

Kassir honored on World Press Freedom Day

By Van Meguerditchian
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BEIRUT: Journalists and activists said Wednesday that the vision of the late Samir Kassir is finally being realized, as the 2005 revolution in Beirut spreads across the Arab world.

"My friend Samir Kassir's 'Beirut Spring' made flowers bloom in Syria and other countries in the Arab world," said the vice president of the SKeyes Media Foundation, Malek Mroueh, at a gathering on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day.

Kassir believed firmly that Lebanese and Syrians face the same threats, from the Syrian regime, to their freedom.

"They [Syrians] will soon realize, more than others, that the Arab Spring, when it flourishes in Beirut, will be announcing the time for roses in Damascus," said Kassir following the March 14, 2005, uprising in Beirut,

which led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

Caretaker Information Minister Tarek Mitri spoke at the gathering, organized by SKeyes at the Babel Theater in Hamra, and said that the remarkable developments in the Arab world are an occasion to remember Kassir.

"We miss Samir Kassir during these times of great Arab developments that we are witnessing," said Mitri.

Speaking to an audience of activists and journalists, Mitri praised the courageous role that Kassir played, despite the frustrations faced by journalists in Lebanon and the Arab world.

A prominent Palestinian-Lebanese journalist, Kassir was known for his critical stance toward dictatorships in the Arab world. He was assassinated in a car bombing on June 2, 2005, fewer than four months after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Following his assassination, his friends and family members established in 2007 the Samir Kassir Foun-

dation and, to protect media freedom, the SKeyes Media Foundation.

Mitri argued that freedom in the Lebanon was essential for the freedom across the region, adding that Kassir "opened new windows" for people to let go of the ideologies that turned the Arab world into a place of conflict.

"Freedom in Lebanon is not there to counterbalance the absence of freedom in the [Arab world], but to contribute in creating it [freedom]," Mitri explained.

A documentary showing SKeyes projects in Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon was also screened at event which followed writers and journalists who have been targeted by security forces for practicing their profession.

World Press Freedom Day was also observed Tuesday at the American University of Beirut, which held a lively discussion under the title, "Social and Digital Media: Changing Politics, Revolutionizing Media Education."

One panel member, media expert Ali Jaber, stressed that journalism is

distinct from activism.

"Journalism is not activism ... journalism is the telling of the story of a certain fact that happened somewhere ... we are living in a very dangerous period where the mixing of journalism and activism has become the norm," said Jaber, in a likely reference to some of the recent television coverage of protests in Syria and the Arab world.

Attracting a huge audience, the nearly two-hour discussion saw contrasting views put forward by media observers and professionals

Professor Nabil Dajani of AUB argued that websites such as Facebook and Twitter did not play a fundamental role in instigating protests in the Arab world, while Alia Ibrahim, a correspondent for Al-Arabiya and the Washington Post, argued that such sites have become a part of modern journalism.

"As a reporter, one cannot ignore all the videos being uploaded online ... those are facts and a journalist has to report on that," said Ibrahim.