

NAU Professor Feels Lebanese Grief Personally

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Gary Nabhan is invited to his cousin's wedding in Beirut this fall.

But now, the director of Northern Arizona University's Center for Sustainable Environments doesn't know if there will be a ceremony at all in the war-torn city. He can only hope that his relatives are unharmed.

As the son of an immigrant Lebanese family, the Nabhan grieves the losses on both sides in the Middle East crisis. He also urges the American government to call for a ceasefire.

"It seems unbelievable that instead of trying to free its two abducted soldiers through negotiation Israel bombed an international airport the size of Sky Harbor," Nabhan said. "Israel says that the Lebanese government should be able to control Hezbollah. It is like saying that the U.S. government should control street gangs or face consequences."

Nabhan strongly condemns Hezbollah's attacks against Israel, but hopes that Beirut and its citizens will not have to suffer any longer.

"Beirut is one of the best cities in the world and now it is going to be even more disabled," he said. "Lebanon was going in the right direction from both the U.S. and Israeli point of view. It successfully evicted the Syrian puppets, but after this attack, anti-Israeli and probably anti-American sentiments will be aggravated."

Nabhan, a member of the Arab-American Writers Guild, has participated in many peace programs. Three years ago he even traveled to Israel to work for a cultural reconciliation project.

Today he would not be able to do that: Israel recently barred American citizens of Arab ancestry from entering the country.

Nabhan hopes that President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will call for a ceasefire.

"Lebanon is the most America friendly country in the region. It would be a great tactical mistake to let the bombing go on. I also hope that American Jews will ask their congressman to make Israel practice more restraint" he said.

Nabhan wrote e-mails to his relatives in Lebanon but did not receive an answer. He will keep following developments in the Middle East and "grieve with my Lebanese, Israeli and Palestinian brothers.