



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Meets with Lebanese Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Sfeir

The Oval Office

2:00 P.M. EST

PRESIDENT BUSH: Your Eminence, welcome. It is my honor to welcome you and your distinguished delegation to the Oval Office. We're -- thank you for your conversation.

His Eminence and I discussed, of course, Lebanon, and our deep desire for Lebanon to be a truly free country -- free where people can worship the way they choose to, free where people can speak their mind, free where political parties can flourish, a country based upon free elections. And I assured His Eminence that United States policy is to work with friends and allies to insist that Syria completely leave Lebanon, Syria take all her troops out of Lebanon, Syria take her intelligence services out of Lebanon, so that the election process will be free and fair.

His Eminence is a man of God. He brings great prestige of the Church to the Oval Office. And I'm proud you're here, Your Eminence, and thank you for your time.

Now His Eminence would like to say a few words.

CARDINAL SFEIR: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I come to the White House in response to the invitation of His Excellency, President George W. Bush, and to thank him for his courteous and warm reception. I would also like to express my deep gratitude for his sincere interest in Lebanon, the freedom of its people, and in peace in Lebanon and the world.

This was a good opportunity to exchange views on the situation in Lebanon, and the questions of freedom and democracy in our region. We profited from this occasion to convey to President Bush the views and aspirations of all the Lebanese.

(Inaudible) -- by the continuing migration of Christian and Muslim youth due to the lack of job opportunities and the suffocating political conditions at home. We look forward to see these conditions reversed because the future of Lebanon requires the talents and energy of all her children.

It is important to recall that Lebanon was the first democracy -- democratic country in the region. Maybe it was not a perfect democracy, but Lebanon remains the role and the point of departure for the spread of democracy in the region. This is why His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, stated that Lebanon is an ideal for freedom and democracy for the East and West, and this is what we have repeated here.

We are hopeful that the Lebanese, with the support of their friends around the world, will be able to

build a better future in a free, independent, pluralistic and sovereign Lebanon.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Your Eminence, thank you, sir.

END 2:04 P.M. EST