

Friday, 1 February 2013

Hariri supports legalizing civil marriage, criticizes Lebanon's Grand Mufti



Future Movement leader MP Saad Hariri said on Thursday that he supported legalizing civil marriage in Lebanon and slammed Lebanon's Grand Mufti Mohammad Rashid Qabbani's fatwa that those who accept civil marriage were "apostates." "I hope there will be a law on civil marriage [in Lebanon]," Hariri said during a live interview held with the Lebanese talk show Kalam an-Nas, adding that the mufti's statements were "unacceptable." He also said that civil marriage was a "debatable" issue that requires "real dialogue." Asked if he wanted to oust the mufti, he said: "No, there is a Prime Minister, let him take action."

Hariri's stances on civil marriage were met with a positive reaction by prominent Lebanese bloggers. BeirutSpring, a Lebanese young man who has been blogging since 2005, described the MP's position as a "historic precedent in Lebanon: A Lebanese Sunni leader coming out publicly against a Mufti and supporting the civil union of Lebanese couples."

Another blogger "A Separate State of Mind," a Lebanese Christian, said he was proud of Hariri's statements.

"I, as a Lebanese first and foremost, am proud of the stance that Saad Hariri took regarding the issue of civil marriage. I, as a Lebanese Christian, am happy that this non-Christian leader sees beyond the scope of his sect," the blogger wrote.

The former premier also commented on the current electoral law controversy and slammed the Orthodox Gathering proposal, which stipulates that citizens vote for candidates of their own sect.

Hariri, whose cabinet was toppled in January 2011 by the March 8 coalition spearheaded by the Shiite party Hezbollah, announced his party's initiative which is comprised of four points.

The initiative suggests organizing the elections to be held on time - in June 2013 - according to a law based on small constituencies and establishing a senate that represents all sects as defined by the Taif Accord - which helped bring an end to Lebanon's civil war in 1990. It also called for adopting administrative decentralization and including the Baabda Declaration - which stated distancing Lebanon from the policy of axes as well as regional and international struggles - in the preamble of the constitution. The former premier's initiative comes after the major Christian parties, the Lebanese Forces, the Kataeb, the Marada Movement and the Free Patriotic Movement, voiced their support for the Orthodox Gathering draft law. The Progressive Socialist Party, independent March 14 Christians and President Michel Suleiman have opposed the aforementioned proposal.

The LF and Kataeb are part of the March 14 coalition, which the Future Movement is also a part of, while the FPM and Marada are part of the March 8 coalition.

"The Orthodox draft law was put on the table for political outbidding. The Orthodox [draft] law wants to tear the Lebanese apart, but we want to preserve coexistence," Hariri said.

He also said that he understood the "concerns of the Christians," adding however that they "should not drift away from modernization."

"We are ready to discuss any electoral law that everybody agrees on, and at the same time we are not seeking power, but we want to preserve coexistence and have real democracy and freedom."

He added that if the Orthodox electoral law was adopted during the next elections, he will participate. "By challenging [the law constitutionally], I am participating," he said.

Hariri's comments on the electoral proposals were met with rejection by Free Patriotic Movement MP Simon Abi Ramia who said the initiative presented was a "failure."

"There is nothing new in Hariri's initiative. It is a failure," Abi Ramia told a local Lebanese TV station on Friday, adding: "I wish Hariri had stayed on Twitter [instead of making proposals]."

Meanwhile, FPM MP Ibrahim Kanaan also said on Friday that the Orthodox proposal "provides real equal [representation,]" adding: "We do not understand Hariri's position regarding it."

Also on Friday, MP Robert Ghanem, head of the Parliament's Administration and Justice Committee, said that Hariri's initiative has to be put into a draft law in order to submit it to Speaker Nabih Berri and then transfer it to the joint parliamentary committees and hold discussions."