

# **Qornet Shehwan Gathering**

## **Background**

Qornet Shehwan is a small town in the Mount Lebanon area of Metn characterized by being the seat of the Maronite Archbishopric of Al Metn. Recently, this small town has become the headquarters for a new broad-based Christian coalition known as the "Qornet Shehwan Gathering."

Qornet Shehwan Gathering started unofficially in May 2003, prior to the parliamentary elections, as an attempt to increase Christian participation in these elections, counter effect the negative effects of the amended electoral law which they strongly opposed. The gathering took a more official nature only after the first Council of Bishops' statement, and consolidated itself as the political wing of the Patriarch.

## **Formation**

The birth of the new coalition was formally announced at meeting of 29 prestigious centrist and center-rightist Christian politicians with Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir at his seat in Bkirki on Monday, April 30, 2001. However the current number of members has been reduced to 22 after the withdrawal of the representatives of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (2 members), the National Bloc (4 members), and the Lebanese Forces (1 member).

## **Membership**

Members of the Qornet Shehwan Gathering are: Amine Gemayel (Former President, Phalange, Maronite), Nayla Mouawad (MP, Maronite), Boutros Harb (MP, presidential aspirant, Maronite), Elias Skaff (MP, Maronite), Nassib Lahoud (MP, Presidential Aspirant, Maronite), Fares Soueid (MP, Maronite), Mansour el Bonn (MP, Maronite), Antoine Ghanem (MP, Maronite, Phalange), Salah Honein (MP, Maronite), Pierre Gemayel (MP, Maronite, Phalange), Dory Chamoun (National Liberal Party, Maronite), Michel Houry (Former Minister, Maronite), Antoine Kleemos (National Bloc, Maronite), Toufic Hindi (Lebanese Forces, Syriac Orthodox), Youssef Saadallah Houry (Free Patriotic Movement, Maronite), Shakeeb Kortbawi (National Bloc, Maronite), Hares Shehab (Maronite League, Maronite), Kamil Ziadeh (Former MP, Maronite), Nadim Salem (Former MP, Catholic), Gebran Tueni (An-Nahar chairman, Orthodox), Farid Elias el-Khazen (Chairman at that time of the AUB Political Science Department, Maronite), Simon Karam (Former Ambassador of Lebanon in Washington, Maronite), Samir Frangieh (Center-left politician, Maronite), Samir Abdel Malak (National Bloc, Maronite), Sami Nader (Free Patriotic Movement, Maronite), Elias Abou Assi (National Liberal Party, Maronite), Elie Karameh (Phalange, Catholic), Salim Salhab (National Bloc, Maronite), Jad Nehmeh (politician, Maronite), Gabriel Murr (MTV owner, Greek Orthodox).

After Lebanon's year 2000 elections, several members withdrew from grouping, including Dori Chamoun, Simon Karam, Nadim Salen, Toufic Hindi, Jean Aziz, Farid Elias el-Khazen, Shakeeb Kortbawi, and Eddy Abillamah.

In addition, the following members lost their seats in the parliament: Fares Souaid, Camille Ziadeh, Mansour el Bonn and Nassib Lahoud.

## **Principles**

1- Lebanon is a final homeland for its entire people and not an artificial state or simply a forum or a card. It is entitled to independence, sovereignty and freedom of decision, just like all other nations of the world. As long as this full right remains denied, Lebanon cannot overcome the crises, which confront it.

2- Dialogue is the best option and indeed the only way to resolve differences between the Lebanese, no matter how intense they are, and not violence, no matter the variety of its justifications. Dialogue means, first and foremost, the recognition of the other, interaction with the other and the acceptance of

differing opinions without any claim to monopoly of the truth. The provoked movements and action, which violates the logic of dialogue, which we have witnessed recently, did not express the reality of the relationship between the Christians and the Muslims but rather constitute a desperate attempt to give the impression that the country is in danger of constant insurrection which makes it in need of guardianship.

3- The reforms which were approved in 1990 and which were integrated into the Constitution of the country are irrevocable reforms and were introduced in response to demands for actual power sharing in the authority. These reforms were designed to put an end to the logic of sectarian dualism in the formula and to the logic of seeking recourse to external forces to achieve internal gains.

4- The state to which the Lebanese aspire is based on partnership. There is no room in it for spoiling or parceling out. Rather, it is the state which is capable of sponsoring and protecting the formula of co-existence and developing it to adapt to the age, a state which effectively organizes the affairs of its citizens and is based on a modern democracy, free from sectarian restrictions and which depends on competence and transparency and in which the supervisory bodies enjoy wide immunity, all under the guarantee of an autonomous judicial authority.

5- Israel constitutes the major source of danger to the people and the land. The success of the Resistance, given the popular and national support, in inflicting defeat on the occupying enemy and liberating the land, was an additional demonstration of the right of Lebanon and the Lebanese to exist and to live together and an indication of their high-level contribution to Arab life. However, this success will not be complete until government institutions, especially the army, return to the liberated South to protect the people and the land as the embodiment of the return of the South to the state as an indivisible and effective unit of the nation.

6- The maintaining of relations with Syria with the present level of faults and shortcomings is detrimental to both countries and is rejected by the Lebanese who unanimously agree on the establishment of the best possible brotherly ties and relations between the two countries and on the preserving of historic links between the two peoples in terms of friendly ties and common interests. This objective will not be achieved unless Lebanon regains its full independence, sovereignty and decision-making freedom. The equation, which should regulate relations between the two countries, should be based on a combination of the closest degree of solidarity and cooperation and the clearest components of sovereignty and independence. This equation paves the way for conclusion of the historic settlement, which ensures the stability of the two countries and lays the foundation for sound and permanent relations of cooperation.

7- Relationship between Lebanon and its Arab environment should not be based on the choice between the annihilation of self or antagonism. Lebanon never did, nor will ever, miss performing its role in the renewal of Arabism and in making a voluntary cultural tie which is open to the modern age, far removed from the policy of dependence which has cost Lebanon dearly. This is based on democracy which takes into consideration the diversity of Arab societies and their political plurality and which strengthens its capacity to confront the challenges of the age and formulate a futuristic plan which would ensure an effective and distinctive position for the Arab world in the dialogue of civilizations.

## **Objectives**

Given these intrinsic realities and in order to avoid the dangers, which threaten the nation, we call on the Lebanese to work together to achieve the following basic objectives:

1. Urge the authorities entrusted with the Constitution to work towards the implementation of its provisions and the recovery of full national sovereignty through the implementation of the Taif Agreement, especially the stipulations providing for re-deployment of the Syrian forces, to pave the

way for their full withdrawal from Lebanon in accordance with a specific time table.

2. Protection and reinforcement of democracy on the basis of the principle that the people are the source of all authority. This will be achieved through ensuring the autonomy of the judiciary, respecting human rights and the formulation of a new electoral law, which would ensure sound representation in addition to respect for public freedoms, and the limiting of intervention of security services in all areas.

3. Completion of comprehensive national reconciliation, the return of banished people, the release of political prisoners, and the turning of a new page in the life of the Lebanese. This would significantly contribute towards the emergence of sound political life and the resolving of the grinding economic crisis and the protection of stability in the country.

4. Support of the struggle of the Palestinian people for the recovery of their legitimate rights and the establishment of their independent state, with its capital Jerusalem, and the resolving of problems of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to prevent settlement (in Lebanon) with a reaffirmation of the responsibility of the international community and of Israel to find a just and comprehensive solution to the problem of refugees.

5. Encouragement for work on the formulation of an Arab just and comprehensive peace plan which would safeguard Arab rights and would pave the way for the establishment of a modern Arab regional system which would provide a sound framework for cooperation between the Arab countries and for confrontation of the challenges of peace and the demands of globalization. This could be realized through coordination on the basis of competence and mutual respect between Lebanon and Syria and other Arab states.