

Activism at MIT

The Lebanese Club organizes events for positive change

BY OAZ NIR

The Lebanese Club of MIT has participated in a number of events of political and social activism around the Boston area. Over the course of the war in Lebanon and Northern Israel, the Lebanese Club added its voice to the call for a ceasefire. Now that the fighting has stopped, the organization has been involved in fundraising efforts to help with reconstruction and to help provide humanitarian aid to those affected.

For the Lebanese Club, the war required a radical re-orientation in their public service efforts. The Club's shining achievement of the spring semester, TECH-LEB 2006, highlighted the technological aspirations of the Lebanese government and private enterprise. However, the recent conflict prompted the Club's leadership to shift their focus to more fundamental efforts.

In an email, Loai Naamani, the President of the Lebanese Club, said, "On July 15 – three days after the abduction of the two Israeli soldiers and official start of the 'July War' – we called for a general meeting at MIT to plan an organized, large-scale response to the atrocities being committed in Lebanon."

He continued, "The objective was attracting a crowd that is large and diverse in background, not in the headline(s) we're gathering under. In this meeting, the Justice for Lebanon campaign was born."

Mr. Naamani, who is a PhD candidate in Information Technologies, said that the Justice for Lebanon campaign consisted of a "very diverse mix of supporters, including organizations such as the Lebanese Club at MIT, American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, American Lebanese Engineering Society, Network of Arab American Professionals, International Network of Lebanese Entrepreneurs and Technologists, MIT Arab Student Organization, Jews for Peace, Stop the Wars, the Middle East Crisis Coalition, and many other organizations."

On its website the Justice for Lebanon campaign de-





scribes its mission as supporting the Lebanese government in the following goals:

- Denouncing the Israeli Military's killing of innocent Lebanese civilians, devastation of Lebanon's infrastructure, and terrorizing its entire population;
- Demanding an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to end all hostilities and halt the maritime and air siege imposed by Israel on Lebanon;
- Urging the U.S. Government and international community to provide comprehensive support in ending the destruction of Lebanon and aiding in its full recovery;
- Establishing its full sovereignty over all Lebanese territory with the sole right and duty of defending the dignity and security of all Lebanese citizens.

The Justice for Lebanon campaign organized a number of events around Boston. Mr. Naamani said, "Four peaceful demonstrations and candlelight vigils at Copley Square that featured speeches by community leaders, first-hand accounts of what was happening in Lebanon by individuals who had just arrived, and dual

roft slideshow projections depicting the destruction in Lebanon." Mr. Naamani himself gave speeches at these events, which were attended by 400-700 protestors, he said.

Several events were organized on the MIT campus. MIT faculty staged a protest outside the Stratton Student Center on July 27th. Also, two benefit concerts at MIT attended by close to 1,000 people, raising some \$40,000, featured the Sharq Music Ensemble, Zaitoun Dabke Troupe, Japanese Taiko Drummers, Moroccan Gnawa, South Indian Dances, Boston Camerata Early Music Group, and Berklee School of Music Ensemble.

Of the Justice for Lebanon campaign, Mr. Naamani said, "In a nutshell, the core demand of this campaign was a 'ceasefire,' an end to the savage mayhem. That having taken place (one way or another), the campaign has reached its objective, and now focus has shifted to humanitarian relief and reconstruction aid. And to best meet its new objectives, a new campaign brand and strategy purely focusing on the humanitarian, apolitical aspect of the story has been developed: www.BostonToLebanon.org." He added that MIT has set up a new, separate Lebanon Relief Fund to raise money for the Red Cross.

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