

On behalf of the Michel Chiha Foundation, I would like to thank and congratulate the American University of Beirut and especially Professor Samir Khalaf and his colleagues, for the excellent organization of this competition.

We also congratulate wholeheartedly the five students receiving the Michel Chiha Award. But let's not forget the great number of participants whose work deserves attention and encouragement and to whom we wish great success in the pursuit of their studies.

As a token of our appreciation, The Chiha Foundation will post on the Michel Chiha website, the winning essays as well as three others, to be announced.

The great interest in the subject of the Near East, shows quite obviously to what extent our young people are still concerned today, by this problem. Indeed, it has preoccupied and shaken this part of the world for more than two generations.

Michel Chiha's body of work covers a whole range of themes and subjects that deal with politics, morality, economy, spirituality etc...But his writings on the tragic destiny of Palestine, bloodstained by the violent and unjustified settlement of a foreign body, in its midst, are SO relevant, that they give the reader, apart from a few details, the impression that they were written today.

This is why the book entitled Palestine, was republished last year by the British Publishing House Stacey International, and the Chiha Foundation, with good reason, chose this subject for our 2009 annual competition.

It was a real pleasure reading all of your essays and noticing that most participants have shown a great deal of political awareness and knowledge.

Almost all the essays submitted underline the fact that the wound remains open, and that we still witness today local, regional and international consequences, that will up heave the near and middle east until justice is done.

It is Chiha's foreseeing of these disastrous consequences, their extent and their duration, three quarters of a century ago, that gave his work a quasi prophetic aspect, which makes us want to read and comment Chiha today, and probably for many years to come.

I would like to point out that most of the students concluded their essay with a certain optimism and the hope for a forthcoming solution, a hope that we all share with them.

For the competitions in the years to come, we will request working on other aspects of Chiha's works, notably his liberalism and his faith in the Lebanese Nation, as a model of harmonious coexistence between different cultures and different religions.

To the young people who are forging their future in this prestigious University at a time where the outcome of the days ahead are difficult to predict, I hope that the errors of the past will not affect our coexistence. The ideas and writings of Michel Chiha might be for them a source of inspiration to unite and go forward together.

Thank you all for your attention and please allow me to introduce Mrs Isabelle Doumet Skaff, granddaughter of Michel Chiha and member of the Foundation.