



# MARONITE EPARCHY OF AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND AND OCEANIA

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Maronites in Australia Launch the Lebanese School Appeal and Raise \$531,044.69 to Support 700 Students in Lebanon**

**Sydney, Australia, 18 October 2023** - The Maronite Eparchy of Australia, in collaboration with Maronites on Mission, has launched the Lebanese School Appeal, an initiative endorsed by His Beatitude Mar Bechara Boutros Cardinal Rai, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, while he visited Australia last month.

The appeal was officially initiated during two dinner events in honour of the Maronite Patriarch on 16 and 21 September, in Sydney and Melbourne respectively, as part of his visit on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the establishment of the Maronite Eparchy in Australia. The appeal raised a total of \$531,044.69, thanks to the generous response of guests who empathised with the challenging conditions faced by students and their families, and the current impact on the education sector in their homeland.

Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay, Eparch of the Maronite Eparchy of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania said, "I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this appeal in any way. Funds raised will go directly towards the school fees of some 700 students severely affected by the ongoing economic crisis, in 12 schools across all regions of Lebanon.

"While not insignificant, this is a modest contribution when compared with the increasing need, and just one step towards addressing a vast shortfall and the major educational challenge facing parents and students in Lebanon. For this reason, we have also decided to launch and promote the Lebanese School Appeal initiative through our parishes and organisations, for the coming years. It is now crucial to work together to secure children's right to accessing education and ensure brighter prospects in a country that has lost so much hope."

Lebanon, facing a dire economic crisis since 2019, now has 78% of its population living in poverty, with extreme poverty rates comparable to countries like Cameroon and Haiti, according to a report by the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Many families in Lebanon are on the brink of financial and social collapse, with some making agonising choices about which essentials to prioritise, sometimes compromising their children's education to ensure immediate needs are met. In some instances, their very young children are being compelled to leave school in order to work and help their families. This critical situation jeopardises an entire generation's future but also poses a serious threat to the future of Lebanon.

The Eparchial taskforce committee in coordination with the World Patriarchal Foundation for Integral Development in Lebanon will oversee the distribution of school fees for students selected according to well-defined program criteria.

To make a difference in the lives of Lebanese students, please support this appeal at [www.maronite.org.au/appeals](http://www.maronite.org.au/appeals).

Together, we can help build up the resilience of the people of Lebanon and secure the continuity of schooling and education for as Bishop Tarabay said, "The future of Lebanon passes first through the school."

ENDS