

**DR. JOSEPH GEBEILY's
SPEECH AT THE CEDAR REVOLUTION COMMEMORATION EVENT
MAY 12, 2006**

Mr. Ambassador,
Honorable Members of the Administration
Honorable Dignitaries from Lebanon
Distinguished Guests from the Offices of Members of Congress
Leaders and Members of Lebanese-American Organizations
Distinguished Guests from the Media and from American Institutes
Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are assembled here today to celebrate the 1st anniversary of the Lebanese Cedar Revolution, one of the greatest events in the annals of democracy at the turn of the 21st century. We want this celebration of freedom to be a tribute to the courage of those who fell, an inspiration to those who will persevere, and an appreciation to those who help.

Long before it gained its fame and its name a year ago, "The cedar revolution" was carried on for many years by all those who believed in freeing Lebanon from foreign occupation and in saving its democracy and liberty. Regretfully, it took the tragic assassination of a most prominent Lebanese, the late Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, on that dark day of February 14, 2005 to mobilize the once silent majority of the Lebanese and to catapult citizens from all religious and political affiliations into a massive protest on March 14, 2005 that came to be known as the Cedar Revolution. Despite the dangers and the risks imposed by the Syrian occupation and its agents in the Lebanese police regime, 1.5 million people, the equivalent of over 1/3 of the Lebanese population, joined by political and religious leaders, converged on downtown Beirut to demand the freedom of Lebanon.

And they prevailed.

The Syrian Army withdrew on April 26, 2005, and Lebanon re-gained its independence. The Pro-Syrian government was forced to step down and the country witnessed its first free parliamentary elections in 30 years.

Today and one year after, we are gathered here to salute the courage and determination of the Lebanese people. We also salute those courageous leaders who have been braving for years the dangers of opposing a ruthless regime like the Syrian Baathist regime, leaders like Dory Chamoun and Fares Souaid who are with us here today, leaders like Walid Jumblatt, Amine Gemayel and Saad Hariri who refuse to be intimidated and live under the constant threat of assassination.

At the same time, we cannot forget that liberty and freedom for Lebanon did come at a heavy price, and it is rightful to recognize

- the sacrifices of those who offered their lives for Lebanon, Rafic Hariri, Basel Fleihan, Samir Kassir, George Hawi and Gebran Tueini
- the sufferings of those who were injured and mutilated like Marwan Hamade and May Chidiac

- and the tragedy of those who spent years of their life, in confinement and isolation , resisting in silence, refusing to submit to the will of the occupier. And I am referring here to Dr Samir Geagea, Without them, without all of them, without the scores of Lebanese handicapped, injured, or killed, while facing the occupier, Lebanon would not have survived as a nation.

Honorable guests, Ladies and Gentlemen ,

The Lebanese acknowledge that none of this newfound freedom would have been possible without the resolute support of the United States of America.

President Bush was the first world leader to proclaim in June 2004 that “the people of Lebanon should be free to determine their own future without foreign interference or domination”.

The policy and actions of this Administration and this President towards Lebanon are remarkable.

From the signing of the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act in 2003, to the issuing of Presidential Executive Orders to punish the contributors to the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon and the perpetrators of crimes against Lebanese citizens and their civil leaders, to the welcoming at the White House of many Lebanese religious and political leaders, and at every opportunity, this President has not missed a chance to re-affirm his commitment to a sovereign and free Lebanon.

Moreover, the repeated statements, actions and visits to Lebanon, by many US Officials, some of whom have honored us with their presence here today, are further testimony to the strong engagement of the members of this Administration for the cause of democracy and freedom in Lebanon.

After all, the name “Cedar Revolution” was coined by a prominent member of this Administration, the Under Secretary of State Paula Dobriansky.

Furthermore, the efforts led by US Diplomats at the United Nations from John Negroponte to John Bolton, have been crucial in securing the full backing of the International Community for Lebanon’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

Lebanon has never ever enjoyed so much support from an American Administration.

It is true that the doctrine of this Administration and of this President has been that: “America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance”

And the President was right when he said, and I quote:

“For too long, American policy looked away while men and women were oppressed, their rights ignored and their hopes stifled. “ and he continues that “those who long for liberty and those who work for reform can be certain they have a strong ally, a constant ally in the United States of America”. That “liberty will overcome oppression in the Middle East”. And “America is pursuing a Forward Strategy of Freedom” –end quote

Surely, the Lebanese Cedar Revolution lends clear validation to this Forward Strategy of Freedom to promote liberty and democracy in the Middle East, and defeat terrorism and extremism.

My dear Friends,

Most of us gathered here today are Lebanese-Americans, proud members of this vibrant community of Lebanese who emigrated to the US, in search of the American dream, and who enriched this generous society with their plethora of contributions to various walks of life, from science and technology, to law and business, the arts and literature and of course politics.

Because Lebanese-Americans are firm believers in the American values of liberty and justice for all people.

Lebanese-Americans are respectful of the universal principles of human rights and human dignity.

Many among us fled Lebanon and emigrated to the U.S., in search of security and peace of mind.

In this great nation, the U.S. of A., we found safety, hope, and bountiful opportunities for ourselves and for our children.

But most importantly, we found in this country the most cherished treasure for every human being: freedom.

Freedom is the absolute requirement for every mind to create, for every soul to flourish and blossom, and for every society to advance and achieve.

And we have been blessed to live that freedom, here in America.

But, at the same time, we were saddened, frustrated, and angry because of the lack of sovereignty and human dignity back in our motherland.

We have therefore decided to take action from abroad to restore the fundamental rights of the Lebanese people. Whether through the organizations within the American Lebanese Coalition or through other organizations here, in Washington, and in other cities, from East Coast to West Coast, many Lebanese-Americans have worked relentlessly until sovereignty and liberty were finally restored to the Lebanese Nation.

And with the help of this Administration, and of Congress, a dark page in the history of Lebanon has turned.

Syrian troops left, the police state responsible for all crimes and abuses against the Lebanese collapsed. And the people of Lebanon are, at last, enjoying their freedom.

But, let us all remain vigilant. The enemies of Lebanon, the enemies of America, and the enemies of peace have not given up yet.

Assassinations, bombings, the continuous presence of Lebanese and non-Lebanese armed groups, especially those supported by Syria and by Iran, are still threatening the fragile state of security and peace in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, with the powerful will of the Lebanese, true patriots, united as within the March 14th Alliance, to safeguard the achievement of the Independence Uprising, of the Cedar Revolution, we are certain that the Lebanese will defeat fear and terror.

And with the noble determination of the U.S., and other friendly nations, to defend Lebanon from the harmful interference of its enemies, we are confident that the Lebanese will be safe and protected.

And with the strong resolve of Lebanese-Americans, like you, to continue their support for their motherland, we are assured that a sovereign, democratic and pluralistic Lebanon will prevail.

As we celebrate the Cedar Revolution today, we also celebrate a solid and profound partnership among the Lebanese People, the American Nation and the Lebanese-American Community.

“A partnership of the free” that succeeded in liberating Lebanon.

“A partnership of the brave” that can and will secure the future of Lebanon. A future of stability, peace and prosperity.

As long as this partnership endures, Lebanon can be assured that its freedom is protected.

And America can be confident that Lebanon will remain a friendly nation.

God save Lebanon. God bless America. Thank you.