

**Remarks by Walid Maalouf
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**International Conference for the Lebanese Students of the World
Los Angeles, California
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These two days have been very unique for me; it has been quite an experience to meet so many students from all over the world who speak different languages with different habits and customs. Yet you have one heritage and one culture in common that brought you together and that is your Lebanese ancestry.

What a great idea and what a huge task to undertake thanks to the Lebanese Campus Link and its leadership who made this link possible this weekend. I myself came to this country as a student some 26 years ago, and I participated in student associations. As far as I remember, this is the first student conference of this kind that has taken place since the one I attended in Washington organized by the Lebanese Student Association in the early 1980's.

I congratulate you for this achievement and I hope you keep pressing on because students have a great role to play in shaping the future of nations. It is so fitting to launch this Campus Link idea by honoring an American hero whose life was taken 22 years ago on the premises of an American university abroad and in your ancestral country Lebanon. Reading Malcolm Kerr's biography you feel he never left Lebanon, and when he left he wanted to return. He felt this strong attachment, this commitment, and this urge to be there where he was born, where he grew up and where he ultimately lost his life. And today the Lebanese students worldwide came back to Malcolm to honor his life and to tell him that we have not forgotten him and his legacy will live on not only through his family, but also through his larger family -- the Lebanese students who have not forgotten.

Through my Public Diplomacy presentations to Lebanese American groups around the nation I speak often of the strong link between the United States and Lebanon. Because of the migration, which started in the early 1800's, you now see Americans of almost five consecutive generations of Lebanese ancestors. But there is another strong link between our two countries - 269 Americans lost their lives between 1976 and 2002 defending freedom and democracy in Lebanon and serving our country's principles and Malcolm Kerr was one of them.

I know you don't want to talk about political affairs, but I just want to make one point to you. For years change has not been possible in Lebanon and today it is. You can not be sure how long this window of opportunity will stay open. Seize the day; don't leave it to somebody else. Young people around the world are making a difference and Lebanon

needs you now. You are the future Lebanese leaders. To build a new Lebanon, however, you need to learn from the past. If there is one thing I have learned in the United States it is the importance of religious and ethnic tolerance. We all know how the lack of tolerance and unity almost destroyed your country. So be genuinely tolerant toward each other. United, you can build a new Lebanon.

From the Marshall Plan, which rebuilt Europe after World War II, to the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, the American people have been looking beyond the oceans to help others regain themselves and their dignity. I was one of the recipients of this generous spirit. I came to this land of opportunity on a private Lebanese scholarship spearheaded by a Lebanese American, Sister Mary Michel Boulus, then the President of Sacred Heart College in a small town called Belmont in the State of North Carolina.

My personal experience in America has been unique and intriguing. For a student coming from Beirut in 1979 to be named 23 years later by the President of the United States to posts in New York and Washington, DC is amazing. I've learned here how to be a team player, how to be persistent, how to believe in myself, how to be thankful, how to forgive and how to dream, because often, in America, dreams come true.

I also found America a unique place where an immigrant like myself could learn to navigate the political process and reach his goals. I learned here that everything is possible if you make the right choices and nothing is impossible if you do it the right way.

Kahlil Gibran said: "**Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.**" It is you who shape your own image. You call the shots for your future. You draw your own road map with the way you handle yourself, the way you behave and act with others. Take always the high road and keep positive. Don't get into small silly fights that do not take you anywhere. Never ever think when you try to harm someone that it will stay hidden and hush hush. Things get out and the truth always prevails. What you are in public you must be in private.

One thing you must not compromise; never ever forget your heritage. **"He who denies his heritage has no heritage"**. Be proud of who you are and where you come from. Stand firm with your principle. This is why Lebanon was saved after 29 years of occupation, because of one American who stands on principle, President George W. Bush said recently at Kansas State University: **"When you make decisions, you've got to stand on principle. If you're going to make decisions, you've got to know what you believe. I guess the best way to summarize me is I came from Texas and I'm going back to Texas with the exact same values I had when I arrived in Washington, D.C."**

Stand firm with your belief. Stand firm with your principles. Don't waiver and don't yield. Be proud of who you are, you are the future of a better Lebanon and a better world.

God bless you and thank you very much.