



HB Cardinal Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir
Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East
Maronite Patriarchate
Bkerké - Beirut

3 March 2011

Your Beatitude:

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We followed with keen interest your recent visit to the Vatican where a statue of Mar Maroun was erected at the façade of St Peter's Basilica. We also learnt that the Holy Father had accepted your resignation as patriarch of the Maronite Church and that the Conclave to elect your successor will start on 9th March under the auspices of Bishop Roland Aboujaoudé.

I still have fond memories of my visit to Beirut last summer, alongside Dr Harry Hagopian and Dr David Ryall, where I also had the pleasure to have a meeting with you and to exchange some thoughts about the situation in Lebanon as much as within its Christian communities.

As the third cardinal and seventy-sixth patriarch of the Maronite Church since your election in 1986, you have played an indispensable role in defending the rights of Christian communities in Lebanon and across the whole region. You have also spoken out for the human rights of all the Lebanese people and in favour of the integrity of your country. What a fitting moment indeed to retire at a time when you celebrate this month your Patriarchal silver jubilee and your Episcopal golden jubilee.

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, I wish you well in your retirement just as I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the Conclave in the election of your successor. The Middle East and North Africa region is undergoing critical developments, and the Maronite Church will doubtless continue to play a key role in the life, presence and witness of Christians in Lebanon and across the whole region.

My colleagues and I at the International Affairs Department remain ready to consolidate our growing cooperation and solidarity with your successor just as we also pray that the Almighty will lead the Maronite Church and all four families of Churches in the Middle East to continue witnessing the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace (Eph 4:3).

With fraternal prayers and warm regards,

Bishop Declan Lang
Chairman of the International Affairs Department
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales