

Conference

The Art of Dialogue

18 - 19 October 2016

Beirut, Phoenicia Hotel

Concept Note

The term “dialogue” seems ubiquitous in the Lebanese discourse, whether in the political or in the non-political realm. It has a positive connotation even when talking about the futility of dialogue between the Lebanese themselves, as long as there are foreign powers involved in Lebanese affairs, be that a negative or a positive involvement, which are not engaged in a dialogue among themselves in this regard – or as long as the rule of law in Lebanon stands inactive as it currently does. In any case, dialogue remains an imperative for peaceful coexistence in any given community. It is specifically important in diverse communities characterized by plurality, which remain on a continuous quest for seeking a consensus. Those societies must seek consensus through taking actions to achieve this consensus in deeds and not just in words with regard to the basic and fundamental national choices, whether those are internal or external in facing active foreign conflicting interventions.

The basic questions that prompted the invitation to this conference under the title “The Art of Dialogue” are the following:

1. What do we mean by the term “dialogue”? Is it the narrow sense that excludes negotiation and debate and exceeds disclosure? Or is it a discourse that encompasses these forms of communication to some extent, but remains managed in order to seek practical solutions to problems or the right opinions in issues? How can we make sure that such a dialogue will not be reduced to just affirming attitudes toward such problems and issues and thereby turning them into a chronic cause?
2. Whether we talk about dialogue in the narrow sense or in a wider sense, the question is: Are there specific and clear rules that should govern dialogue and set the conditions for it to be genuine? And will this then be a real dialogue or will it merely be a means of delay in order to buy time? Will it be a way to avoid confrontations, to evade enforcing the law or a failure to ensure adherence to that law?
3. Based on the answers to the two previous questions, what are the impediments and obstacles hindering dialogue? Are these impediments and obstacles internal or external? Are they cultural, social or political? Are they rather fleeting and circumstantial or are they fixed and structural – as it shows in the Lebanese experience in comparison with other regional or international experiences.
4. In order to remove the impediments and to address the obstacles, what could be practical and appropriate proposals on short and medium terms on all levels, be it individual and family, society and community, the national or the international discourse?

Within this framework and bearing in mind the limits of a two-day conference, we found it appropriate to undertake the quest for answers to the questions raised above. Hence we have the honor to invite you as our guest and valuable participants to share the discussions as well as the outcomes and recommendations of this conference, the topic of which we believe are timely and important.