The Speleo-Club du Liban (SCL) and the Lebanese National Council for Scientific Research (LNCSR) organized, in April 2001, an international speleological meeting, where local and foreign cavers discussed the present situation of the Middle-East speleology. This event, which took the form of a three-day symposium, was done also with the collaboration of the “Groupe d’Etudes et de Recherches Souterraines du Liban (GERSL)” and the “Association Libanaise d’Etudes Spéléologiques (ALES)”. The symposium encompassed the three main perspectives of speleology: sport and leisure, science, and culture. During the first two days, 38 oral presentations and 20 posters were exposed. These presentations tackled different subjects that are grouped under five major topics: 1. cave rescue, 2. exploration, 3. hydrogeology and karstology, 4. protection of the karst environment, and 5. archeology. The presentations discussed various speleological features present in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran. The audience consisted of cavers and scientists from the Middle-East as well as from Europe, North America, and Japan. A spelemedia exhibition with more than 150 photo-posters also took place. In addition, several films were projected. Finally, a beautiful excursion through the Lebanese western mountain chain with a picnic-lunch marked the third day and the end of the symposium.

The significance of this event is not only due to the fact that it is the first of its kind, but also for providing a meeting point for local and foreign cavers and scientists who are interested in the speleology of the Middle-East. An important link between different caving entities was, hence, established, anticipating rewarding future cooperation. In addition, the symposium falls on the 50th anniversary of the Speleo-Club du Liban which was a pioneering speleological organization in the Middle-East and a founding member of the International Union of Speleology (UIS). As it has been broadly proposed, by the participants of the symposium, to establish an international speleological documentation center for the Middle-East in Lebanon, the Speleo-Club du Liban is honored to announce the opening of such a center by the beginning of the year 2002. The Club archives, which include invaluable information along a span of 50 years, as well as the contribution of the different speleological organizations will be stored in a modern well maintained library with a state-of-the-art internet facilities.