

Interview with Dr. Bou Dagher Kharrat on MTV, Rendez-vous, MTV - Lebanon, February 21st, 2015

Various environmental projects as well as the upcoming ECOPLANTMED International Conference scheduled in October in Beirut were at the heart of the interview that took place on February 21st on MTV Channel with Doctor Magda Bou Dagher Kharrat, Head of the Life and Earth Science Department, at the Faculty of Science of the Saint Joseph University.

After a brief introduction about the Faculty's work in general Dr. Kharrat then focused on the environment-related issues such as reforestation and biodiversity protection.

"When it comes to the Environment, we must always rely on our partnership with the local society because any project that undergoes studies at the faculty would not be fully implemented, had it not been adopted by the civil society," she explained.

Afterwards, she shed the light on one of the projects taken over by the Faculty.

"I will talk about the ECOPLANTMED project, funded by the European Union, with different Mediterranean partners such as Italy, Crete, Spain and Tunisia. The main goal of the project relies on rehabilitating damaged ecosystems," she noted, adding that the said project not only sticks to preserving the environment, but also goes further than that in restoring whatever had been impaired.

She then indicated that the ECOPLANTMED International Conference will take place at the end of the project with all partners to exchange expertise and discuss the results and successes.

"We mainly focus on restoring remote areas, on a certain level of altitude, such as Kfardebian, and basically plant again the damaged area".

Dr. Kharrat however explained that reforestation could not be done in a hazardous way. "We must study the plants, the seeds and the season to plant them," she added.

The cooperation with "Jouzour Loubnan" was then mentioned, for the said association is a key collaborator to the environment and most specifically on the reforestation level.

Making a certain area suitable for ecosystems featured also high during the interview, whereas Dr. Kharrat confirmed that animals come and go by themselves but the main focus would still be trees and plants that constitute a good home for them, once the ecosystem is stable.



“Unfortunately, some species are extinct and we are elaborating a red list to determine what has disappeared, what is threatened and what could be in danger in the near future”.

In this framework, when asked about a possibility to gather these species from abroad in order to plant them again on Lebanese soil, Dr. Kharrat clarified that some species are strictly Mediterranean-based and could not be imported from countries such as Australia, Europe or the United States.

“So we should focus on using local species,” she added, noting that some plants have been modified by humans over the years. “The species we own have adapted for thousands of years to the climate and the nature of the Lebanese soil which is why we would rather they be locals and natives than import them from another land or country”.

Dr. Kharrat then said that a local conference already took place and showed greater local interest, from universities and individuals, than it used to a decade ago. “The Lebanese society is now more aware when it comes to environmental issues and is ready to contribute to make things better (...) because these issues touch now everyone and not just ecologists”.

Adding to these reasons the general situation in Lebanon and the neighboring area and the influx that has witnessed our country, without forgetting the indefinable number of buildings each year, she said that repercussions on the environment that are more and more palpable have awakened the need in people to protect their nature.

“We cannot work outside the general framework we have been given,” she said while noting the official level of contribution done by both Ministries of Environment and Agriculture in Lebanon.

“Legal measures and legislations are there and now it is up to universities to gather funds and find further opportunities to Lebanese youth who meet all requirements and have needed capacities and competencies to work.”

“Jouzour Loubnan” association work was then brought up. Dr. Kharrat explained that when the reforestation activities started back in 2008, the idea of native species was there all along, which is what actually triggered the use to study local seeds. After a careful study in the lab, she added, the germination protocol is then distributed to concerned nurseries from which we buy later on the plants for the reforestation.

About the international conference, Dr. Kharrat finally noted that the ECOPLANTMED International Conference website states all related information and said that it is an open event to all interested persons. “We insisted this conference takes place in Lebanon for our country has characteristics that are

very specific to it and could not therefore be found anywhere else in the world. It is symbolic and the Lebanese must be aware of the natural treasure they have.”

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