

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like first to commend the Arab Ladies of the United Nations and the Arab Club at the United Nations for organizing this very special event and for all their efforts in putting together such a rich program.

Having been asked to limit my intervention to only three minutes, and assuming that other speakers will highlight the role of my illustrious predecessor, Dr. Charles Habib Malek, in the drafting of the Declaration of Human Rights, I couldn't find a better way to participate in honoring him, other than to share with you tonight how timely and relevant remain observations he made more than 65 years ago when this organization was still nascent.

As a matter of fact, another illustrious predecessor of mine, Ghassan Tueni, had found and published at Dar An-Nahar in 2002 in a booklet form under the title: "Israel, America and the Arabs", a 152 page memo dated August 5, 1949, sent by then Ambassador and Permanent Representative Malek to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic of Lebanon and originally bearing the simple subject of: "Report on the Present Situation".

From this memo, I have chosen and translated 10 quotes on Lebanon, the Arab World and Israel, and International politics that best illustrate what Tueni calls in his preface Malek's "objective visionary".

Let me however proceed in reverse order from the forest to the tree.

1- On international politics, Malek wrote:

"I'm convinced that the time we live in, is a time where force is held in high regard. De facto politics, as well as offensive or defensive power politics, have survived the advent of the era of the rule of law, peaceful coexistence and the United Nations. Notwithstanding any other consideration, the country that has a right would be in a better position to defend it, if it also has an effective and feared power."

“The value of media campaigns or political negotiations in shaping the course of history is worthless unless it relies on a critical force. In the end, the political balance and international struggle only represent the balance of real powers not of conflicting arguments.”

“We have to work with the rising powers in Asia ... Asia is growing and its role in world politics is increasing. We must make the utmost benefit from that, especially that we are Asians.”

The relevance of these observations speaks for itself indeed.

2- On the Arab world and Israel, Malek wrote:

“Palestine was and remains the most critical Arab issue of all...The Nakba of Palestine is but a clear image of the general Arab Nakba, and the weaknesses that lead to the Arab failure in Palestine are but the same ones that lead and still lead to the failures of the Arab world.”

Failure is certain “If at any time in the future, the Arab world is to face Israel with the same incoherent, indifferent and improvised policies as it did in the past, and if the Arab world does not confront its own ills and fundamentally rebels against its contemporary history marked by withdrawal, fear of Western enlightenment and glorification of a dead past impeding it from assuming its present and future responsibilities, and if it does not reform its political, economic, cultural, social and religious systems in a bold way.”

“Enlightenment, knowledge, truth and freedom are the necessary conditions to the desired awakening, without which there is no future for the Arab world...Time has come for the emergence of a genuine and total liberating movement.”

Again, the timeliness of these observations is overwhelming.

3- On Lebanon, Malek wrote:

“Lebanon is part and parcel of the Arab world.”

“Lebanon's independence is a necessity that tolerates no doubt.”

“Lebanon's ultimate justification *vis à vis* itself and the world is its honest commitment to the economic, intellectual, spiritual and existential freedoms.”

“If Lebanon does not sanctify the freedom of intellect in the full sense and if it does not uphold the search for truth in its laws, government and army, Lebanon will lose its very *Raison d'être*.”

Ladies and gentlemen, this was and remains Lebanon's predicament.

To conclude, allow me to remind that in his well-known essay, “Why read the Classics?” the famous writer Italo Calvino suggests -among other definitions which he offers- that “a Classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say.” In this sense, Malek's 1949 memo undoubtedly amounts to a Classic in the annals of Lebanese and Arab diplomacy.

Thank you.