

Harvard Club hosts former Ecuadorian President at AUB

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Peace processes require attention to history, national culture, the interest of all important actors, the emotional component of the problem and the relationship with the other negotiating party, said former president of Ecuador, Jamil Mahuad, at a lecture at AUB on May 6, 2010. Mahuad argued that human beings have five major concerns, namely, appreciation, autonomy, affiliation, status and role. As humans, we are constantly searching for a common ground and desperately “fishing” to make connections with others, noted Mahuad.



“Respect for autonomy, showing appreciation for the other side and finding common affiliations are not always sufficient, but they are always necessary,” Mahuad told an AUB audience which included the Consul General of Ecuador, Karam Doumit, president of the Harvard Club in Lebanon, Nagib Boulos, Consul General of Ecuador in Turkey, Fadi Nahas and the ambassador of Mexico, Jorge Alvarez, as well as AUB faculty and students.

“Mahuad, a distinguished academic and politician, has made significant contributions to the knowledge of ‘Conflict Transformation,’” noted Kamal Shehadeh, member of the Harvard Club of Lebanon.

Mahuad began his talk, entitled, “From the Middle East to Latin America and Back: Shared Lessons in Conflict Transformation,” by drawing a parallel between the negotiation process and the two sides of the brain. Mahuad argued that the negotiation process involves using both sides of the brain, namely, the right (rational) and the left (emotional). The “two brains” analogy was specifically used to refer to the historic peace accord that was signed by Ecuador and Peru during Mahuad’s presidency, and which ended a decades-long border dispute between those two countries.

Co-sponsored by the Issam Fares Institute for Policy Studies and International Affairs (IFI) and the Harvard Club of Lebanon (Est. 1964), Mahuad’s talk highlighted the importance of starting a working relationship with the other party in any negotiation process -- a theme inspired by Harvard law professor Robert Fisher’s book, *Getting to YES*. “You have to talk to your enemy if you want peace,” noted Mahuad.

Mahuad argued that peace negotiations entail separating people from the problem. Decisions on the negotiating table seem rational, noted Mahuad, but they are emotional. One should treat people as human beings and should build relationships of trust and confidence with them. The peace accord between president Fujimori of Peru and president Mahuad, mediated by then-US president Bill Clinton, began with a joke while in the Oval Office that broke the ice, said Mahuad. Ecuador and Peru have since been great partners, noted Mahuad.

During the discussion session, Mahuad was asked to give useful tips from his experience that Arabs and Israelis could give their leaders to help resolve the 60-year old conflict. Mahuad argued that while it was difficult to give advice to other governments, there were, nevertheless, universal trends. Everybody is longing for peace, noted Mahuad. “People want cooperation more than fighting,” he added.

Mahuad argued that it was important to stress the local culture, for it would be a mistake to assume that one could apply ready-made recipes for achieving peace on the rest of the world. It

is also crucial for a Chief-of-State to build on what others have left behind and not separate himself from his “bad past,” as Mahuad put it.

Asked about his driving force to achieve peace, Mahuad noted that “few things are more satisfactory to [him] than making agreements with people.” Mahuad stressed the importance of human connections and getting to know the other, particularly when negotiating peace.

Mahuad, who is of Lebanese origin, was President of Ecuador from 1998-2000. Mahuad was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1999 for his involvement in the peace accord between Ecuador and Peru. Before becoming president of Ecuador, Mahuad served as Mayor of Quito for six years. Mahuad is co-founder and Senior Fellow at the ‘International Negotiation Program’ at Harvard Law School. He is Board member of the ‘Abraham Path Initiative’ and Global Advisory member of ‘Mediators Beyond Borders’. The ‘Abraham Path’ is a place where people can meet and create human understanding.