

# Alternative Approaches to Conflict Resolution in Lebanon

George Irani and Sami Baroudi,

*Peace cannot be equated only with the cessation of military hostilities. It entails a firm commitment to conflict resolution in a manner that meets the interests of all. This issue is of substantial significance in Lebanon now that military confrontations have ended.*

BUC, Byblos, April 14-16, 1994

Keeping this in mind, Beirut University College (BUC) organized a conference examining non-military and non-political approaches as well as dimensions of conflict resolution. The conference's focus was reflected in its title: **Acknowledgment, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Alternative Approaches to Conflict Resolution in Lebanon.**

The theme of the colloquium centered on the premise that purely political approaches to conflict resolution in Lebanon are inadequate; they ought to be supplemented with cultural, anthropological and psychological approaches. Attention was devoted to a careful examination of these alternatives and their applicability to Lebanon. Some of the approaches discussed are indigenous to Lebanese and

Arab culture; others (while developed in a different cultural context, namely North American) are adaptable, perhaps, after significant modification, to the Lebanese condition.

One approach that stems from our Lebanese tradition is the time-honored method of **Sulha**

**(peace making)** still practiced within certain communities and in certain religiously mixed regions where multiple religious groups coexist. *Sulha* is used to resolve even multi-communal conflicts.

Acknowledgment and forgiveness are essential components of the *Sulha* tradition. For *Sulha* to



Left to Right: Dr. Riyad Nassar, Ms. Lori King-Irani, Dr. Merle Leskoff, Dr. George Irani, Dr. Nabeel Haidar

*Forgiveness is an essential component of the Sulha tradition. For Sulha to work, conflicting parties must be willing to forgive.*



work, conflicting parties must acknowledge each other's rights and be willing to forgive. To forgive, however, does not mean to forget past injustices and pain or to allow others to inflict more pain in the future. Through the process of acknowledgment and forgiveness, the *Sulha* tradition is chosen so that participants can overcome the victimization syndrome.

Psychological approaches to conflict resolution include more than acknowledgment and forgiveness. On the conference's second day, Dr. Merle Lefkoff, an internationally acclaimed facilitator, led two consecutive workshops designed to increase communication between parties that hitherto had not had meaningful dialogues. The morning workshop focused on how to conduct negotiations successfully and participants were asked to practice active listening. They were encouraged to identify common interests that could

make it possible for them to move away from preset dispositions. The afternoon workshop was designed to help participants open up to others and frankly discuss their problems. On the last day of the conference, a number of conference participants planted an olive tree to underline their commitment to seeing lasting peace emerge in Lebanon.

Conference follow-up has begun in earnest. The first activity involves revising and updating some of the academic papers of participants dealing with the **causes and consequences of the Lebanese conflict and the relevance of acknowledgment, forgiveness and reconciliation**. The second includes research to be conducted by two task forces that have already been formed: one is charged with investigating perceptions of others and stereotyping in post-war Lebanon; the other concentrates on the problems of the physically chal-

lenged. These task forces will submit their reports in six months. The tangible product will be production of an edited publication (George Irani and Laurie King-Irani, editors) including the main papers of presenters, the reports of the task forces and proceedings of the conference.

In a follow-up evaluation of the conference one of the comments read as follows: *Women seemed better able to understand and adopt the concepts of acknowledgment and forgiveness.* George Irani also stated that he thought that if Lebanon was to be "saved," it would be the women who would do it.

— *George Irani,*  
Assistant Professor,  
Social Science Division,  
Coordinator of Conference

— *Samir Baroudi,*  
Assistant Professor,  
Social Science Division

*On the last day of the conference, a number of participants planted an olive tree to underline their commitment to seeing lasting peace in Lebanon.*