

Beirut Human Rights Week at USJ

10 to 14 december

Campus de l'innovation et du sport



On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, the USJ Institute of Political Science (ISP) organized the Beirut Human Rights Week for the week of Dec. 10-14, 2018, bringing together an array of renowned figures and academics both from Lebanon and abroad.

The symposium was launched with speeches by Karim Bitar, Acting Director of ISP, Manfred Nowak, Secretary General of the European Inter-University Center for Human Rights and Democratisation, Christina Lassen, the European Union Ambassador to Lebanon, and Prof. Salim Daccache, s.j., Rector of USJ.

In his address, Prof. Salim Daccache stated that “one of the main achievements of the charter is the affirmation of a key principle, that of the absolute dignity of the human person. Based on this, though we are faced with multiple requests for the revision or amendment of the charter, or even for the drafting of countercharters in the name of ideological or religious principles, nothing in the world should question this principle of dignity.”

“If we take the dignity of the human person as a standard,” added the Rector, “we can only note that reality does not lie in favor of the respect of human rights in Lebanon and the Arab world. The problem is not only related to governments and state institutions, nor is it limited to religious institutions. It is also linked to social traditions that are firmly anchored in a patriarchal culture that considers the dignity of the group to trump the dignity of the individual. For an academic institution such as USJ, it is obvious that a pioneering experience like ARMA (Arab Master’s in Democracy and Human Rights) is a way to raise awareness and train people to have the necessary skills to deal with the most negative of human rights circumstances.”

Prof. Daccache concluded, “Taking into account its long experience with the culture of human rights and the fact that it was one of the first signatories of the Human Rights Charter, it is certain that Lebanon must perpetuate this beautiful mission initiated by Charles Malek in 1947.”

The Rector’s speech was followed by a ceremony during which the human rights prize was awarded to five Lebanese NGOs and their founders: Rabab Sadr for the Imam Sadr Foundation, Wadad Halawani for the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon, Pierre Issa for Arcenciel, Kamel Mhanna for the Amel Association, and Melhem Khalaf for Offre-Joie.

Monday’s sessions were marked by the speeches of former Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki, Permanent Observer of the ICRC to the UN Robert Mardini, and former Director of this body’s Middle Eastern branch, former Minister Charbel Nahas, as well as a large number of academics.

Tuesday, debates were centered on the theme of “Skepticism and adversity facing human rights: national experiences and regional issues”, including sessions on issues such as “Human rights in the age of dictators and populists”, and an analysis of the situation post-Arab Spring.

Wednesday, a workshop on “Freedom of expression in all its states” was held, organized with the Institut français du Liban and the Samir Kassir Foundation. It looked into “the future of the media and freedom of expression at the level of the economic model”, and focused on the theme of “Media, arts, sexuality, censorship, and freedom of expression in illiberal democracies”. The numerous participants also took part in a tour jointly organized by ISP and UNHCR in Beirut and Saida to inquire about the situation of Palestinian refugees. Films on democracy and human rights

were screened Wednesday night at the Institut français, including the world premiere of the documentary “The Declaration” on the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the presence of its director, Rawan Damen of Jordan.

Thursday, a roundtable on “Combating violence against women” was organized with the Canadian Embassy in Lebanon, and the Ambassador, Emmanuelle Lamoureux, was present. Finally, on Friday, the theme of the day was “Human rights as an instrument for full citizenship: political participation and election”, in partnership with UNDP.