

Lebanese cardinal criticizes politicians for allegiances

BEIRUT, Lebanon – Lebanese Cardinal Nasrallah P. Sfeir criticized Lebanon's political leaders for their allegiances to foreign powers and urged lawmakers to elect a president "before it's too late."

Politicians' allegiance to foreign powers has made them "prisoners of their position and paralyzed their capabilities," said the cardinal, patriarch of the Maronite Catholic Church.

"The prevailing situation is dangerous. We do not know whether anyone assesses its danger among those in responsibility," Cardinal Sfeir said in a statement issued Nov. 30.

The cardinal urged the opposition to end its boycott of the presidential election and said it is "disgraceful and condemnable" that the opposition's resigned Cabinet ministers boycott parliamentary sessions but continue to run their respective ministries.

"The Lebanese people denounce all these acts which go against logic and law. They expect the authorities whom they have elected to focus on people's daily concerns, provide jobs for people so they can take care of their families and provide them a secure and dignified life," the cardinal said.

Lebanon has been without a president since the term of Emile Lahoud expired Nov. 24. Its parliament has failed to agree on a successor. According to the country's power-sharing constitution, the post must be held by a Maronite Catholic. Another attempt at electing Lebanon's head of state has been scheduled for Dec. 7, after being postponed six times.

During a homily Dec. 2 at Bkerke, headquarters of the Maronite church, Cardinal Sfeir defended his statement.

"It is always advised to say the truth, even if it might hurt ... and it's known that

saying the truth is healing," he said.

In the Nov. 30 statement, Cardinal Sfeir expressed disappointment for being drawn into the dispute over Lebanon's president.

Under intense pressure from France in November, the prelate reluctantly drafted a list of suitable candidates for the presidency, as feuding political parties were unable to agree on a potential candidate.

"Fearing that the decline of the (current) situation be imputed to us ... we handed over a list," he said.

"The names were diffused; most of the candidates whose names were not mentioned in it poured upon us their utmost anger. We said may God forgive them, for they know that there was no way to mention all candidates' names who are, thank God, many," he said.

"All of a sudden someone told us, 'Give us a second list or add a name to this one.' We replied: 'This was all we could do. You are free to add or drop the name you want.' This list is still wandering about, having reached nowhere," the cardinal said.

He pointed out that the responsibility of Lebanon's presidential election falls into the hands of its legislators.

"God knows that we have never sided with one (politician) against another, but we always had and still have for (our) aim the interest of the entire homeland," said Cardinal Sfeir.