

Atiyeh hears opinions of Syria's president

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Syrian President Hafez Assad told visiting Oregon Gov. Vic Atiyeh on Saturday that his nation lacks confidence in the credibility of the U.S. government.

The United States "cannot play a constructive role in the Middle East while it is completely one-sided toward Israel," Assad told Atiyeh.

Atiyeh, who is of Syrian descent, met with Assad on the sixth day of the governor's visit to this Arab country.

Atiyeh has held discussions with various government officials since his arrival in Syria as head of an Oregon trade mission.

"The U.S. administration has not implemented any . . . agreement it has committed itself to," the official Syrian news agency Sana quoted Assad as telling Atiyeh.

"Consequently our confidence in American credibility is nil," Assad said. "We have explained to many American officials who have visited us that the U.S. aims are serving Israeli interests and not the real national interests of the United States."

Atiyeh traveled to Damascus after visiting Amar, his father's birthplace in northern Syria.

All 500 residents of the village turned

out for a festive welcoming of Atiyeh and his wife Delores on Thursday.

The Atiyehs were showered with lilac water, rice, rose petals and hard candies as they walked along the community's narrow main street.

Six trumpets and three drums led the throng. People crammed balconies and roof tops, applauding as the Atiyehs strolled under an arbor graced with pictures of the governor and Syrian President Hafez Assad.

It was like "scenes from a movie . . . suddenly you're in the middle of it," Atiyeh said afterwards.

It was Atiyeh's first return to Amar

since 1929, when he, two brothers, his mother and an uncle traveled to the Middle East community.

Atiyeh's cousin, Aniese Hadeed, 80, hugged the governor upon his return and remembered the visit 55 years ago.

"He was so little and happy," she said of the Portland-born governor. "He would climb up and down the stairs and ride the horses."

At the home of another cousin, Aziz Atiyeh, gypsy musicians danced wildly Thursday night and played horns and hide drums.

The governor and his wife, their son, Thomas, 36, and 14 other Oregonians in

the group sat at a long table loaded with freshly grilled lamb, olives and bottles of arak, an anise-flavored Syrian liquor.

The local dignitaries included a Bedouin chief and a company of khaki-clad policemen for Amar, about 90 miles north of Damascus, Syria's capital.

Atiyeh got up three times to join chains of dancing villagers in the festivities that continued until 1 a.m. Friday.

Shortly before dawn Friday, Atiyeh awakened for a walk through the village, sampling freshly baked pocket bread. The Atiyehs left the village after a farewell lunch with relatives.

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