Those Who Play with Human Lives

Al-Jumhuriya, 25 January 1956.

How much hope humanity has invested in the United Nations and its Security Council, and what effort it expended in establishing them, and what money it has spent and continues to spend upon them! And how slight and trifling is what humanity has reaped from them since their founding until they had spent ten years of their existence — years in which they spared people nothing, and in which they did not restrain evil from people. Rather, the two of them incited enmity and hatred among them, filled their hearts with rancor, malice, and grudge, emboldened the oppressors in their oppression until they exceeded every bound in it, and drove the oppressed to despair of justice until they despaired of it utterly, and took pessimism, suspicion, and ill opinion as the foundation of their lives, and the basis of every bond between themselves and other people.

These are the ones whom humanity charged with establishing right among its peoples and with building for it a complete and comprehensive peace, founded upon a justice that takes up the cause of the weak against the strong, that does right by the wronged against the wrongdoer, and that secures all people from fear, aggression, and hostility. Yet they have accomplished nothing of this, nor have they even attempted to accomplish anything of it; for they did not themselves believe in it, deep within themselves, and instead they set about performing this grave task of theirs as actors who sometimes perform well and sometimes err, filling people's hearts every day with grief and pain, and making them taste every day the bitterness of disappointed hopes and false expectations; and by these I mean those of whom the United Nations is composed from one year to the next, and those of whom the Security Council is composed from time to time.

The United Nations met at the end of this past summer, and among the problems presented to it was the problem of Algeria, and the hardship being poured upon its people, and the schemes devised against them, and the blood of theirs being shed and the lives of theirs being destroyed; because they demand to be free, to be secure from fear, to be protected from aggression, and to attain the dignity which the Charter of the United Nations has decreed to be the right of man as man, not as one who belongs to this state or that, or lives in this country or that.

This problem was a case between a weak people — the Algerian people — and a strong state — France; and it seemed to people that the United Nations had taken its Charter seriously, and had resolved to establish justice between the two adversaries without regard to the fact that one was weak and the other strong, and so it accepted the Algerian question among the problems it was to study in that session, and joy spread through every quarter of the earth, and people's hearts were filled with delight and hope, and their tongues proclaimed that justice was assured beyond doubt, even if it came to people slowly and deliberately. But the strong adversary flew into a rage and seethed with fury, and arrogance seized it in its wrongdoing, so that it grew too haughty even for judgment, and refused to stand in the position of the accused and to defend itself before a weak adversary possessing neither power nor resource; and so it left the United Nations to turn without an axis and wander without a path, and returned to Paris angry and resentful, relying on its strength, exulting in its might, defiant with the means of violence and chastisement it possessed. And it was no time at all before the United Nations grew troubled by this anger, then was thrown into turmoil by it, then submitted to what there was no choice but to submit to; so it postponed the case indefinitely, and went to France seeking to appease and conciliate it, and left the Algerians to death, which snatches them away from where they know and from where they do not know, and left them to injustice, which is poured upon them morning and evening, and gave leave for justice to return to its resting-place, to sleep and sink into slumber, until it might be granted a waking on some day, or might not be granted a waking on any day.

And France returned to the United Nations secure and triumphant, having raised its head in arrogance and extended its hand in reconciliation, and the Assembly was utterly reassured; for the beloved had returned to the beloved, and the friend was content with the friend, and the gathering was reunited after its parting, and the United Nations was content with its own well-being, while blood continued to flow in Algeria in rivers, and we found ourselves reading, in the French newspapers themselves, that a hundred Algerians had been killed in the first four days of the past week, and then reading, in some telegraphic dispatches, that more than three hundred Algerians had been killed in that very same week.

And there is no harm in any of this, so long as France is content with the United Nations, and so long as the United Nations is content with

France; as for the lives destroyed, the blood spilled, and the families struck with grief — these are merely instruments for the powerful to play with, neither less nor more than that.

A few days ago, the Security Council met — and what do you know of the Security Council? It is the supreme body that curbs the tyranny of the tyrannical, restrains the oppression of the oppressors, punishes aggressors for their aggression, and makes of them an example to deter people in every quarter of the earth. This grave council met, and there was presented to it a case that it is a disgrace for civilized humanity even to exist, a disgrace for civilized humanity that it should be a matter for argument and discussion, that any dispute or debate should be conducted over it. For the great powers wished to play with the small, and so they disturbed the secure and the tranquil out of the security and tranquility in which they had been living, and unleashed upon them their plaything, which sheds their blood, slaughters their sons, drives them from their homes, and scatters them over the earth in every manner of scattering, and they looked on as it did all this with their assistance and support, rejoicing and exulting, having created a state out of nothing, and set it in authority over lives, blood, and wealth, and imposed it upon history by sheer force, and then went on indulging it until it came to love tyranny and to delight in violating what ought not to be violated, desecrating what is sacred, and squandering rights. And it occurred to this plaything one day to raid its neighbor Syria, to take it by surprise, to kill, plunder, and capture, and its raiding force returned secure and content, as though it had done nothing and committed no sin and trampled no right. And why should it not do so, when the means of aggression had been laid open to it, when it had been given to feel secure from consequences, and when it had been permitted sins that are not permitted to others?

And the matter was presented to the Security Council, which pondered and weighed, advanced and retreated, moved forward and drew back, and then ruled and resolved that Israel was guilty, but would not be punished for its guilt; a culprit, but would not be held to account for its crime; condemned, but merely to be censured and warned, and then it was content with censure and warning, going no further; for in that, it judged, there was sufficiency, and more than sufficiency.

And one member of the Security Council said to the council: let there be, at the very least, that Israel be made to compensate Syria for her sons who were killed and the wealth that was lost; for that would be no punishment, but it would carry some measure of fairness. But the

council refused, and persisted stubbornly in its refusal, and its member judges put their fingers in their ears and said: it is enough for us that we have condemned Israel; for its condemnation is a great thing. Then the Security Council dispersed, having given leave for justice to return to its resting-place, to sleep and sink into slumber, until it might be granted a waking on some day, or might never be granted a waking for the rest of time.

As for the lives that were destroyed, the blood that was spilled, the families that were struck with grief, and the rights that were squandered — these are merely instruments to be played with, neither less nor more than that.

Will the Arabs still go on relying upon these players with human lives to do right by the wronged against the wrongdoers? And has the time not yet come for them to do right by themselves, with their own hands, now that the morning has grown bright for those with eyes to see?