

POLITICAL BEGINNINGS\POLITICAL CAREER

Dr. Basil Fuleihan once remarked that the most important role and responsibilities he had as an MP were to modernize the economy, including revising laws that govern economic activity; and promoting civil liberties to ensure the human rights of the citizens of Lebanon. A liberal, progressive and enlightened thinker, he had a genuine concern for the welfare of Lebanon and worked determinedly to establish its success.

Dr. Fuleihan was born in Lebanon in 1963. He earned his undergraduate degree from the American University of Beirut where he majored in Economics, and graduated with distinction in 1984. Dr. Fuleihan earned a Masters degree in International and Development Economics from Yale University, followed by a PhD in Economics from Columbia University in New York. His doctorate dissertation was entitled "Customs Unions, Growth and Economic Diversification".

Dr. Fuleihan began his professional career in 1988 as Advisor and then Senior Advisor to the Saudi Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund. With many opportunities for a lucrative and successful career with the IMF ahead of him, Dr. Fuleihan instead opted to return to Lebanon to put his knowledge and expertise to work for the country, which he firmly believed he could change for the better. So in 1993, he moved to Lebanon to serve as economic advisor to the Minister of Finance and as Director for the IBRD/UNDP Revenue Enhancement and Fiscal Management Project, where he remained until 1999. During the period 1994 to 2000, Dr. Fuleihan was also a lecturer in Economics at his alma mater, AUB.

Dr. Fuleihan was elected to the Lebanese Parliament in October 2000, winning the Protestant seat in Beirut's first electoral district, where he ran as a member of PM Hariri's "Dignity of Beirut" electoral list. He saw the seat as a chance to fulfill his sense of duty to his fellow citizens as a policy maker rather than as a provider of services. He promptly became the economic advisor to

the then Prime Minister Hariri, whose respect he had attained during his time as Director of the UNDP project at the Ministry of Finance.

He served as Minister of Economy and Trade between 2000 and 2003 and worked on the development and modernization of the ministry. During his tenure as Minister, he accelerated Lebanon's accession to the World Trade Organization and negotiated then signed on behalf of the Lebanese Government the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Agreement.

Dr. Fuleihan acted as the chief architect of Lebanon's economic and financial program presented to the Paris I and Paris II meetings (February 2001 and November 2002). In early 2002, he supervised preparations for, and subsequently chaired, the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League meeting that preceded the Arab Summit meeting in Beirut. He launched the modernization of a number of economic and trade-related laws, in particular in the fields of consumer protection, competition, food safety, e-commerce, automobile insurance and intellectual property rights.

In 2003, Dr. Fuleihan became the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on National Economy, Trade, Industry and Planning, where he championed the enactment of economic and trade-related legislation he had proposed to Parliament during his tenure as minister.

In 2004, the combination of the extension of the presidential mandate of Emile Lahoud, with the UN Security Council's enacting of Resolution 1559 (which called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon and the disbanding of all militias within Lebanon) caused the fractioning of Lebanese politics. The two resulting camps became known as Loyalists and Opposition, and were not divided along religious lines. A major point of contention between the two groups at this time was the redistricting of Beirut to manipulate representation in the government by artificially dividing Beirut's electoral districts.

Dr. Fuleihan, who had long supported the establishment of government reforms, notably the implementation of more equitable and modern electoral law, aligned with the Opposition party, and strongly supported the principles, goals and ideology of what came to be called "The Bristol Gathering".

In December 2004, The Bristol Gathering issued their first joint statement calling for Lebanon's "right to self-determination" from the Bristol Hotel. They demanded a fair and just electoral law and an impartial government to supervise the Parliamentary elections in May 2005.

Dr. Fuleihan returned to Beirut from Geneva to stand by and support MP Hariri's bloc in an extraordinary parliamentary session held on the morning of February 14, 2005. He felt duty bound to support Hariri, for the benefit of his fellow citizens, in their determination to modernize the electoral system in Lebanon. The session yielded no progress.

On their way back to former PM Hariri's home after the session, Basil Fuleihan and Rafic Hariri were the victims of a massive one-ton car bomb that killed Mr. Hariri instantly, and left Dr. Fuleihan with critical burns over 90% of his body. Dr. Fuleihan succumbed to his wounds in a Paris hospital on April 18, 2005.