

**A Child of Life**  
**A Benefit Monodrama on Gibran by Dramatist Michel ElAshkar**  
Kresge Auditorium, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA  
Sunday, September 8, 2006 at 8:00pm

**Opening Remarks by Loai Naamani**  
President, Lebanese Club at MIT

---

Good Evening—

I would like to welcome you here tonight on behalf of the Lebanese Club at MIT and the many friends of the club volunteering to help us out this evening, an evening that I promise you will be nothing short of magnificent!

It is no surprise that we have come across many of the faces in today's audience at the weekly rallies we held at Copley Square over the past month as part of the *Justice for Lebanon* campaign. If you recall, as we embarked on that campaign, we set forth a statement with 4 clear, immediate objectives that we converged around and loudly demanded week after week in Copley Square.

And now, with a ceasefire having taken place, with the air and maritime blockade having been lifted just 3 days ago, with the world responding with over \$3bn in relief and reconstruction aid and much more along the way, and with the Lebanese Army being sent to protect all of Lebanon along all its borders, I am very proud to announce today that *all* of our campaign's demands have been met, more or less, and even prouder to say that *you* all deserve a loud thank you now as we reflect back at your unshakeable commitment to this cause.

And on behalf of the people of Lebanon, the children of Lebanon, the government of Lebanon, and the friends of Lebanon, I would like to thank you once again for

heeding and joining our call; it has truly been an honor fighting for this cause with you.

But even though our *Justice for Lebanon* campaign has come to an end, this is by no means an assurance that justice has been served. As we repeated before, any peace has to begin with justice: and our peace begins with the justice of reclaimed land, the justice for reclaimed citizenry, the justice of reclaimed sovereignty, the justice of reclaimed pride, and not only that. Our peace, ladies and gentlemen, begins with justice of accountability, accountability for an unjust war, for unwarranted savagery.

And until all those facets of our justice are attended to, it may be difficult to conceive of a peace that is not imposed on us, or raped from us, or purchased for us, or imported to us from abroad.

As we transition from the *Justice for Lebanon* campaign, our efforts and energies are now focused on the massive relief, reconstruction, and environmental aid needs that Lebanon has today and are estimated to exceed \$15bn of total war costs. And I am hence delighted to announce today our transition into a new, focused, grassroots fundraising campaign called 'Boston to Lebanon', which I am sure many of you have noticed and hopefully read about. I do not want to elaborate on this now, as you do have a fairly, detailed pamphlet and website to refer to. But I do want validate and ask whether you like and agree with the Boston (Heart) Lebanon slogan. So *does* Boston love Lebanon ladies and gentlemen? Does it love Lebanon loud enough!?

*[audience expresses itself]*

Great. This is what Mayor Menino also assured us in this proclamation of September 18 as Kahlil Gibran Day in Boston. And I would like to share what he said with you:

[*proclamation reading*]

So I think Boston and its mayor do “heart” Lebanon, and through this campaign, we do hope to make more of Boston “heart” more of Lebanon, and show for it with their \$s, instead of this taxpayer money going elsewhere, like to finance other neighboring countries’ thirst for cluster bombs, for example, especially now that supplies need to be heavily replenished again.

... 200,000 cluster bomblets remain unexploded in 390 location, killing almost 10 people a week since the war supposedly ended on August 14

Why? No, really, *why?*

Hasn’t humanity in Lebanon been offended enough, been scarred enough, been wronged enough during that month-long war?

Is this the gift or endowment of hatred that the children of Lebanon deserve?

How can it be that we export a child of life – and children of life – to the world, and in exchange receive cluster gifts that rid life of our children?

How can it be that the Pope John Paul II, may God Bless his sole, raises Lebanon to the order of not just being a country but a letter of coexistence to the world, and then witness his letter burn into ashes?

Our only consolation, moving forward, remains to be the steadfast hope and faith that this savagery would set the stage for a new reality in Lebanon...

A new reality in which – I hope – there will be no need to *co-exist*, because we will simply *exist*.

A new reality in which – I hope – there will be no need to *unite*, because we will simply be *one*.

A reality which Gibran himself once described in the past, perhaps rightfully so, as:  
“You have your own Lebanon and I have my own” – Yet we strive to soon proudly  
tell him of a new reality in which:

“Gibran’s Lebanon is mine, my Lebanon is yours”

“Our Lebanon is one, a nation for all and a nation for life”

And now, ladies and gentleman, I come to the toughest part of this, as I introduce a very, very special and dear person to me. I thought a lot about the best way to introduce Mr. ElAshkar to you tonight, which awards to tell you about, which honorary proclamations to cite, which tributes and stellar reviews by giants from Lebanon and the international community to quote, what eclectic background as an engineer, dramatist, and musician, hailing from a family that breathed art in every form to share with you...

But then I told myself that you can really read about all this in the playbill and on the website, and that the toughest introductions are those of the people we know very well in real life and admire to the extent of failing to find the right words to introduce.

I had met Michel in late 2004 as we prepared for that year’s production of A Child of Life, which featured proclamations from both the mayors of Cambridge and Boston, and the honoring of Gibran’s godson, cousin, and owner of the prophet’s manuscript, 85-year old Kahlil Gibran, who was sitting in this very front row.

Our relationship very quickly evolved into a solid friendship, or even brotherhood, if I may have the honor of calling it so. I recall I had my first thanksgiving ever at Michel’s and his family, I recall my first dish of ‘kibbeh nayyeh’ outside Lebanon was

by Michel, and if all this sounds too food-centric to you, I can confidently tell you that no person I know brings as sweet, and as sweeping memories of the Lebanon we adore, as Michel does when you watch and listen to him passionately speak of Lebanon, as you will very soon witness first-hand.

If anything, Michel is truly one of the very few “children of life” that I have had the privilege and honor of meeting during my own life. And I have no doubt, that had Gibran been living today, he would have been more than proud to see Michel step in the big shoes he left, to see another “child of life”, teach us how to embrace life, and love, and freedom, with the fresh fervor, and curiosity, and appetite of a child.

And finally, ladies and gentlemen, it’s my very distinct pleasure to introduce to you internationally acclaimed dramatist Michel ElAshkar in his monodrama... “A Child of Life”, which he has generously donated the proceeds from to the Boston to Lebanon campaign – And without further adieu, join me in warmly welcoming Michel, and lets watch his masterpiece speak for itself!

*- Loai Naamani*