

Uruguayan ambassador

Jorge Luis Jure Arnoletti:

'Lebanon, our privileged partner in this region of the world'

Jorge Luis Jure Arnoletti, the new Uruguayan ambassador, was very happy to return to Lebanon, land of his ancestors, which he first knew as a tourist in 2001.

His impressions have been very positive, he told us. "Once here, I was confirmed in the admiration and esteem I had always felt for the Lebanese people. Like Uruguay, Lebanon has few natural resources like petroleum. Our best forms of wealth are the people of our two countries and the education we give our young people".

About the situation on the ground in Lebanon, the ambassador was optimistic, noting the ability of the Lebanese to find a consensus to put an end to their conflict. He also observed that the international community was waiting for Lebanon to resume its economic growth, its social development and its privileged place in the region.



“Happy is the country that has no history”, the saying goes. Is that the reason so little news of Uruguay is reported, except within South America?

It's true that we rarely make the front pages of newspapers outside our own country. That's not a bad thing since so much news we hear today is of disasters of all kind in every part of the world. During the last 20 years Uruguay has seen stability since the return of democracy. Since the nineteenth century the country was traditionally very democratic. The 1960s however saw an economic degradation and the eruption of guerrilla warfare, and the 1970s witnessed a coup d'état and a dictatorship.

After the restoration of democracy in 1985,

the country recovered its *raison d'être* and ideology, and all the work and efforts of the government and people are focused on promoting development and consolidating the freedom of all the citizens.

But Uruguay has had periods of violent history. In the nineteenth century it had to struggle against neighboring countries and against European powers. It wasn't clear whether it would end up as part of a wider federation also comprising Argentina and Brazil, or whether it might be a French or British colony. The Uruguayans were very divided among themselves.

As a small country, Uruguay has had a difficult history, but with the understanding of Latin American countries and of the international community, it has been able to ensure its independence.

Excellent relations

between Lebanon and Uruguay

Are there any disputes between Uruguay and Lebanon? What about cooperation projects? And what is the volume of trade between them?

Relations between the two countries are excellent, based as they are on their shared will for independence and freedom. We opened a consulate in Beirut in 1920, and when Lebanon declared its independence in 1943, we recognized it, and diplomatic relations were established in 1945.

On the official level, Uruguay received a visit from the late President Camille Chamoun, and the Lebanese community is well-integrated into Uruguayan society. The Lebanese are the most numerous after the Spanish and Italian communities.

We would certainly welcome trade and financial exchanges. Indeed, we would like Uruguay to be better-known in Lebanon in economic, cultural and artistic terms, and vice-versa. Uruguay is well-known for its fine beef, and many Lebanese are interested in importing Uruguayan beef. Also, Lebanese banks are interested in acquiring software and computer programs we produce, especially for the security of computerized bank accounts. There is also great interest in the importing of rice, of which Uruguay is one of the world's 10 biggest producers.

There is room for investment in our tourism sector, not least in the town of Punta del Este, sometimes called the "St-Tropez of the South Atlantic".

Montevideo seeks

sustainable development

With what problems requiring urgent solutions is the Montevideo government confronted?

The government is preoccupied with the matter of sustainable development and with ensuring a flow of external investment in the productive sectors. It is working to reduce inflation and to diversify exports to all parts of the world. Uruguay, along with Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, is a member of Mercosur, a free-trade area embracing the "southern cone" of the South American continent, and membership of this body has provided us with numerous economic advantages.

We'd like to diversify exports, and to export much more to the Middle East through Lebanon, which is our privileged partner in the region.

Is Uruguay threatened by terrorism? How is it contributing to the struggle against this plague?

Fortunately, we do not have a problem with terrorism. In this regard we have signed all the requisite conventions to combat terrorism as well as to ensure human rights. We cooperate closely on the judicial and administrative level through bilateral

treaties and the United Nations, against organized crime in the Americas and we have signed all the conventions against terrorism of the Organization of American States.

What is Uruguay's position in regard to the war in Iraq? Does it approve the maintenance of US forces there, or does it think it better that they should be withdrawn?

Uruguay is one of the founding members of the United Nations, and it strongly believes in the role of the world body in its role as a defender of peace. We are a country very committed to international law. The United Nations must act in accordance with international law as the protector of peace.

In regard to our position towards the war in Iraq, it is not for us to decide. The UN must follow its charter; we cannot decide for it.

Does the government of Uruguay envisage making the law on immigration more flexible? Does this law make it more difficult for Lebanese and citizens of Arab countries to go to Uruguay?

My country was created by immigration. It is very open and Lebanese have been accepted there since the first ones arrived in Uruguay in the nineteenth century, even when there was trouble with those who were then referred to as "Asiatics".

The Lebanese have benefited from a law permitting immigration. Uruguay has become the country most open to citizens of various origins -- Chinese, Africans, French and other Europeans. Lebanese are always welcome. Uruguay is a receptive country, a peaceable land open to investment, and we have always welcomed Lebanese immigrants because of their hard work, intelligence and spirit of initiative.

Uruguay, a member of the Commission on Human Rights

Several countries have initialed an international convention on human rights in order to secure better respect for democratic values. Has Uruguay ratified this?

Uruguay has ratified all conventions related to human rights, and last year it was elected a member of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Moreover, equality was given to Uruguayan women, who received the vote in 1932, and we've had a law on civil gender equality since 1946. Uruguay's *raison d'être* is democracy and freedom. We must always be in the forefront in protecting fundamental human rights.

What about privatization in Uruguay? Can Lebanon learn anything from your experience in this respect?

We've had more than one experience in this respect. Public enterprises are associated with private capital in order to have increased investment in their infrastructure and better management, without losing the possibility of supervising essential public services. In this way we've opened competition in many markets which were formerly monopolies, like electricity, insurance, communications.

We retain some public enterprises, which serve as control bodies to prevent price rises or prevent a lack of investment. This is espe-

cially the case in regard to water. An article in the Constitution stipulates that natural waters (rivers, springs) are the property of the state. The idea is that water will in the future be as valuable as petroleum is today.

Languages

What is the situation in Uruguay in regard to foreign languages? Is any language -- French or English -- given a privileged place over others? What is the position on the teaching of French?

For some 60 years French was taught and learned in secondary schools as a compulsory subject. Today it's English, but French, along with Portuguese, German and Italian, are still taught in the state schools. University education in Uruguay is based on a French model. Uruguay is very close to the French-speaking countries and it is possible that it will join the International Organization of Francophonie. Negotiations about this are going on.

Have you made contact with Uruguayans of Arab origin (Lebanese, Syrians, Egyptians or others) in the countries to which you've been accredited?

In Lebanon there are very few Uruguayans of Arab origin, but we stay in touch with them. Most of them are people with relatives in Uruguay and have obtained Uruguayan nationality.

There is a very good Lebanese painter of Uruguayan origin, Bruno Sfeir, born in Uruguay, and a photographer of note, Jorge Aramburu, who works with UNIFIL, and a physician who has lived here for some years, Dr. Boutros Derbogossian.

We hear less and less about the Organization of Latin-American States. Why is this? Can't the OLAS resolve frontier conflicts between some of its member states?

In the Western Hemisphere there are several levels of relationships. There is the Organization of American States, which brings together all the states of the Hemisphere, all the states from north to south. Then there is Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela). There is also the grouping of Andean states (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela). There is also an organization for the countries of Central America and another for those of the Caribbean.

Relations are good between these groupings, and there have been no armed conflicts. These organizations serve, above all, the economic and social development of the countries. This is the task of the OLAS, which groups Central and South American countries plus Cuba and Mexico. Mercosur has its headquarters in Montevideo, which has become a bit like "Brussels" in South America.

What is the best memory of your career as a diplomat?

In 1988, a year after having finished my duties as consul in New York, I was the guest of honor of the Uruguayan community there, which had me come from Montevideo for our national day of independence. It was an occasion of gratitude which will remain unforgettably engraved on my memory. ■

By Jeanne Massaad

Curriculum vitae

Born in Montevideo on June 30, 1955

Doctorate in international law (1978, School of Law and Social Sciences of the University of Uruguay).

1974-1977: Organization technician for the UTE electricity company.

1977-1978: Public relations official for the ANCAP national oil company.

1978: Joins the Foreign Service in Uruguay following a competitive examination. Third secretary in the Treaty Department.

1980: Promoted second secretary in the Foreign Service.

1982-1987: Consul in New York. Chargé at the consulate-general in 1984-1985.

1987: Director of the Department of International Economic Organizations (Foreign Ministry).

1987-1990: Works in liaison with the Foreign Ministry in the office of the president of Uruguay.

1990-1995: Consul and counselor at the Uruguayan embassy in London.

1994: Promoted counselor in the External Service.

1996-1997: Head of the National Service and coordinator in the office of the president of Uruguay. Counsellor at Uruguay's Permanent Mission with the ALADI.

1999: Promoted minister-counselor of the External Service (following a competitive examination held by the Foreign Ministry).

1998-2004: Minister-counselor (chargé d'affaires on several occasions) at the Uruguayan embassy in Paris.

Presently and since 2004, minister of Uruguay's Permanent Mission at the ALADI and Mercosur.

Ambassador of Uruguay accredited to Lebanon and Cyprus; presented his letters of accreditation on September 13, 2007.