



Office of the Special Coordinator
for Lebanon

Bureau du Coordinateur Spécial
pour le Liban

**United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams
Statement Following Meeting with Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros El-Rai
Bkirki, Lebanon**

Thursday, 07 April 2011

It is a privilege for me to be here today at the seat of the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkirki and to meet with Patriarch Bechara Boutros El-Rai. I congratulated His Eminence on his recent election, and I wished him well in the very important and challenging task ahead of him.

I also met today with Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir. I praised his efforts at the helm of the Maronite Church, including during some very difficult times, in the past 25 years.

I told His Eminence Patriarch El-Rai today that the slogan of “Partnership and Love” he has chosen was very timely and essential in this period of turbulence in the Arab region. I warmly welcomed the Patriarch’s calls for openness and dialogue with other religions and other countries. The United Nations supports all efforts aimed at bringing people closer together, and we have repeatedly stressed the importance of dialogue as the best means of promoting more understanding and tolerance.

We also discussed today the situation of the Christians in Lebanon and in the Arab region and the important role they have played in this region for centuries.

Finally, I asked His Eminence today for his prayers for the safety and immediate release of the seven Estonian nationals that were abducted two weeks ago. I have appealed for their immediate release, and I stress that no purpose is served by their continued detention. We all hope this matter will be resolved very soon.

I look forward to other very good meetings with the Patriarch in the future.

Thank you.
