

## ***Memories of Utopia- Infoshop, World Bank***

The following statement represents the personal views of the speaker, Nureddin Mannan, and the director, Najla Rizk, and does not constitute a USEF policy statement.

### ***Speaker***

- Mr. Nuraddin Mannan  
Nuraddin Mannan was born in Wadi Halfa, Sudan. He holds a BA in Geography and the Arabic language from University of Khartoum, Sudan (1974). Between November 1977-1989 Mr. Mannan worked as a senior Sudanese diplomat to the countries of India, Kingdom of Morocco, Republic of Chad & Cameroon Republic and the United States of America. In 1992 he founded the Kushite Nubian League in Washington DC and was the president until 2001. Since then he has been an active member and sits on the Board of Trustees of the Nubian American Association.
- The Nubian Benevolence Association

### ***Moderator***

- Ambassador Nicholas A. Velitoes

### ***Co-sponsor***

- World Bank

## **Nuraddin Mannan**

I come from the extreme north of Sudan, near the Egyptian border. Today's Nubia stretches from Lower Egypt to Dongola in Northern Sudan. There is no exact census for the Nubian population but some researchers estimate their number in Sudan for about 5 millions and about three millions in Egypt. One of the hottest and most arid regions of the world, the inhabitants are largely dependant on the Nile River for existence. The total Nubian population in Egypt were relocated in areas inhabited by Arabized Egyptians and likewise many Sudanese Nubians were relocated to Eastern Sudan.

The regions of Nubia, both in Sudan and Egypt, are considered by many historians to be the cradle of civilization. Nubia was an important trade route between sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world. Its rich culture and tradition of languages are seen in archaeological records, such as the Old Testament. Nubian culture can be described as peaceful, from its embrace of all three Abrahamic religions. It is the real corridor to both Egypt and Sudan.

Unfortunately, Nubian culture has been going through heavy process of cultural cleansing and Arabization within the past three to four decades despite an extensive effort to maintain language and tradition through music and stories. Hamza Eldin, the great Nubian musician, who passed away last week in San Francisco, was one of the first Nubians to introduce Nubian through music to an international audience.

Preservation of Nubian culture will help harmonize the Egyptian-Sudanese border. Yet, students are not allowed to speak the Nubian language in classrooms, both in Egypt and in Sudan. In the face of such injustice, international campaign is needed to save the Nubian civilization. When asked of their current state, Nubians reveal a sense of nostalgia. Our wish is to ultimately go back to the Old Nubia.

## SYNOPSIS OF “MEMORIES OF UTOPIA”

About 40 years ago, a large part of the land of Nubia was submerged. The Aswan dam was built to provide electricity for all of Egypt and push the country into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In doing so the largest ever man-made lake was created and forty-six villages were moved to Kom Ombo. Forty-six Nubian villages. One hundred thousand people were moved to a new location, no longer on the Nile River. It was the end of Nubia.

All the Nubians have today is the memory of their lost land. Those still alive that knew the old land, claim it was a real utopia. Even their children dream of a place they never saw but have been able to imagine, thanks to the vivid words and evocative songs of their elders. They speak of a land that “was blue with the Nile strip, green with the palm trees that banked it, and yellow at the foot of the desert hills.” A life very much connected to the ancient symbol of life: the Nile.

“Memories of Utopia” tells the story of a Nubian musician who travels from Egypt to the Sudan in search of the Nubian villages that were never flooded. As he travels down the Nile by boat, he meets many Nubians who have returned to their homeland, in search of the life they knew before they were forced to emigrate. Through song and music, everywhere Fikry stops he tries to recreate the long ago Nubian nights for him-self as well as those he meets along the way. This is a story of longing, of music and of self-discovery.

“When we say we love Nubia, we love it at its roots. The love starts from the house, the family, the environment (landscape?). The society is what forms the person. From childhood we were introduced to the silence and tranquillity. This is how we lived in Nubia. The Nubian village was in harmony: (with) the Nile, the palm trees, the houses, the mountains. Like a picture. From this environment we drank love and it is this picture that remains in my mind” – Mekky Seif El Din (Nubian writer).

(Rizk 2005)

### **Statement By The Director of *Memories Of Utopia*:**

I first came in contact with Fikry al Kachif in 1996 and through him, the Nubians living in Kom Ombo and Aswan. From that moment on, I went back whenever I could and the dream of trying to capture their spirit and way of life continued to nag at me. After finally succeeding in taking the trip with Fikry down the Nile in search of the villages never flooded, I was struck by how the Nubians were willing to go through incredible hardships in order to go back and live on the banks of the Nile. Their struggle to maintain their music, language and traditions was peaceful, non-violent and yet with a force and insistence that just emphasised the spirit that had impressed me from the beginning. (Rizk, 2006)

### **Biography And Filmography of Directors:**

#### NAJLA RIZK

Born in Canada in 1967, Najla then moved to Iran with her family until the revolution in 1979. She then moved to Cairo where her parents were from originally. She studied at the American school there then received her BA at the American University in Cairo, majoring in Political Science. Since graduation in 1990, Najla worked as a freelance journalist for several English language magazines then started her career in visual media first in advertising, then worked as the assistant to one of the leading cinema directors in Cairo. With him she assisted in all production and post-production phases of video clips and docu-mercials. In 1998, Najla moved to Italy to work as an assistant director and director in diverse live productions for an Arab satellite network. There, she wrote and directed 3 hour long programs about independent cinema in the Arab world. Since 2002, she worked as a promotion producer for another Arab satellite network and other movie channels based in Rome. “Memories of Utopia” is her first documentary which she wrote, independently produced and co-directed.

#### MARCO MORELLI

Marco was born in Rome in 1964, growing up in the center of the city as a typical Roman youngster: with a passion for sports, soccer and travel. He trained on a competitive level in swimming and continues to do so although he participates in many other sportive activities such as cycling, skiing and soccer. He studied as a cameraman at the college for cinema and television (CineTV) but from 1985 has worked as an editor for various Italian and Arab television programs and promotions. He completed 3 years in the department of anthropology at the Sapienza of Rome but his studies were interrupted due to work responsibilities. In 2004, he wrote and produced a documentary about Patagonia in Argentina which was aired on RAI 3 for a leading weekly touristic program. He now works full-time as a promo producer. Marco has co-produced and co-directed “Memories of Utopia”

To purchase *Memories of Utopia* DVD please contact Najla Rizk at najletto@hotmail.com.