

The Challenge for Arab Journalists

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Veteran award winning former *Washington Post* correspondent and columnist Nora Boustany, currently Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) Writer-in-Residence, argued for more Arab journalists in international media in the IFI-sponsored Nadim Makdisi Memorial Lecture, “Finding our Niche in the Narratives of Nations: The Challenge for Arab Journalists,” held in College Hall on January 18, 2010.

Boustany, arguing her point by tracing her own break into the American media in the early eighties as a young female Lebanese journalist, stated her mission over the years: “Listening to and interpreting local narratives, whether here in South Lebanon, in Gaza, Iran, or Algeria and Yemen and packaging them for American and British audiences.”

She gave examples of news stories in which she, as a journalist with an Arabic sounding name “who could converse in the local dialect” and was less “prone to acts of kidnapping,” could bring to articles the truth major news outlets in the west were denying: stories on Libya and Jordan which yielded “the exact opposite from what European diplomats, dissident university professors,” and others were reporting.

Boustany insisted, “We must never shy away from delivering the hard truth, even if it is unpalatable to Arab audiences or our contacts. . . Journalists are” supposed to work “as a public service. It is imperative to report faithfully even if what we discover is not flattering. The Arab world does not have any more time for self-delusion.”

We need to show, Boustany went on, “how our message, our truths, and our own narratives can be perfected to make their way into the global conscience and into the hearts and minds of people everywhere.” More Arab journalists need to take to the field; universities, such as AUB, should sponsor courses in journalism, especially at a time when newspapers and news organizations are shrinking.”

Following the lecture, Boustany took questions, discussed the Arab and local press, and made a plea for more young Arab journalists to get involved in the “narratives of nations.”