

150th Founders' Day
President Fadlo R. Khuri, MD Remarks
December 5, 2016

(After welcome and greetings to distinguished guests, excellencies, BOT members, Provost, Deans, Faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends of AUB)

Saturday, December 3—two days ago—marked 150 years to the day since our University opened its doors to its first students. It is an extraordinary thought that everything we see around us today started with that small number of faculty and students meeting in rented rooms here in Beirut a century-and-a-half ago.

L. P. Hartley's 1953 masterpiece, *The Go-Between*, reminds us in its opening sentence that 'the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there'. Indeed, the Syrian Protestant College, the name under which AUB first emerged, was a very different institution to what we have today. Founded by American evangelical missionaries, its purpose was to spread the gospel. The building we are sitting in today looks like a church because it once was one—a college chapel, the setting for daily Christian worship, mandatory for all students, regardless of their faith, or absence of faith.

The founding fathers—whom we honor today—did not achieve their pious, sincerely held, objective to convert the people of Lebanon to their faith. But they did plant the seeds for the equally sincere realization among their successors that the mission of service to humanity would be better advanced by providing secular education of the highest quality.

The last decades of the 19th century and first decades of the 20th century were the time that SPC/AUB went from Presbyterian proselytization to a different kind of evangelizing—to use a Roman Catholic word in a secular context that it was not coined for—the inculturation of secular, democratic, liberal values, embedding an aspiration for a better tomorrow by leading the development of Arab society, by teaching science, medicine, the arts and the humanities. They succeeded beyond their wildest expectations. Leaders trained at the American University of Beirut were indeed faithful, secular democrats, servants of their peoples throughout the Arab world and well beyond. And it is to that purpose that we again turn as we look to a future rife with challenges and hurdles. It is our charge and our stated goal to help remove those hurdles towards a more educated, engaged and pluralistic society.

Many of you, most of you I hope, will have been involved in some form or other in the astounding celebrations of AUB's sesquicentennial this year. It has been a magnificent effort in which we have had ample opportunity to reflect on this University's impact on Lebanon and the Arab world; we have celebrated our most illustrious alumni, our history-makers, as well as the many who are not household names but have still made meaningful impact in their own *milieu*. We have held academic symposia, staged sporting contests and many, many other inclusive cultural and social events. This attention to celebration was not intended solely for narcissistic self-examination. We have treated 2016 as an inflection point, a point in our long and distinguished history when we can look ahead to devise how we ensure this University will remain relevant and sustainable—intellectually, ethically, economically, socially environmentally sustainable—in future years, even decades, even through to our bicentennial and beyond.

We have delved back into our past in order to determine our future, and our goal is nothing less than to equip the citizens of tomorrow with the means and the purpose to work for a better world.

We will establish the most effective and powerful platform we can to develop and mentor the next generation of citizen leaders. We will do that by modeling a better, fairer, freer, more ethical and democratic workplace here at AUB. By doing so we will continue to honor and celebrate the founders of our college, who took that far-sighted and transformative step 150 years ago to create this institution.

We are fortunate to be able to welcome as our Founders' Day speaker on this very special occasion—Dr. Eve M. Troutt Powell, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Troutt Powell is a distinguished historian of the modern Middle East whose most recent book is *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement in Egypt, Sudan and the Late Ottoman Empire* published by Stanford University Press, 2012. She will be talking to us today about the critical role of Liberal Arts education and its role in creating well-rounded citizens and servant leaders. Her address is intriguingly entitled, *The Nahda, Slavery and the Liberal Arts*. I want to sincerely thank you, Dr Troutt Powell, for being here on this very special occasion.