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**Bill proposed to grant vote to expatriates**

***Activists hope to follow in footsteps of Iraq***

**By Nada Bakri**

Special to The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Hoping to follow in the footsteps of this year's elections in Iraq, local activists have proposed a bill to grant expatriates and Lebanese abroad the right to vote from outside the country.

The proposed bill is a part of the "Battle for Democracy in Lebanon: Lebanese vote abroad" campaign, set in motion following the end of Syria's nearly 30-year occupation of Lebanon.

Following last month's finalization of the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, the country is now preparing to hold its first free elections since three years before the start of the 1975-1990 civil war.

The bill was prepared by Chibli Mallat, a law professor at Beirut's St. Joseph University and Nada Abu Zeid, a lawyer currently living in France, in cooperation with Gebran Karam, an engineer and professor at the Lebanese American University.

The trio is calling for a peaceful demonstration in front of the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Beirut at noon on Wednesday, and in front of embassies and consulates around the world.

According to Mallat, the bill stipulates the registration of valid passport holders one week before election day, and the transformation of Lebanese embassies and consulates into polling stations with electoral lists provided by Lebanese authorities.

He said: "We have presented a draft of this bill to the prime minister, the justice minister and to other officials and politicians inside the country and abroad to widen the democratic circle."

He added: "A source close to the speaker of Parliament contacted us asking for more details about the bill. Deputy Walid Jumblatt said he supports the idea as well as Administrative Minister Tarek Mitri, who is pushing it with Mikati."

Mallat said the bill being approved is a very real possibility as it only requires politicians to respond to the request for democracy by putting "a box in each diplomatic mission."

He insisted there is nothing controversial about the bill, dismissing the assumption it would put upset the country's delicate sectarian balance.

Abu Zeid and Karam, co-founders of the Web site [www.lebanese-abroad.com](http://www.lebanese-abroad.com), said the events which rocked Lebanon in recent months and resulted in a rebirth for the country had led a group of expatriates to prepare a petition demanding the right to vote from their new countries of residence.

Lebanon was the first Arab country to hold elections, first doing so in the 1920s. Lebanese women were granted the right to vote in 1952 - years before many European countries approved such a decision.

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