

Unfortunately, and unlike many of you I believe, I have not had the honor of meeting the late Dr. Evelyn Menconi in person during her lifetime.

However, I've been privileged, I have to admit, to almost see her and touch her legacy...  
... in the tireless commitment of her many friends to *preserve* this legacy,  
... in *your* generous presence on a celebrated day like this,  
... and, *above all*, I came closest to fathoming the scale and depth of her legacy in experiencing first-hand, the selfless and monumental efforts of this memorial series' planning committee over the past 6 months to bring us together on this wonderful evening...

... Elaine, Carole, Kim, Doha, Liz, MJ, and Mike Haidar of course, to which a very, very warm round of applause in gratitude is first and foremost due today.

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I've been kindly asked by the committee to address you this evening on the 'Boston to Lebanon' fundraising campaign that we spearheaded after the July War this summer and on how your contributions will help Lebanon.

Like many of you, and for the usual reasons, I usually try to avoid giving donation pitches. And in this case, it weighs on me to have to ask you, yet again, to give more and more of the very much you have for Lebanon...

For, we keep asking *you* for money, the same '*you's*... each and every one of *you*.  
*You* who have stood up high and firm, supporting this cause from the very beginning.  
*You* to whom the people of Lebanon are already eternally grateful.

However, I'd like to think that my task tonight is easily difficult...  
... It's easy because, after the atrocities committed against Lebanon and the Lebanese during the devastating July War this summer, I'm left with a cause that doesn't really need any selling. It just sells itself without any props.  
... And it's difficult in the same time because I know I'll never find the right words to accurately describe the magnitude of the plight that has befallen Lebanon; one is only left to the very morbid, yet very telling, facts & figures... which I'm sure you need not be reminded of.

After the *Justice for Lebanon* campaign of rallies and vigils for an earliest possible ceasefire this summer, our focus shifted to raising funds to support the massive aid needs in Lebanon. This is how the 'Boston to Lebanon' campaign was born. You can learn more about the campaign details from the pamphlets on the booths outside. But to give you an example of the activities we've supported to date, our focus has been on 3 main aid areas:

- environmental aid (current focus on oil spill),
- cluster bomb & landmine removal,
- and relief for the displaced

The activities funded by the campaign have been conducted by NGOs, such as Bahr Lubnan, OffreJoie, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), and the Lebanese Red Cross. Those included:

- cleaning up the Ramlet El Baida beach from the oil-spill by paying the daily salaries of 20 fishermen,
- reconstructing 4 households in the widely demolished Qaouzah village,
- removing unexploded mines in South Lebanon by supporting 7 skilled technicians,
- & purchasing the equipment for a new blood bank in Jbeil.

Your financial support will help us sustain this effort further, and will empower more and more non-profit NGOs in advancing their noble missions in a country that is very much in need.

At a minimum, we encourage you to purchase any of the ‘Boston (Heart) Lebanon’ merchandise – we have t-shirts, pins, mugs, bracelets, & stickers. They’ve been designed to carry a very simple yet very powerful message: a timeless letter of love from Boston to Lebanon... which in itself, and here I’m quoting the late Pope John Paul II, may God bless his soul, is not just a country, but a letter or “risala” of pluralism, tolerance, and love to the whole world.

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Finally, and speaking of helping Lebanon, and especially at a time in which the country is lethally devolving further and further into internal political bickering and gridlock, there may be only one person in this room today who can help.

I implore the leaders of Lebanon, or the leaders of their own fragments of Lebanon, and practically the root of today’s stalemate; I encourage them...

... to rise above their petty differences and to learn from the example of Evelyn Menconi

... to be inspired by her selflessness in serving a community that races today to uphold her legacy; (*if only our leaders were as half self- or sect-centered*)

... I encourage them to be inspired by her courage in promoting a culture and cause that may have long endured animosity in this part of the world

... I just want them to be touched by her resounding presence today in this hall and in your hearts.

Now, I leave you to what promises to be a marvelous evening of beauty and talent... confident that Evelyn’s smiling eyes are watching us from above ... with pride and with anticipation for more, much more, to come from this generous community.

Thank you

Loai Naamani