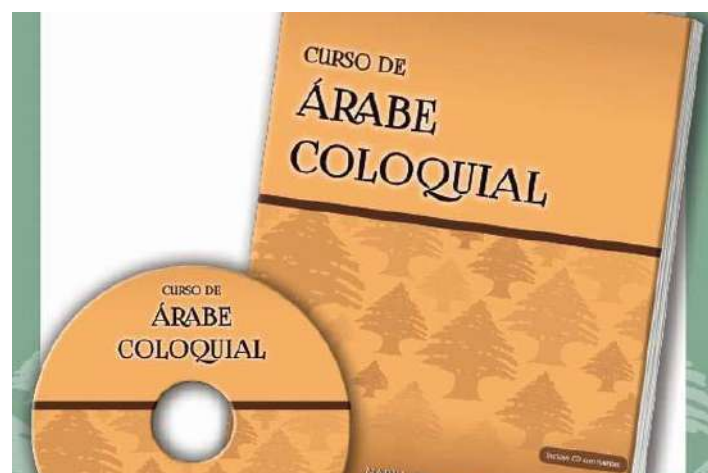
We've heard about a method of teaching spoken Arabic which you developed. Can you tell us about this method?

Well, it is a long story but I had to share my understanding of the language, to put in practice my ideas and my desire to demonstrate that colloquial Arabic is better for teaching the language of the home which in turn leads to a really familiarity.

In order to create a universal work on colloquial Arabic, I have undertaken a phonetic study of the sounds used in Arabic speaking countries to have a comprehensive work that would serve all those that want to learn the language of their country of origin. In order to realize this work I established 33 letters that encompass all the sounds used in colloquial Arabic which can be used not only to those of Lebanese descent but instead apply to all Arabic speaking regions and countries.

In order to not let this work fade into obscurity, I've written three books for teaching colloquial Arabic.

One book contains 100 lessons for learning the basis of the language; the second a grammar book; and the third is a basic dictionary that contains 5600 words. I seize the opportunity to inform you that the last two books have been translated in English and Portuguese and that in the next month the second edition of the dictionary will be released with nearly 11,000 words.





Do you think that the translation of the grammar and the dictionary are enough to teach the language?

Of course, the advantage of this method is that it can be applied in any country; with the grammar and the dictionary every professor can use their own teaching style and the language according to the country or region where they live. The English and Portuguese translations facilitate comprehension of the teaching method and its application regardless of the country or region since each letter has only one pronunciation regardless of its position in the word. This alphabet contains the essence of the pronunciation.

This work has its challenges with many obstacles to overcome on the way; some accuse me of deteriorating the value for the language while others find this method the best way to learn how to speak correctly the language of the home. But that said, I most thank all my countrymen in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Columbia, Chile, Australia, Canada and the US that have shown an interest in disseminating the method in their own locality.

I'd like to mention the alphabet known as "colloquial Arabic chartouni" is available for mobile phones and for computers. There is also a website, www.arabecoloquial.com, which has a comprehensive explanation of the method.

Tell us about some of your other activities

For eight years I was president of the association "ALFANNAN" that brings together Lebanese artists and intellectuals in Mexico from 2008 to 2015. I'd like to mention some of the cultural activities that I've done and continue to organize as continuation to these efforts that many have participated in over the years:

1. A course on the history of Lebanon from antiquity until modern times titled "Lebanon through its History" has been organized continuously over the last 16 years.
2. "Universos en Concierto" is a programme to promote new Lebanese artists from Lebanon and abroad and to highlight those that have been successful in all artistic fields from music to painting to sculpture which we have been doing since five years.
3. A course titled "Mexico through its History" which will have its fourth edition this year.

About my other cultural activities, I can mention that I contribute to conferences on various topics mainly related to history and language.

What's new at IOM?

We need your inputs!

Here at IOM we want to help expatriates to be agents for change in both societies of origin and destination by providing iDiaspora as a global online platform which can equip them with the tools they need. Unlike many of the platforms and tools currently available that are often targeted at specific communities from a given country or residing in a certain country, or both, iDiaspora will be truly global allowing you to connect with, learn from, and collaborate with individuals and groups from a variety of backgrounds all working to maximize the potential of transnational living. But we don't want to just create another website, we want to build a dynamic workspace that responds to the real needs of individuals and groups working in this transnational space. As a first step in this participatory process, IOM has created a 10-15 minutes online survey to collect inputs directly from members of transnational communities to provide us with crucial insights into the elements of the platform most needed by expatriates. This in turn will allow IOM to invest in elaborating the most useful tools first and slowly build and expand on them as new needs emerge. The survey is currently available in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish here: <https://idiaspora.org/developing-idiaspora-platform>



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About this newsletter

The Arab Expatriate Exchange is a quarterly newsletter produced every semester by the UN Migration Agency (IOM) Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa. It constitutes IOM's institutional communication with expatriate groups from the Middle East and North Africa.

Submit to the next issue

We strongly welcome and encourage individuals and groups to submit their articles and suggestions for the upcoming issue, in one or more of the following categories:

- Highlighting a successful project
- Highlighting a diaspora group
- The success story of an expatriate
- Announcements for past or upcoming events

For more information and submissions, please email us at: iommena-news@iom.int

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