



Deirmimas

A message from the Municipality..

To my fellow friends, Deirmimasians expatriates.

Toronto May 2007

**Dear friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**



I am very honored by your presence today at this special gathering in Toronto. Allow me to welcome you all.

I am grateful to you my fellow countrymen and women for attending this reunion, which sends out a clear message that Lebanon is not only a nationality we hold, but also a belonging to a sacred land we all cherish. For the world it is known as the Land of the Cedars but for us, it is more than that. Our land is the Land of 130,000 olive trees, our beloved Deirmimas, whose oil has always run in our veins, our blood, our unfading memories of this captivating homeland. Just like the womb of the mother that nurtured our bodies during the early months of our conception, I always believed that our land is the larger womb which nurtures the very soul that connects us all.

I took the mayorship of Deirmimas in 2004 and along with the 14 board members of the municipality, we all volunteered into putting our efforts making Deirmimas "the Bride of the South" a challenging target that required us to invest all our incoming budget solely for development purposes. Given the scarce resources and limited public financing that were available to us, in many cases, we had to count on private donations often using our own resources, those of board members and from international institutions such as Caritas, World Vision, the United Nations, International Relief, etc.

Our main objective is to serve all the people of Deirmimas without any discrimination as to their political affiliation or doctrines. Our aim was always to uphold the trust of the people by treating them fairly and trying to bridge the gap between those who still live there, those who reside in Beirut and those who left since the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 and well before.

The municipality was involved into various projects such as the digging of a well to provide quality water, the rehabilitation of roads, public utilities and the reconstruction of the 600 year-old Monastery of St. Mema which was totally demolished during the July 2006 War, establishment of a dispensary to offer medical treatment to the people of Deirmimas and neighbouring villages, installation of electrical generator and a full fledged network of wires and switches to connect the majority of homes to electricity. We are not only interested in the blocks and stones, we have been organizing social activities to strengthen the ties amongst the people of Deirmimas, thus on special occasions namely at Christmas and Halloween, outings for young people, veterans gatherings, etc. Our list is endless, but we believe that a thousand miles journey starts with the first step!

As you know, wars have contributed to the degradation of the environment and an intermittent flow of the people towards the capital city of Beirut and to abroad. The cumulative effect of 30 years of war and communal conflicts has had an overwhelming impact and hardship on the people of Lebanon and on the Lebanese social and economic fabric. The scope and scale of the destruction are tremendous, from the loss of human lives to extensive damage to the infrastructure and severe shocks to the country's monetary and fiscal situation.

Since the latest Israeli war on Lebanon and based on our initial assessments of the situation in the South and on our direct experience in providing humanitarian and social relief to our people, we have come to realize how impossible the situation has turned lately. Only in Deirmimas, out of 350 houses, 196 were hit by Israeli shells. Thousands of cluster bombs were showered on us leaving their scares and thorns for a generation to come. It is too difficult for us to convince the children to stay or the educated to come back!

Hence the need to be inventive and creative: how to alleviate the impact of the economic and social crisis? Our people need our assistance, to help them survive on a land which we may lose for ever. Preserving the land and protecting our olive trees seem to me the only mission worth living for. It broke my heart to see the devastation when I first entered Deirmimas after the war. As an engineer I can certainly confirm to you that Houses are easy to rebuild, but how is it possible to recover a 2000 years old tree? I am more than willing to forgive 'the committer of evil' but would Mother Nature forgive us for our wrong doings? Our abuses? Our ignorance?

Let me tell you that during the last 11 days of the latest war, 11 people stayed back to look after the whole village. We have managed by operating electrical generators to light the public streets in Deirmimas during that last critical period. I managed to open an office in Beirut to follow up on rescue operation between the capital and Deirmimas. I did jump on the first MEA flight from Dubai the day Beirut airport resumed its activities to organize one of the largest UN humanitarian operation in South Lebanon, when Deirmimas was selected as a focal point for dispatching humanitarian aid to a dozen of villages in the Caza of Marjeyoun for over a month period.

I am not here today to brag about the honorable work of our prestigious municipality. I am not here to ask for the "zakat- *tax for the poor*" of your money. I am not here today for the sheer joy to throw this exciting party. I am here today to share my sorrows, my concerns for the future of our homeland, and to invite you to put your heart into finding a million ways to preserve it.

My journey has brought me here today to see you. I hope next time we meet that will be in Deirmimas.

Dr. Kamel Morkos
Mayor of Deirmimas