

### **Intervention of HE Michel Eddé :**

When Michel Chiha died on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1954 at the age of sixty three, Lebanon suffered a great loss. Today, the Lebanese still miss the brilliant presence of an outstanding man, a man of culture, a poet, a journalist, a politician, a remarkable banker in the world of finance and economics, and a Christian believer filled with an exceptional and noble sense of humanistic values.

Michel Chiha was born in the town of Bmekkine in Lebanon in 1891. He was a brilliant student at Saint Joseph Jesuit University in Beirut. His early interest in his country's public affairs forced him to flee Lebanon in 1915 and take refuge in Cairo-Egypt escaping Ottoman persecution. Michel Chiha returned home from his exile in 1919 after Lebanon was liberated from the Ottoman yoke and placed under French Mandate while neighbouring Palestine was placed under British Mandate.

Under those new circumstances, Lebanon had to be recreated as a modern independent state, it was imperative to rethink Lebanon in the context of its new configuration. I believe that the first and most important person to take notice and rise to that historic mission was Michel Chiha. This at a time when Palestine was showing signs of grave concern, as well as the beginning of growing unrest especially after Lord Balfour's Declaration in 1917 to create "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine in response to the pressure exercised by the "International Zionist Organization", and while the Zionist project in Palestine was being openly advocated. Consequently, Michel Chiha had both to focus on his primary Lebanese mission, and also to confront the idea that certain limited Lebanese circles had started to promote of a "national Christian state" in Lebanon.

From the outset, Michel Chiha sensed the danger that would eventually threaten Lebanon as well if the project succeeded that sought to destroy Palestine's basic character known throughout history for its religious Christian, Islamic, and Jewish diversity, and replace it with a single religion and a single ethnicity. Chiha had probably realized that to shield it against that danger the unique nature of Lebanon would have to be enshrined in its constitution. In that respect, Chiha was among the early pioneers who drew attention to Lebanon's uniqueness.

The great majority of Lebanese, the Christians in particular, were swift to denounce the idea of a "national Christian state" in Lebanon openly and categorically; they considered that it contradicted the basic essence of Lebanon as a society formed spontaneously of communities who, though not uniform in religion or in sects, were agreed on a unique formula of coexistence based on diversity. Michel Chiha had to interpret this special nature and embed it in the text of the Lebanese constitution when he was chosen, following his election in 1925 as a representative for Beirut, to sit on the parliamentary committee charged with the drafting of this constitution. This is exactly what he did. Furthermore, he was not just a member on the committee, but he was the one who actually drafted the constitution of 1926, and was rightfully considered the philosophical author of the Lebanese formula.

Meanwhile, parallel to Lebanon's political evolution that led to its independence in 1943, the conditions in Palestine were steadily worsening. In particular, Jewish immigration into Palestine was increasing, and the number of Jewish settlements on Palestinian land was growing. Those organic changes were obviously taking place in step with the Zionist project which, with the claim of finding "a solution to the Jewish problem", was succeeding in attracting the sympathy of many in the West.

The Jews began to claim a state for their people. This in turn, was rejected by the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab countries. With spreading talk and action towards the establishment of that state through the partition of Palestine, Michel Chiha's feel of the danger for both Palestine and Lebanon also grew. The partition of Palestine on confessional and racial bases would deal a fatal blow to Palestine as the setting of religious diversity, openness, and cultural plurality and to Lebanon as well as distinguished by the same attributes.

With this in mind, Michel Chiha found himself devoting the last ten years of his life to the Palestinian problem. That was clearly manifested in his writings, published today in English for the first time, that date back to the period between 1944 and 1954; that is four

years before the creation of the state of Israel and six years after that. He exercised his foresight in analyzing the realities implied by the Zionist project for Palestine. He warned against its destructive consequences which he categorically believed would transcend the territorial space of Palestine itself to shake the whole world. As he wrote on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1947 :

*"The decision to partition Palestine through the creation of a Jewish State is one of the gravest errors of contemporary politics. Something which seems minor will produce the most surprising of consequences. It can reasonably be said that this minor matter will shake the world to its foundations."* (Palestine, p. 58)

The events that have taken place during the past sixty years validate Michel Chiha's opinion which held that the Zionist project would not only fail to solve the "Jewish problem" but would eventually cause another problem of international dimensions, which is the Palestinian problem.

Michel Chiha warned sixty years ago, on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1948, that *"the Jewish Agency should take care not to further endow its insane venture in Palestine with the features of a religious war"*; in his opinion this would lead to an evil he called *"Religious wars [that] have never taken on any other shape. They have never begun in any other way"* (p. 63).

Isn't it true that part of what is now being discussed and so-called "the clash of civilizations" is fundamentally a war of religions which is to a large extent the product of the Zionist extremism that sowed its first seeds in the early stages of the tragedy in Palestine?

In his perceptive vision of the future, Chiha went even further when he wrote on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944, that is 64 years ago:

*"Don't they realize, those who defend the past, that they were bound to lose the loftiest of their virtues in this adventure ? and that the second generation (where the first had failed), or the third at the most, would be despite everything similar to Israel dormant in the ancient times; to the fatigued antique Israel?"*<sup>1</sup>

An Israeli bears witness today to these disastrous Israeli facts that Michel Chiha had predicted then: Avraham Burg, Labour MP, Speaker of the Knesset from 1999- 2003 and former chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel who announced the end of Zionism in an article he published in *Yediot Aharonot* (translated and adapted by *The Guardian* on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2003, appeared also in *The Washington Post* and ,in French, in *Le Monde*).<sup>2</sup> Burg literally starts his article thus: *"Zionism is dead; its aggressors are occupying the seats of power in Jerusalem...The Israeli nation today rests on an ugly mountain of corruption, oppression, and injustice. The end of the Zionist enterprise is at our doorstep. There is a real chance that ours will be the last generation."* *We are no more than a state of settlements, run by an amoral clique of corrupt lawbreakers who are deaf both to their citizens and to their enemies... The countdown has started for Israeli society."*

Burg, holding Premier Ariel Sharon to account says, *"The prime minister should present the choices forthrightly: Jewish racism or democracy. Settlements, or hope for both peoples. False visions of barbed wire, or a recognized international border between two states and a shared capital in Jerusalem."*

However, unfortunately, extremist Zionist leaders did not approve of that opinion; instead, they held on firmly to what Chiha called elsewhere the "spread of their exclusive will".

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation appeared in the Introduction to the original French version, p. 13: *« Ne craignent-ils pas, ces tenants du passé, que leurs vertus les plus hautes, ils les perdent dans cette aventure et que la seconde génération (à défaut de la première), ou la troisième au plus, ressemble malgré tout à l'Israël endormi de naguère, à l'Israël fatigué de jadis ? »*

<sup>2</sup> Burg, Avraham. The end of Zionism. *The Guardian*. Monday September 15, 2003  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/comment/0,10551,1042071,00.html>

Chiha's agile mind, and his pure spirit of humanism, began to explore the bases on which peace with Israel should be founded. In this context, Chiha declared on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1952, "*We take the existence of Israel to be an established fact and it is not a question of throwing the Israelis into the sea.*" (p. 128) Chiha was a pioneer in considering that the problem with Israel was a problem of **borders** not a problem of **existence**. Since the extremist Zionist project refuses to delineate any borders for this state but seeks to expand its area continually, Chiha insisted that peace with Israel should be on the basis of fixed borders, the return of the refugees, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state—not an entity appended to Jordan, and on the internationalization of Jerusalem to save it from Judaization.

Moreover and from the Lebanese perspective, Chiha was able to foresee the dimensions of the escalating tragedy in Palestine. I believe this gave him early on a unique insight into the nature of the Zionist plan as it reached its climax in the foundation of a Jewish State, and into the risks of catastrophic danger it embodied, and its subsequent fatal threat to the countries in the region and the world if nothing were done to halt it.

After the partition of Palestine, Lebanon itself was overwhelmed by large groups of Palestinian refugees numbering then more than ten percent of the Lebanese population. The refugee problem in Lebanon became a very complex internal issue that caused demographic, security, economic, and social dangers that threatened the state, its structure, and its very existence.

From the very beginning, Israel regarded Lebanon as a target to be destroyed not only because Israel openly coveted its land and its waters, but essentially because Lebanon's formula of religious diversity exposed Israel's mono-religious and mono-racial structure. Israel considered—and still does—that the destruction of the Lebanese formula is a crucial need in order to prove to the world the impossibility of a multi-religious state surviving in the region.

When the decision makers in Israel are obsessed by ancient times, "advocates of the past" (les tenants du passé) as Chiha called them, when they openly declare that their plan does not stop at Palestine alone in the first place, they engender a fanaticism which claims its affiliation to Judaism or wants to speak in its name. This paves the way and is the basis for the rise of other fundamentalist groups in response claiming that they speak in the name of Islam with which they identify. Consequently the entire world geography becomes a stage for terrorism which, in Chiha's earlier quoted words, "*Shake[s] the world to its foundations*" (Palestine, p. 58).

Despite Israel's occupation of the whole land of Palestine, and other Arab territories and despite its aggressive wars, it failed to annihilate the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause. Furthermore, it failed to force the Arabs to surrender to it and accept its hegemony over the fate of the Arab world.

In this respect, Israel's history is the history of its categorical and systematic rejection of a fair and peaceful solution to the Arab Palestinian-Israeli conflict and continuous foiling of every proposed initiative or plan for probable solutions. This has been its practice since its creation as a state and until now.

In 1952, two journalists, one English and one American, put a question to the then Israeli President Haim Wiseman, "How do you envisage a solution to the Palestinian problem?" He pondered for a moment, and replied, "There are problems that have no solution. They simply grow old." (« *Il y a des problèmes qui n'ont pas de solution. Ils vieillissent seulement* ».)

In the context of this strategic policy, Israel continued to carry out its plan to destroy the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) which was a national and secular liberation movement, with the hope of liquidating the Palestinian people and its national cause at the same time. After the outbreak of the first Palestinian *Intifada* in 1987, and the emergence of the religious Islamic movement "Hamas" in opposition to the secular Fatah organization, Israel believed that turning a blind eye to that new movement would serve its goal of destroying Fatah and distorting the liberal and secular character of the Palestinian resistance, ultimately tainting it with the character of a religious war launched by Islam

against Judaism. Israel believed that this would eventually rally the sympathy and support of the West and the Christian countries, and eventually destroy the Palestinian resistance as a national liberation movement.

However, Israel was disappointed after discovering that " Hamas " itself was a Palestinian liberation movement, albeit a religious one. Israel then resorted to declaring a war with the aim of liquidating Hamas and the Palestinian people altogether.

This catastrophic policy adopted by Israel opened the doors wide to the form of international nihilistic terrorism that then entered the battlefield, its best example being " Al-Qaida ". So, instead of achieving its goal of throwing the Palestinian people into despair and frustration forcing them to surrender, which would have dealt the Palestinian cause a deadly blow, Israel subjected an entire people to coercion and made them the victim of that new wave of unbridled international terrorism.

This systematic, undeterred, victimization of the Palestinian people has also aroused throughout the Islamic countries, negative and angry responses towards the West in general considering those countries in their turn responsible for Israel's ill-treatment of the Palestinian people and denial of their fundamental rights. This turned those countries into fertile ground for the propagation of terrorism.

Hence, instead of restricting the battlefield to the land of Palestine, the field expanded through the spread of terrorism which took the whole world as its stage. In so doing, Israel was probably the main reason for terrorism to spread, take root and worsen. The most dangerous characteristic of terrorism is its capacity to become a prevalent culture and a way of living, and not just a strategy of political action for a party or a movement.

So, is there any solution to this destructive threat ?

The Israeli situation using Israeli mechanisms is incapable of coming up with a sound stand or an acceptable peaceful solution that could save Israel itself from the unprecedented and escalating crisis it is suffering as an entity.

The political stability that Israel enjoyed for 29 years, since its creation in 1948 up until 1977, under the Labour Party, started to shake and erode gradually. The second period of stability that lasted for 15 years during the period in office of the Likud beginning in 1977 and ending in 1992 also ended with the fall of Yitzhak Shamir's government. After that, Israel fell into a period of continuous and frequent political turmoil that started in 1995 after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and is still going on.

No Israeli government has completed its constitutional term. The governments of Shimon Perez, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Ehud Barak fell successively; Sharon's first government lasted only for two years, and his second was unable to finish its term due to his serious illness. Sharon was succeeded by Ehud Olmert whose cabinet is constantly exposed to serious political tremors.

During that period which extended over 12 years, Israel held five early parliamentary elections, a fact which is a sign of structural instability.

This phenomenon of instability is a consequence of the Israeli electoral system based on absolute proportional representation, and allows for the representation of very small groups in the Knesset, from the extreme right to the extreme left. This makes it impossible for a homogeneous majority to rule Israel and take decisions on crucial matters, mainly the peace process.

Now, as for the United States of America, the reality is that the influence of the Zionist lobby has to a large extent prevented that superpower from playing a constructive role.

Let us recall that most American presidents who tried during their first presidential term to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict were opposed by the Zionist lobby. President Nixon did not complete his second term after having initiated a sound peace settlement for the Arab-Israeli conflict and fell into the " Watergate " trap. President Carter failed to secure a second term following the Geneva Peace conference he initiated, and President Bush Senior met the same fate, after backing the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991. As for

Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, neither expressed serious interest in seeking a solution to the Palestinian problem until the fourth year of their second presidential term, which meant that they could not achieve any tangible results in a very limited period of time.

The Arabs for their part have proposed a solution. For the first time in the history of the Arab Israeli conflict, all the Arab countries, without exception, declared in the Beirut Summit meeting in 2002, and then in the Riyadh Summit meeting in 2007, their willingness to recognize Israel and live peacefully with it based on a permanent, just, and comprehensive peace enjoyed by all the countries in the region including Israel itself but on condition of establishing an independent and viable Palestinian State with Arab Jerusalem as its capital, the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied Arab territories, and solving the Palestinian refugee problem by allowing their return to the prospective Palestinian State.

A few years ago, the United Nations celebrated the admission of a new member to its ranks, Nauru, the area of which is no more than 21 square kilometers, and whose population is no more than 7000.

But the long established Palestinian people, whose population of over nine million is living in the West Bank and in the Gaza strip, as well as in camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and other Arab countries, are deprived of a land, a State, and an identity. In other words, these people do not exist in practice, and they are denied a natural legitimate status. So, how can the West, with its major powers, decision makers, elites, and millions and millions of citizens reconcile the ideals of freedom, democracy, humanitarian justice, and international legitimacy on the one hand with keeping silent about that terrifying injustice, and the continued persecution and the putting to death of an entire people?

In the face of the current deadlock in reaching a solution to the Palestinian problem, I believe that publishing this book now in English bears a great and exceptional importance. The futuristic vision that characterized the writings of Michel Chiha 65 years ago is clearly manifested today in all its catastrophic facts; however, the distinguished features of this book lie also in its publication in this country considered the cradle of democracy, that is the United Kingdom whose deep-rooted heritage and modern history affirm the rejection of oppression and injustice.

On the other hand, it is inconceivable that the ideals of Judaism should be deformed by those who claim to exercise oppression in the name of those ideals; especially that the Jewish people have originally suffered a great deal of oppression and persecution throughout history.

Allow me here to bring back to mind the rabbi who lived during the times of Jewish persecutions in Russia and Poland during the seventeenth century. That rabbi prayed to God saying, "Oh Lord, let my fate be that of the persecuted not the persecutors."

In the end, allow me to commend the remarkable preface of Mr. Christopher Doyle to the English edition of this book, and the comprehensive and insightful profound introduction, also to the English edition, prepared by Professor Samir Khalaf.

I also would like to offer my deepest gratitude and thanks to "Michel Chiha Foundation" and the "Centre for Lebanese Studies", and "Stacey International Publishers" who were responsible for holding this gathering which I consider to be a serious contribution to the promotion of a healthy atmosphere, appropriate for reaching a fair solution to the Palestinian problem; a solution capable of saving the peoples of the region, and all its countries including Israel, from the labyrinth of wars and destruction.