Charles Malik International Symposium
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Thank you very much; for me it’s a profound honor! I had the privilege when I was young of getting to know and experience the phenomenon of nature that was the great Dr. Charles Malik. But from the perspective of the university I want to say that AUB is extremely proud of its profound connection with Charles Malik.

He gained his BA in Mathematics and Physics at the university in 1927; he spent the first year of his long and feted career here on this campus as an instructor in these subjects. In 1930 ever adventurous he went to work in publishing and research in Cairo and then to the United States and Germany as everyone in this audience knows he studied philosophy under the two colossi of the field Whitehead and Heidegger. But he was always deeply attached to his university and his nation, and after he earned his PhD from Harvard in 1937 he came back to Lebanon and off course to AUB where he founded and led our philosophy department through its early glory years until 1945. And then he made his first famous *I will be a reluctant* entry into state craft and the world of diplomacy, and what an impact that had on the world. He came back to academia ever curious, ever intellectually provocative, and became the chair of philosophy at AUB until just after the outbreak of the civil war in 1975. Everyone in this room and everyone in the world whose fortunate enough to know Charles Malik he was never neutral on anything; so it was inevitable that he will become enmeshed in the Lebanese civil war as an opinion leader, as a Jean Provocateur in the philosophic sense as an individual who always had solutions. But it was also the time between 1945 when Malik became Lebanon’s first ambassador to the United Nations; in 1958 when he presided over the thirteen sessions of the United Nations that would really change the world of human rights at the general assembly that he left a mark on history, and not just AUB’s history, but the world’s history. No one will have missed the fact that AUB is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, if you’ve taken a walk on the Cornish or gone on a Middle East airline’s flight or read the newspapers you noticed that we’re celebrating our 150th year and we’re doing it in a special way by citing our history makers, the many people who passed through our gates have influenced our educational system and then went on to shape human events at the global level, medical level, making profound impact in the world, at AUB, and beyond.

Very few of these illustrious alumni actually came in as unanimous choices on the very first ballot. But it will surprise no one that Charles Malik influential, provocative, thoughtful, creative, antagonistic intellectually in the best sense of the word but open to thought and ideology in equal measure was one of the very first people that AUB chose to celebrate. We proudly display his picture and a fraction of his impact on the Cornish. And we’ll always celebrate this titan of intellectual thought. Because there are many reasons for this but one simple thing is that the head of the Lebanese delegation at the San Francisco conference, he was one of our disproportionately numerous alumni signatories to the charter of the United Nations, so even more significant than being signatory he was a central figure along with
Elinor Roosevelt in the framing, the drafting, and the adoption of the general assembly of another of the most important document in the era - the universal declaration of human rights in 1948.

As a philosophy professor turned diplomat, eventually less reluctant diplomat, he was able to bring his academic perspective that he forged in Harvard and at AUB to the extensive discussions in the drafting on the universal declaration of human rights and working in the committee and in the general assembly with his remarkable persuasive powers. What comes out when that document speaks to us is his political acumen coupled with a true belief in an advocacy for the primacy of the individual’s freedom of thought in expression over the pressures and constraints imposed by powerful human constructs such as states and religions.

In many ways Charles Malik preceded the Arab Spring by a good sixty years. He was a fundamental fighter for the right of the individual. It was his towering humanist belief that he combined with his deep rooted faith. He thought that an individual’s freedom of thought and independence from the constraints of the intellectual oppositions of others was a vital human right. That comes out in the universal declaration, because the universal declaration enshrines in it language that has resonated for decades in international treaties and national consultations around the world.

From that perspective, Charles Malik is a perfect product of AUB. AUB has had pioneers in Arab nationalism, Lebanonism, communism, Syrian nationalism, you name it; but it is a campus that educates its students to be free in thought and assertive in declaring that freedom of thought and opinion is a right for all. No one believe that as deeply and strongly as Charles Malik, and that contributed to him putting language in the universal declaration for human rights, the inalienable human rights, the rights of the individual not just of society, and that is now part of our international lexicon of freedom.

So these are some of the reasons we are extraordinarily proud of Charles Malik who is an AUBite through and through. We’re pleased and very proud to be the joint host of this international symposium with our colleagues at the excellent Notre Dame University that looks at its philosophical writings and impact on students and colleagues and on society alike. So in the spirit of our ongoing quest for knowledge the purpose here is not just to honor Malik’s achievements but to inquire to his contributions as a philosopher, as an intellectual a Jean Provocateur, as a leader, and as a pioneer; and as an outspoken advocate for the rights of the individual.

For me it’s a profound personal honor! When I was young at the house of Shukri Shammas and others, I got to see the great Charles Malik debate any number of individuals; it was clear to me that this was a man not afraid to argue a point and to argue it bravely and beyond conventional constraints of what constitutes a friendly argument. He was deeply committed, he was passionate, and he believed in what he said. It was inspiring for me even at a young age to see someone who held his convictions so truly close to his heart whether you agreed with him or not you couldn’t help but be inspired by his conviction that his opinion and your opinion were vital to the freedom of the individual.
So on behalf of AUB it's an honor and a pleasure to welcome you to this celebration of this singular, remarkable, and historic man. Thank you very much.