

For Immediate Release



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## **AUB: KIP Conference a Forum for Diverse Voices Tackling Big Issues**

Since 2015, the Knowledge is Power (KIP) project has been building bridges between various stakeholders concerned about gender and sexuality issues in Lebanon. KIP's capstone initiative is their Multidisciplinary Conference on Discrimination and Sexual Harassment being held at the American University of Beirut (AUB) Olayan School of Business (OSB) on Friday, March 31 and Saturday, April 1.

Over two days, there will be thirteen panels, two plenary sessions, three workshops, and one keynote address, as well as an exhibition and poetry performance. Participants include artists, activists, researchers, students, and representatives from NGOs, government offices, and Ministries. The opening session began with AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri speaking about the broad nature of the conference's theme.

"The idea that in this society, or in any society around the world in the 21st century, individuals continue to be treated as inferior, or less, or different, just because of the biology of their birth is self-evidently and empirically repulsive—whether that means gender or gender identity, ethnic identity, or physical or mental disability, or age, or anything that certain groups or individuals might use as a weapon to unfairly exclude others during their journey of life," said President Khuri.

KIP Director Dr. Charlotte Karam, who is also associate dean for programs at OSB, thanked the US Department of State for their generous funding of KIP and thanked all those who have championed it and supported it—within and outside AUB—including a multitude of committed students.

“The impetus for this conference design, as you will see, is a focus on multidisciplinary, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity,” said Karam, “It comes from the KIP Project’s key aim which, from its inception, was to support and further build bridges across disciplines.”

Consul General Jewell Evans from the US Embassy in Lebanon reiterated the support of Ambassador Elizabeth Richard, and the Secretary of State’s Office of Global Women’s Issues, for the KIP project and its aim to promote gender equality and to end sexual discrimination and harassment.

“At stake is a more just society for all Lebanese: women and men, boys and girls alike. Such a society is bound to be more prosperous, stable, and democratic,” said Evans.

Abir Chebaro, representative of the Minister of State for Women’s Affairs and advisor to the Prime Minister for Women’s Affairs, spoke about a series of laws identified by the Ministry to address gender equality, including a law criminalizing sexual harassment in public places and at work.

“I am sure that our teaming-up to advocate for the implementation of the anti-harassment law and other projects will improve the development of our country, a goal that AUB has always tried to achieve,” said Chebaro, herself an AUB alumna.

The first plenary panel of the conference examined the current regulatory environment around anti-sexual harassment within the Lebanese context, and was co-hosted by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs.

MP Ghassan Moukheiber spoke about the importance of these types of partnerships between academia and government and about his efforts, now in collaboration with the Ministry of State for Women’s Affairs, to pass the anti-harassment law now before Parliament. This is a law originally drafted three years ago that was recently approved by the Council of Ministers and now goes to the Parliament.

“It is possible in the next legislative session of Parliament to have a law that criminalizes sexual harassment,” stated MP Moukheiber.

Other panelists included Colonel Joseph Musallam of the Internal Security Forces; Walid Nakib, head of the legal unit at the Former Prime Minister’s Office; Manar Zaiter, director of the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering; and Judge Arlette Tabet, an attorney general in Mount Lebanon. They addressed a variety of issues such as the need to enact laws while also addressing the underlying social dynamic in Lebanese society, and the importance of combatting racial and ethnic harassment as well.

The conference continues all day Friday and Saturday, in what promises to be an informative and illuminating two days. Concurrent panels will be delving into areas such as student activism related to discrimination, sexual harassment in the workplace, and marginalized groups in the Lebanese political sphere.

Other highlights include a workshop by Lina Khalifeh, founder of “SheFighter,” the first self-defense center for women in Jordan. The second day of the conference begins with a keynote address and discussion with world-renowned author and activist Nawal al Saadawi, and ends with a poetry performance by Zeina Hachem Beck, in collaboration with the AUB Theater Initiative.

As Dr. Karam said at the opening ceremony, addressing the broad aim of this conference: “Being better informed makes us better equipped to move forward with greater impact.”

ENDS

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**Note to Editors**

**About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor’s, master’s, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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