

For Immediate Release



Beirut: 28-3-2019

### **International conference at AUB on the Middle East in 1958:**

**“A reexamination of the past for an understanding of the present and future”**

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) and the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES) organized a multidisciplinary international conference entitled “The Middle East in 1958: Reimagining a Revolutionary Year.” The two-day conference brought scholars from institutions in Europe, the US, and the region to shed new light on the domestic and global political history interplay of the year 1958 and their implications in the region's present and future.

“This conference is an opportunity to dig deeper into the historical moment, when the cold war was coming into full effect in the Middle East, and how the events of that year influence the politics of today,” said Rayan El Amine, assistant director of IFI. “The political reverberations of the events of 1958 can be felt today – whether in the delicate confessional balance of power in Lebanon or even how that year informs US foreign policy today.”

AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri spoke about political activism and thought leadership at AUB since well before the independence of any Arab state and going in tandem with the growth of the political role of Lebanon at the end of the 19th century and the emergence of An-Nahda. He referred to AUB students and professors such as Constantine Zurayk, Charles Malek, and Kamal Salibi in demonstrating their contributions to ideological trends such as in al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa in 1918 that kindled the Arab identity, the foundation of the Arab Nationalist Movement in the 1930s and 1940s, and ar-Rābita (the Lebanese Student League at AUB) in 1958.

“The AUB community—its faculty, students, staff, and alumni—have played a key role in shaping, analyzing, and documenting a broad swathe of the history of this country and the region,” said Khuri who referred to AUB's multilingual and interdisciplinary documentation of the region's history and its academic debates of 1958, considered among the first in scholarly institutions. “This institution has never hesitated to question what is assumed to be unassailable truth... [for] the best path towards service was found through the enlightenment of liberal education. Today, AUB remains committed to the ideal of graduating enlightened and inquisitive

leaders who are prepared for spirited intellectual engagement in a bastion and beacon of free thought and free expression."

The conference featured a keynote address titled "Arabs, Americans, and Global 58," by Dr. Salim Yaqub, professor of history and director of the Center for Cold War Studies and International History at University of California, Santa Barbara. A roundtable was also held under the title "Rethinking Lebanon in 1958: Domestic Crises and Foreign Intervention in a Revolutionary Year," where scholars and journalists discussed the legacy of 1958 for the political history of Lebanon.

"Sixty years after the momentous developments in this revolutionary year is an opportune time to discuss new archival records, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches, and narratives with a distinguished and stellar group of scholars," said Dr. Jeffrey Karam, assistant professor of political science and international affairs at the Lebanese American University and associate at Harvard University's Middle East Initiative, who added that the panels serve as platforms for a forthcoming book. "Rather than adopt a narrow definition that focuses on revolutions as singular and critical moments of enormous change or reform in the political history and trajectory of particular states, we expand on the postcolonial moment in the Middle East in the 1950s and especially 1958 to provide a better and much more inclusive definition of such important and decisive moments in the longer process of development and decolonization."

"The conference starts from the year 1958 to reexamine the routes of the post-colonial moment in the Middle East, a moment that in many ways forms one of the multiple pasts of our uncertain present," said Dr. Samer Frangie, director of CAMES. "In its combination of revolutions, coups, wars, regional competition, foreign intervention, 1958 may be read as repeating or reenacting our post-revolutionary present rather than simply causing it, and invites us to think alternative forms of historical connection. If anything, in its inconclusive, uncertain, and contingent logics, 1958 as a date militates against thinking in terms of a founding year and urges us to pause before affixing 'post-' to dates and fixing strict periodization. It is in this spirit that our conference returned to the momentous year of 1958."

ENDS

Text by Safa Safa  
Senior Writer  
Office of Communications  
American University of Beirut

**For more information please contact:**

Simon Kachar  
Director of News and Media Relations  
Mobile: (+961) 3-427-024  
Office: (+961) 1-374-374 ext: 2676  
Email: [sk158@aub.edu.lb](mailto:sk158@aub.edu.lb)

**Note to Editors**

**About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

**Stay up to date on AUB news and events. Follow us on:**

Website: [www.aub.edu.lb](http://www.aub.edu.lb)  
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/aub.edu.lb>  
Twitter: [http://twitter.com/AUB\\_Lebanon](http://twitter.com/AUB_Lebanon)