

Speech of the President of the Basil Fuleihan Institute, Mrs. Lamia Al-Moubayed Bsar
**On the occasion of the twenty seventh anniversary of the Basil Fuleihan Institute of
Finance and Economics**

24 October 2023

Your Excellency the Prime Minister

Your Excellency the Minister of Finance

Parliamentarians and ministers

Representative of the Ambassador of France to Lebanon

Heads and representatives of international institutions

my colleagues at the Basil Fuleihan Institute,

Dear colleagues,

On the occasion of the farewell of the "great journalist Mr. Talal Salman", his family distributed his iconic book: "Defeat is Not a Destiny".

These words echo and grow with the sound of bombs from Gaza to our south Lebanon.

The Institute of Finance Basil Fuleihan Institute, a leading public institution, chose not to be defeated. And it wasn't ?

we were not defeated in 2003 when it faced the most severe forms of rejection of its philosophy mission, vision and approach .

In the end, it was legally set as a public institution that is administratively, financially and technically independent, a pioneer in 1) capacity building, in (2) preparing public policies and accompanying their implementation, and (3) building partnerships and international cooperation in matters of public money management.

It was not defeated in 2005 when hope was defeated with the assassination of His Excellency Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the tragic death of Basil Fuleihan after 62 days of a courageous struggle to survive; Basil, to the memory of whom this Institute was dedicated.

It was not defeated in 2006 when the Grapes of Enemy wrath destroyed everything except our will to resist.

And it was not defeated by two great explosions, the first financial, and the second an atrocious explosion that happened meters away from us, an explosion that destroyed our port and the heart of our city and this building,

Two explosions that shook our confidence in the State and our belief that justice alone protects society. As we say: "States thrive when justice prevails" (p)

At some point, defeat was around the corner, not far from our minds and those of colleagues in state administrations and institutions, many among us today.

We asked them and we asked ourselves: Is there any logic for us to continue? Do the Lebanese really want a State and effective institutions? A “State” in the modern sense of it, neutral institutions who have citizens interest at the center, especially the most fragile.

A state where the logic of sectarian quota does not prevail over meritocracy, where public money is managed according to standards of transparency, prudence and responsibility. A state that calls for preparing public leaders to assume the task of serving the public interest and guard the public value. A State that does not reward the corrupt, and elevate the social contract to a contract of mutual trust.

Do the Lebanese want a state in that sense? Or a state built on sectarian interests and costly consensus? A thick state where there is no place for transparency and no real decision-makers, at all levels of governance.

The question is legitimate, of course, and open to all possibilities. And to all hopes or dreams .

The answer is also clear and explicit: "There is no way to restore our governance without Statehood, and us accepting to be equal citizen in a State."

Our institute is one thread among many, necessary for the formation of governance and the societal legitimacy of governing.

It is a foundation - a Midmac – a base- a model institution. The power of the model is most needed today to inspire citizens and public servants and show them what tomorrow should be about .

For this purpose, it cannot be defeated and it won't

It will not succumb to attempts to limit its role, to alienate, annex, or merge into other unworthy institutions, in the name of restructuring and downsizing. It won't!

In the midst of an unprecedented crises, the Institute revisited its modus operandi and built a crisis response based on 6 pillars:

1. One, gradually increase its revenues by providing intellectual services, and in accordance with its regulations.
2. two, invest in technology to provide relevant data and evidence basis for any structural reform the Lebanese government wishes to undertake: the budget dashboard as a tool for spending reviews and others and e-learning capabilities
3. Three, the implementation of joint projects in cooperation with our partners in Lebanon and the region, the Institute being a house of expertise in Public Financial Management.
4. Four, training our experts abroad and sharpening their knowledge in preparation for accompanying future needed reforms,
5. Five, restructuring our expenses, and
6. Finally, retaining the Institute's team, its precious talent base of which I am so proud.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Institute team and expert-trainers, colleagues at the Ministry of Finance and in state administrations,

We who have chosen to be public servants and vowed to preserve State institutions, protect this land and the dignity of its people,

We who have devoted all our energies to this country, the best years of our lives, and some of us their own lives, we would like to say to you that defeat is not an option and it will not.

You, we, are the State. Institutions are the only constant in the citizen's relationship to its State, and this link should not be left to weaken or to die.

Today, public institutions need to be rescued, re-incapacitated, restored. And for this they need resources and skills. They also need to be led by qualified, experienced, open and courageous leaders who have the capacity to govern.

At this institute, we extend our hands to all those who share this conviction, in the state, the private sector and the international community, and who wish to lend us a helping hand in this endeavor.

In Conclusion

I would like to thank for their hearty testimonies: Dr. Huda Saber and Dr. Ziad Al-Sheikh, Mrs. Nihad Younis and our colleagues in Palestine, and my dear friend Maxence Duyault, while assuring him of our continued cooperation with the ESA.

Words of appreciation to His Excellency the Prime Minister who honored us today as a guest in a house he built

Warm thanks to the patron of the ceremony, His Excellency the Minister of Finance, Dr. Yousef Al-Khalil, to whom we owe respect and appreciation.

Thanks are due to the Lebanese Army and its commander for his confidence in our institute and his uninterrupted support,

to the Minister of Interior and the Internal Security Forces for standing by us, especially recently after the robbery.

To the Directorate of General Security for providing us with connectivity and physical facilities during to peak of the crisis, a support that allowed us to maintain our services uninterrupted.

All gratitude to Mr. Nassif Saqlawi, Chairman and General Manager of the Regie of Tobacco. I don't remember meeting him once during these four tough years without him reassuring me and offering his unweave red support

Gratitude to our colleague Mr. George Maarawi, Director General of Finance, whose support and friendship we are proud of, and to senior officials at the Ministry of Finance, my dear friend Rima Makki, President of the Supreme Council of Customs and the Director General of customs, Mr. Raymond Khoury, who both have the most difficult task of securing most of State revenue today.

I must also express my great gratitude to those who stand by our side from among the international partners and call on them to increase their support, including Mr. François Spurrier, Representative of the Ambassador of France to Lebanon, Ms. Alicia Scarcella, Representative of the European Union, Mr. Khalil Dinguizli, Representative of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Ms. Melanie Hochstein, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program, and Ms. Gilan El-Messiri, Representative of UN Women, and the World Bank team here present (Misses Lina Fares, Lina Tutunji and Mona Couzi).

To my second family at the Institute, there are no words that express my profound respect for your commitment and heartfelt appreciation for your courage and determination.

Finally,

A big thanks to all of you who came today to share these moments and express your support.

Thanks to you, defeat is no destiny.