

## **LEBANESE BRAZILIAN BUSINESS COUNCIL FORUM**

### **Speech of Engineer Maroun El Helou** **President of The Lebanese Contractors Syndicate**

HE Ambassador of Brazil in Lebanon Jorge Geraldo Kadri

Honored Brazilian guests,

Distinguished organizers members of the Lebanese Brazilian Business Council

Dear Lebanese colleagues and businessmen

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by expressing the pleasure and satisfaction of being here today, mainly because this event demonstrates our joint determination and mutual commitment to continue what has already started in Brazil last year thanks to the initiatives of entities from both our countries.

In fact, the Brazilian investors, businessmen, and contractors who hosted the Lebanese delegation during their last visit to Brazil have well responded to our invitation; this demonstrates the motivation and big commitment of all parties ready to build potential partnerships.

I truly believe that our will, joint efforts and endeavors will definitely lead us to successful commercial conclusions due to the historic link between both our populations following the Lebanese exodus which has started more than one century ago, in addition to the potential imminent opportunities in Lebanon and the region.

Some alliances already exist between our countries in various fields, including the construction business where one of the reputed Brazilian construction firms “Andrade Gutierrez” has entered into a joint venture with the Lebanese well known contractor “CET” for the construction of the Janneh dam. Same needs to expand, with the help and contribution of the current congregation especially that many opportunities and investments are already clear in the horizon.

In order to better plan such future and make it profitable, we should define adequate strategies, set mutual goals, and share our respective experiences (local and international)... These are at the basis of any successful cooperation.

Our new partnerships should normally be initiated in our domestic markets. In this respect, we all know that Lebanon's infrastructure requires substantial enhancements and upgrading, and the execution of many projects such as dams, hydro-electrical plants, and special electro-mechanical works shall be necessary for that purpose. Despite the advanced experience and professionalism of Lebanese contractors, the capabilities and track record of specialized Brazilian firms would surely be a valuable add-on.

On the other hand, the Real Estate market, also represented in this event by experts, expects a promising future in terms of touristic and real estate projects in order to accommodate the return of Arabs and Lebanese investors once the political and security situation finally settles in the area, which is expected to happen in the near future as the readings anticipate.

Moreover, we cannot forget the oil and gas industry which will clearly be a substantial market by itself. Concrete measures and firm milestones are already implemented, and the initiation of the extraction is now a matter of time. In this regard, the proven experience of the large Brazilian firms in this area will surely be needed. Most sectors of our local economy will obviously benefit from the establishment of such industry, including the construction industry, and this is where our role as contractors and entrepreneurs begins if we are well prepared.

We believe such domestic parameters constitute attractive grounds for Brazilian investors, in particular the ones from Lebanese origins, to embark into partnerships with their Lebanese counterparts.

Besides the domestic opportunities, other growth and investment possibilities are becoming closer by the day, and I specifically have in mind the reconstruction of Syria. With the war over, hopefully soon, the reconstruction work required is of tremendous proportions, whereby anticipated costs exceed \$250 Billion as all studies indicate, and where diversified resources will be heavily needed.

Geographic proximity of Lebanon and Syria, common culture, origins and language of our nations are all factors which normally situate the experienced Lebanese Contractors on top of the qualified candidates' list for such upcoming campaign, and further justifies potential partnerships with competitive Brazilian firms.

Furthermore, we believe that Brazilian and Lebanese firms may and even should join forces in other markets where we both already exist, in particular in the GCC and African countries.

Throughout the last decades, Lebanese contractors have earned the trust and recognition of both public and private clients in such countries, and same is mainly due to our commercial competitiveness, our professionalism, seriousness, and determination.

Successful partnerships may be built between Brazilian construction firms and already established and prosperous Lebanese firms in such countries relying on such situation.

Keeping in mind these tasks approaching in the horizon, the Lebanese Contractor Syndicate has already taken many actions with the purpose of upgrading the contracting and subsequently favoring successful joint venture with international companies, including:

- Pressure on the Lebanese Government in order to sanction the Act related to the classification of the contractors.
- Pressure with the competent authorities in order to secure the approval of the proposed General Terms and Conditions book related to the organization of the contracting sector, and which copes with the most recent international standards and codes.
- Organization of the contracting trade, where a bill in this regard has been approved by the Ministry of Labor, and is currently on the agenda of the Council of Ministers for final sanctioning.

To conclude, I believe that our collaboration will provide a win-win situation for both of us, and the key to success, in my opinion, resides in sharing our respective domestic and international experiences, and defining adequate and creative strategies, in a manner to make our respective roles complementary, each one exercising the function in which it excels: Brazilian firms sharing their large technological and financial potentials and their know how particularly in special works, and Lebanese firms sharing their PR, human resources, and experience in the areas and countries of operation, besides their skills in project management, consultancy, and design works. This ladies and gentlemen would certainly be a recipe to success for both of us.

Once again, I thank you for your presence.

Obrigado a todos.