



Marhaba

Rotary Club Beirut Cosmopolitan Monthly Newsletter – November & December 2020

**RCBC MEETS TUESDAYS AT THE HILTON DOWNTOWN HOTEL, DOWNTOWN, BEIRUT
BUSINESS MEETINGS AT 19:00**

Club Charter Date
June 21, 1995

Club Number
30893

District
2452 Rotary
International
RI President
Holger Knaack
RC Herzogtum
Lauenberg-Mölln,
Germany
District Governor
Mazen A. Alumran
Kingdom of Bahrain
Assistant Governor
Rami Sarkis
RC Beirut Cedars

RCBC Officers
2020 - 2021

President
Habib Saba
President Elect
Sona Kourtian Donigian
Vice President
Joe Boulos
Secretary
Farida Najjar
Treasurer
Diana Cotran
IPP
Adib Mounla

Directors
Habib Bassoul
Mona Jarudi
Michel Mansour

RCBC Online
www.rcbclebanon.org
[www.facebook.com/
beirutcosmopolitan](https://www.facebook.com/beirutcosmopolitan)

MARHABA EDITOR
PP Mona Jarudi
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“President’s Message – Reflection & New Year”

As we welcome the New Year - 2021 - with renewed optimism we take sobering stock of the year that came to pass and that promised so much - 2020 -

Last year marked the 100th anniversary of Greater Lebanon but with political, financial and economic meltdown opening the year coupled with a rampant corona arriving at our shores in March and 50% of the population sliding below the poverty line there was to put it mildly not much good news to celebrate.

With that background in mind we prepared our plan for RY 2020-2021, a road map if you will, with the primary intention of focusing on the needy through sustainable community and economic development projects with positive environmental impact. We got the blessing of our club members in the kick off club assembly in July and shortly thereafter we wished each other an enjoyable August break.

No sooner had we settled into August, we were of course confronted with the largest non-nuclear explosion and the third largest overall explosion in history at the port of Beirut which shook the foundations of our city to its core. We were confronted with hundreds of lives lost and thousands injured, many permanently scarred and some from our Rotary family, hundreds of thousands displaced, not to mention the tens of billions of dollars of damage that the city incurred.

Our club’s priorities for the Rotary year were turned upside down and our focus redirected to the recovery effort in the aftermath of the explosion. Our country’s youth including our own Rotaractors and Interactors were some of the first responders on the ground to help with the cleanup, provide hot meals and assist the elderly. Together with them and our NGO partners we also collaborated on projects to repair shattered glass windows and doors of homes of the needy in the impacted areas before the winter set in, carried out food distribution to the needy, participated in the establishment of a community center in an area impacted by the explosion, and last but by no means least embarked on an ambitious project to assist in the rehabilitation of the devastated Karantina Public Hospital - which we are well on track to execute in the coming months in the form of a Global Grant God willing.

In this dire situation and despite the tragedies and the losses including those dearest to us there was a silver lining:

Literally hundreds of Rotary clubs reached out, some for the first time, from all corners of the globe to see how they can assist and indeed came on board for the Beirut recovery effort. We will in due time recognize them all. Our dear friend and fellow member PP Habib Bassoul made a miraculous recovery from a very critical situation and our friend and fellow member Nadim Hissen also escaped a deadly situation with courage. COVID-19 has been kept at bay from our club members and their families thank God and we pray that it stays that way until aid comes in the form vaccines - at the same time we offer our deepest condolences to friends and family members from other clubs and beyond whose loved ones did succumb to the virus. 2020 allowed us to reflect on what is most important in our lives in all its simplicity and reminded us not to take the most precious fundamentals in life for granted.

In parallel our ongoing projects made progress with the approval of numerous global grants that are currently in an execution phase along with the annual orphan's Christmas event which was held at SOS village this year. Furthermore, despite the inability to meet physically since our kick off club assembly our business meetings continued regularly and methodically via that now household name zoom which has made the world all the more smaller and our global Rotary family all the more closer. Our programs committee headed by Rotarian Samir El Khoury has done an extraordinary job despite the limitations and thanks to their efforts the best is yet to come as we enter the second half of our Rotary year.

Despite the odds our raison d'être, to serve our community above self, remains as unwavering as ever and with continued good health to our members and our friends and the solidarity of our global Rotary family we remain optimistic for a brighter more joyful New Year!

Sincerely Yours,
Habib Saba

Online Business meeting With Mrs. Asmahan Zein
Advisor to the Board of Lebanese League for Women in Business (LLWB)
"MEMORIES, GLIMPSES OF LIGHT, EXPECTATIONS"

November 3, 2020

Asmahan Zein is a very passionate individual, believes highly in Lebanon and her love for the country and community is embedded in her blood. she is a firm believer in the community and its social capital and fully supports women, youth, entrepreneurs, students etc.



As an introduction to her rich life, she took us through a journey that had its high and low moments. During the civil war, in 1982, she witnessed the evacuation of families from Beirut, and in 1985, she decided to leave for Abidjan and work there. She turned the dire situation in Beirut into an opportunity to leave and work on her career. In 1988, she moved back to work for Aramex (owned by her brother) and witnessed the growth of the company from 12 employees to 300 during her many years there. The CSR role that she played in Aramex allowed her to do for the community what the government could not, thus underlining the value of the private sector. Working with the NGO Ruwad al Tanmiyah in Tripoli, she bridged the divide between two rival communities there, supporting women, teaching them skills , defending their rights and helping them become leaders in their families and communities.

The glimpses of light were a reflection of her extensive work with many NGOs in Lebanon. Through Injaz, Ruwad al Tanmiyah, AMideast, she met the best people and became a valuable member of the boards of these NGOs. In 2015, she started the Lebanese League for women in Business (LLWB) and was its President. This organization is 416 members strong, its focus being women empowerment, startups, entrepreneurship for girls and guiding drop-out students into the vocational training to become self-sufficient. She met politicians, ambassadors and international donors to solicit every help she could.

Her latest project now was driven by the economic crisis in the country. She collaborated with the American University of Beirut on Ardi Ardak , an agricultural based project, small and large scale , to encourage people in urban areas to plant their gardens, roof tops and balconies. They also help underprivileged farmers by giving them seeds and seedlings, and encourage landowners to use their lands for farming. Ardi Ardak is a project very close to her heart.

Asmahan still has high hopes for our country. She firmly believes in education and teaching children the value of citizenship, believes in the great work of NGOs and the private sector, and the continued empowerment of women and young people to be catalysts of change and hope.



Yes, Lebanon had all the above !!!!! Yes, Lebanon had its special touch.



Corporate Social Responsibility



Ruwad Altanmiya in Tripoli.



Online Business meeting

With

Dr. Rama Kanj

Educational Psychologist

“TRANSFORMING EDUCATION AFTER COVID-19 & BEYOND “



Dr. Joseph El-Khoury

Assistant Professor of Psychiatry

“THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON MENTAL HEALTH “

November 10, 2020

PhD candidate and Educational Psychologist, Rama Kanj, addressed this meeting on the topic: Transforming Education beyond the Pandemic, How Education can Emerge Stronger.

A recent news headline stated that the Covid19 pandemic could open a door to new technology and dramatic innovation in education. It's a hopeful angle in an otherwise highly challenging period in education. UNICEF estimated that by April 2020, close to 1.6 billion young people would be affected by school closure, one third of which had no chance at remote learning via radio, TV, or online content.

The challenges in the education sector are numerous. Teachers and students were not prepared for remote learning, lack of decent internet and access to digital devices, zoom fatigue, poor response to mental health issues, students with learning disabilities cannot benefit from remote learning, and most importantly students experienced drop in motivation with online learning.

Although Covid19 exposed vulnerabilities, but it surfaced human resourcefulness and potential. The whole education system has to be rethought.

- Rethink technology: governments and development partners have to remove technological barriers by investing in digital infrastructure and lowering connectivity costs.
- Rethink teachers: develop tools to help teachers become super teachers.
- Rethink classrooms: schools will create a foundation of inclusive spaces where classrooms become learning hubs for socializing and sharing knowledge.
- Rethink students: from passive to active learners.
- Rethink parents: they should be role models for flexibility and adaptability.
- Rethink mental health in schools: train teachers to detect signs of mental health problems in children , and plan to offer targeted support for students and staff.

Ms Kanj concluded her valuable presentation with stating that at the national level four elements are required: cooperation, communication, coordination and better collaboration among leaders and educators to effect the change required in the future of the education sector.

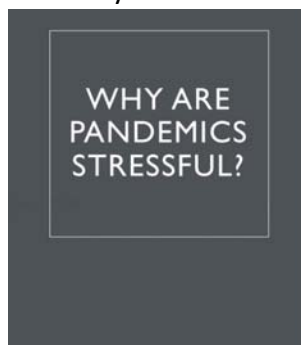
The second presentation that evening was by Dr. Joseph el Khoury, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the American University of Beirut. The topic was : Mental Health in a Pandemic, Lessons from the past and present.

Dr. Khoury took us in his presentation on a historic journey of all the pandemics that ravaged the world in the past one hundred years. Over 20 major epidemics and pandemics took place, mostly geographically contained prior to the modern age. The Spanish flu in 1918 was one of the first global pandemics which was most likely worsened by WWI and large scale population movements. Since then we had different kinds of contained viruses like Ebola, Mers, SARS, Swine flu to name a few. Then comes the Covid19 in 2019 that is still holding the world under its spell and pharmaceutical companies are in a race for vaccine production.

Dr. Khoury then poses the question on why pandemics are stressful? In the below diagram of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs 1943, the balance of life and needs is distorted greatly in a pandemic. In Lebanon, this imbalance was exacerbated by the dire economic and political conditions in the country. Consequently, there are lots of people who are seeking medical help in order to overcome this period. The available literature into the effect of Covid19 on mental health is still in its early stages but a flurry of studies and articles is to be expected in the near future. In Lebanon, the medical community issued directives and guidelines to deal with issues during the pandemic and projected guidelines into the future. To improve the mental health of the nation the following is required:

- the mental health and needs should be part of a strategic health plan and should be allocated a budget.
- organization and collaboration between the public sector (MoPH), academic centers, national organizations and the private sector to provide the most optimal provision of services based on needs assessment.
- improve access to mental health through widening coverage of psychiatric and psychological care via private insurance.
- support research on the impact of the current crisis on mental health in order to better plan for prevention and care of mental health .

AND a 100 years later, after the Spanish Flu, the advice remains unchanged: avoid crowds, wear masks and be mindful of others around you.



Online Business Meeting With Dr. Marwan Iskandar
Economist & Author
"LEBANON: THE IMPOSSIBLE CRISIS"

November 17, 2020



On November 17, RCBC hosted Dr. Marwan Iskandar, a distinguished economist and author, to its virtual meeting. Dr. Iskandar is an Oxford graduate and has held several senior positions in both the public and private sectors. He is a former advisor to several Lebanese and foreign governments. He is the author of several books including Social Security for Lebanon and Rafic Hariri and the Fate of Lebanon.

In his talk titled Lebanon, the Impossible Crisis, Dr. Iskandar described in some detail the very bleak economic situation facing the country today. It is projected, he stated, that the GDP will shrink by some 35% by year-end and around 50% of the population will fall below the poverty line. The Lebanese pound has devalued by some 80% this year spiking inflation to unprecedented levels and rendering the value of trapped deposits in banks in Lebanese pounds as well as US dollars greatly diminished.

How did we get here? Dr. Iskandar identified government ineptitude and banks greed as prime reasons. For many years, especially since 2015, the Central Bank became lender of last resort to finance the chronic and increasing deficit of successive governments. The major source of deficit is electricity, where it is responsible for 50% of total deficit or roughly 50 billion dollars. The Central Bank adopted a series of measures called "Financial Engineering" to fund government deficits. Banks in turn were the major, if not the only, supplier of hard currency to the central bank lured by high interest rates reaching some 10% versus the less than 1% they were earning on their deposits with foreign banks. As a result, over 90% of government spending was earmarked to debt servicing and paying salaries to a bloated bureaucracy leaving less than 10% for all other investments. Moreover, the policy of the central bank to defend the Lebanese pound that is pegged to the dollar contributed to the collapse Lebanon is experiencing now.

Going forward, Dr. Iskandar believes that the road to recovery is long and hard. Reaching an agreement with the IMF is a MUST first step. Rebuilding confidence in the banking sector is difficult but not impossible. He pointed out repeatedly that at the height of the financial crisis in 2010, some 25 billion dollars were injected into Lebanon mainly by Lebanese who perceived Lebanon and its banking sector a safe haven in those turbulent years. Also, the road to recovery is dependent on stable political system and government that will accelerate the badly needed confidence in the country.



Online Business Meeting With Mrs. Sadika Kebbi

Executive Director at The John Maxwell Team

"EVERYONE COMMUNICATES, FEW CONNECT"

November 24, 2020

The first mistake we make as people is that we want to look good, but as communicators we should be perfectly aware that it is not about us. We should lose ourselves to the people we are talking to. One has to lose self-consciousness to gain other consciousness. A communicator loses oneself to find oneself. Connecting in general increases one's influence in every situation. Connecting is the ability to identify with people; relate to them in such a way that it increase a communicator's influence, and as John C. maxwell states leadership is influence. Most people who disconnect don't know it. They keep on talking without realizing that they lost their audience. "You cannot speak what you do not know; you cannot share what you do not feel; you cannot translate what you do not have, and you cannot give what you do not possess."



General Club Assembly, Board Election

RI 2021-2021

December 1, 2020

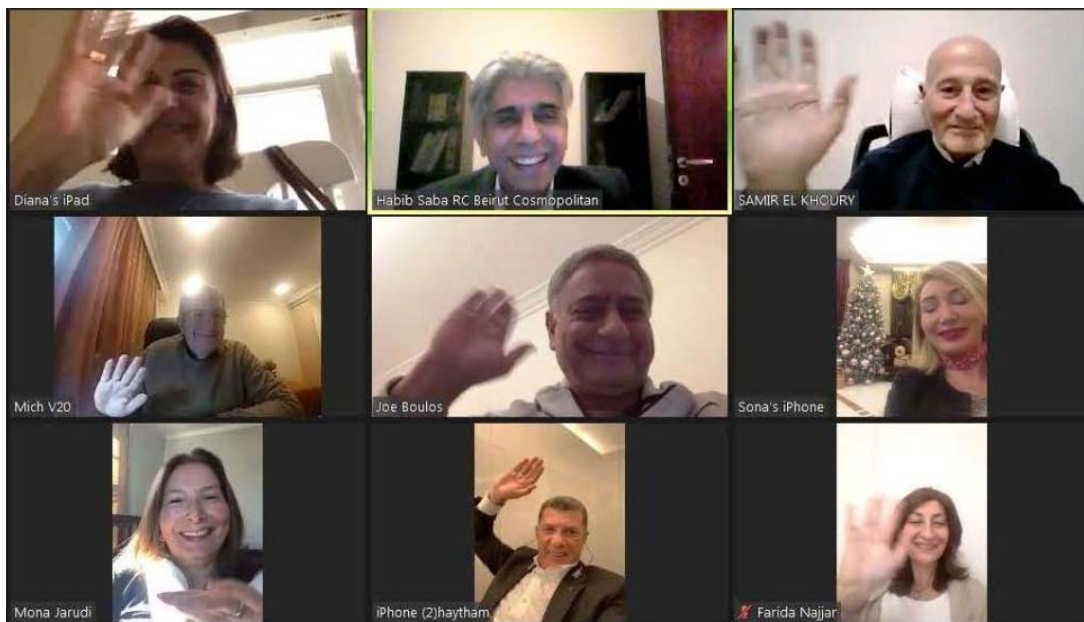
On Tuesday December first, RCBC had its general assembly to go over club business with updates and to elect the new board for RI 2021-2022.

Due process and protocol were observed through the virtual election process where the ballot was sent to the members and votes were counted by an election committee of three club members.

The Incoming Board (2021-2022)

President Elect	Sona Kourtian	IPP	Habib Saba
President Nominee	Farida Najjar	Director	PP Mona Jarudi
Vice President	Joseph Boulos	Director	Samir El Khoury
Club Secretary	Haytham Kurdi	Director	Michel Mansour
Club Treasurer	Diana Cotran		

Congratulations to the new board and best wishes for a successful year!



Christmas Celebration

December 22, 2020

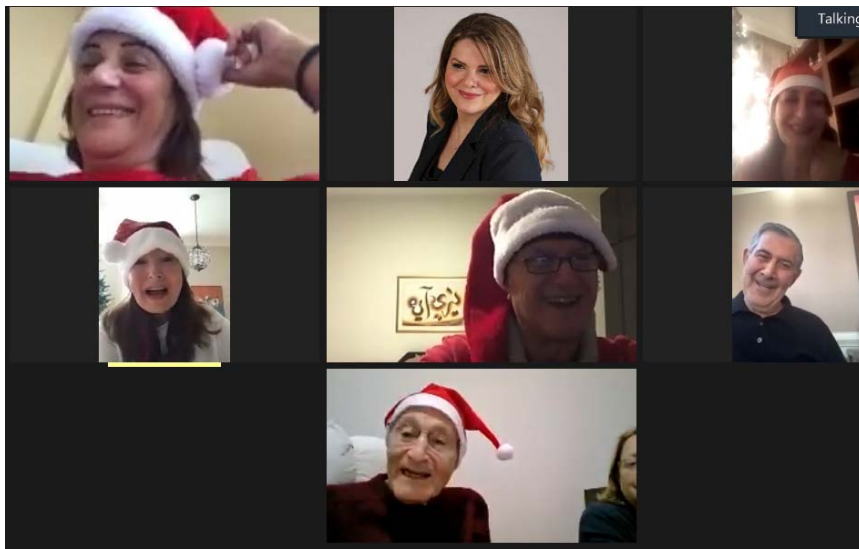
Determined not to abandon our club tradition of getting together for a holiday cheer and toast, the program committee planned a virtual meeting to end this very challenging year on a better note.

The committee chair, Rt. Samir, welcomed everyone and proposed a toast to everyone's health and well-being. A video of a virtual choir singing Handel's Messiah was enjoyed by all.

Santa played a major role that evening, where our very own PP Joe appeared fully decked with Santa's attire and armed with much needed humor.

P Habib Saba, PP Habib Bassoul and other members were missed.

Happy holidays to all and may the bonds of friendship and fellowship continue to flourish in our dear club.





Christmas visit to SOS Village

December 22, 2020

On December, Tuesday 22, 2020, RCBC was happy to give cheer and put a smile on the children of SOS Children's Village at Bhersaf in the beautiful Metn region of Lebanon.

SOS stands for Societas Socialis, founded in 1949 by Herman Gmeiner, an Austrian, to help orphaned children. SOS Children's Village, stands for: A loving home for every child. It is a nonprofit National Association and a member of the International Federation of SOS Children's Villages.

P. Habib Saba, PP Amal Talhouk, and CS Farida Najjar with the help of NGO Chreek delivered and distributed food parcels from Burger King+ popsicles + personal gifts for the 42 children whose ages range between 3-19 years (and that is until they graduate and find the future awaiting them). Over and above, each child received a personal letter from another child of a similar age with the season's compliments, which added to the warmth of this Christmas event. RCBC surely didn't forget to offer food parcels and personal gifts to the 11 caretakers who play the role of (mothers) to those children.

RCBC members always look forward for their annual Christmas project to draw a smile on orphans' innocent faces.





Many Happy Birthday Returns

November

Sylva Guiragossian
Sona Kourtian
Michel Mansour
George Theodory

December

Wael Hamdan
Subhi Jarudi

THE END