

Conference on Ameen F. Rihani's Arab-American Legacy

On April 28-29, 2011

Speech of Fr. Walid Moussa, President

With great pleasure I welcome all of you at Notre Dame University, Louaize, on this great occasion to celebrate together the centennial anniversary of the publication of *The Book of Khalid*.

To hold a conference at NDU addressing Ameen Fares Rihani's system of thinking is more than obligatory. Although it is an academic undertaking, yet it embraces comprehensive indications. If in the previous century Rihani had troubles with Maronite clerics when his ideas were seen as heretical, today a Maronite institution of higher education is intensely promoting what this great philosopher was teaching through his literary works. What a paradox!

Almost forty years after his passing away, NDU was launched, and since its inception, NDU has discovered the need for cultural and religious openness. It was established as a marriage between the East and the West, thus, being a Lebanese institution adopting the American system of education where the language of instruction is English. Its heritage highlights a belief in education as a means of protection against fanaticism and corruption and a dedication to freedom of thought and expression. Its mission seeks to provide comprehensive quality education that fosters enlightened citizenship, human solidarity, moral integrity, and belief in God. Indeed, among the core values that NDU is determined to practice stands the respect for humanity and dignity of the individual, by promoting faith and diversity; faith that leads for a better and more just society, and appreciation of diversity through an understanding of the impact of human beings on their environment.

What NDU represents is not at all different from what Ameen Rihani tried to promote.

When I read *The Book of Khalid*, I feel very highly concerned with what this work embodies. It looks like we are upholding today at NDU and at all universities worldwide what Rihani defended in his masterpiece of thought one hundred years ago. He could be either a pragmatist who was down to earth and knew the real needs for a world facing conflicts of diversity or a prophet who foresaw the challenges that a nowadays-globalized world will entail. Unfortunately, it took us some time to realize what has been happening on the globe and to listen to the repeated literary warnings of a century ago. However, Rihani's words say that the only *saki* of the thirsted in the desert and thirsted in the city is Patience.

This story of two Arab boys from Baalbek, Khalid and Shakib, who immigrated to New York City, synthesizes the problematic cultural and religious conflicts of today's world. It is an

impressive history and literary creations of the early Arab-American immigrants. However, this antagonism between Americans and Arabs was coupled with a message of dialogue and unity, with an attempt to reconcile the values of the West and the East for cultural integration and peace. Nevertheless, Rihani identified the three pillars of this task, thus professing his *credo* in *Al-Fatihah* of this book of travels when he said: “This is my book, the Book of Khalid, which I dedicate to my brother man, my mother nature, and my maker God”.

Today, here at NDU, one of Khalid’s wishes has been attained. Researchers from the East and the West have come together to exchange ideas and experiences of cultural and religious characteristics. I truly believe that this endeavor will lead to a joint effort for a common understanding and active cooperation.

Thank you all for being here today. My gratitude goes to all speakers in this conference, particularly, all those who joined us from abroad. Thank you for your contributions to the welfare of our world and future generations. I express my recognition as well to all organizers of this valuable event, especially, the Faculty of humanities.

With all my best wishes for a fruitful and successful conference.