



Dear friends and colleagues of the AUB community,

### **Continuity of leadership excellence**

The importance of AUB as a player on the world stage is well known—the throng of our alumni who in 1945 signed the Charter of the United Nations being one example and the drafting of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights being another. Last week, this University was back at the UN, this time hosting a high-level side event at the General Assembly in New York to address the urgent need to protect health in armed conflict, not just in Syria and other Arab countries but in a global context. The [Lancet-AUB Commission on Syria](#) has put research on health in conflict led by the [Faculty of Health Sciences \(FHS\)](#) at center stage and I would like explore in this President's Perspective the story behind this inspiring faculty that in the last 10 years has emerged as a genuine leader in global health diplomacy.

But first it is my pleasure to announce that the person who steered this transformative change, Dean Iman Nuwayhid, has been reappointed to another term in office at FHS after a thorough review process involving the University leadership, faculty and the Board of Trustees. Please join me in congratulating Dr. Nuwayhid and wishing him renewed success to further build upon the faculty's extraordinary impact on the health of the communities and populations which it serves.

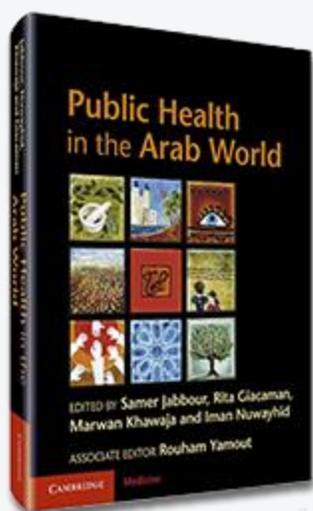


AUB is a crucible of leadership, and Dr. Nuwayhid is a true leader with far-reaching vision, an unswerving commitment to partnership and equity in every endeavor, a strong belief in the power of homegrown research, a leader who is prepared to take risks to pierce the envelope wherever it closes in and prevents our impacting on health. Appointed in 2008, the dean clearly understood when it came to global public health discourse not only were Arab voices not being heard but the Arab region was almost completely absent when the challenges were raised. He has carefully spearheaded a process to equalize this imbalance, and the methods he employed have scored FHS success after success as his vision has taken form.

Dr. Nuwayhid's own research focus has played a seminal role, underpinned by his conviction that health should be understood as a collaborative and comprehensive social and political project that engages holistically with everything happening around us. He was instrumental in bringing occupational health practice to Lebanon and the region; his research linked directly to the [International Labour Organization's Resolution 182](#), the Convention on the Prohibition of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, led to the passing of a law in Lebanon to protect working children. His insight was to recognize that parents naturally love and want the best for their offspring but, when looking at substandard education systems and dismal employment prospects, prefer that they get a head start developing a skill. It was logical therefore to switch the focus from blaming or punishing parents but rather prioritizing regulation on workplaces and exposures that impact health in the short and long term. Iman Nuwayhid has long believed and acted on the belief that health is a fundamental right of every human being, but that right is precarious in our Global South. He has dedicated his life to working towards that, and he deserves our thanks and admiration.

### Trajectory to global health prominence

A striking factor of what can be called the FHS approach is that it always starts with internal consultation and aims to push out into the region and then globally. The faculty has been configured as a system of interlinking engines that drive towards its vision of being a global leader in health, through collaboration, homegrown research, and expansion of impact. At the heart is the mission of educating students in public health, with centers wrapped around it to drive forward research, practice and policy dialogue. Recognizing that the health challenges are so great in this region, connections and collaboration inside FHS are a must, as well as with all other departments, programs and disciplines within the university and external partners. This is evidenced by the high research productivity of faculty, their ability to attract generous external research funds, and the regional and international recognition of their role and impact as leading researchers and public health academics in the region and beyond.



The drive to make the Arab voice heard started with the project to produce [Public Health in the Arab World](#) (Cambridge University Press, 2012) which began in 2009. This was not just an academic publishing project—but rather a tangible argument for homegrown research and the basis of building a network. The [PHAW List](#) which emerged now numbers 2,000 Arab and international subscribers. Before PHAW, Arab researchers in health rarely talked to one another and their output barely registered on the radar. But when the Arab uprisings broke out, the contribution of Arab researchers thanks to work led by FHS became an essential reference. The timing of the book's submission in mid-2011 meant there was an urgent need for re-examination in the light of the unfolding political and social circumstances. This

led to a major new undertaking in partnership with UK medical journal The Lancet which published the series [Health in the Arab World: a View from Within](#) (January 2014). Once again research and concepts developed at FHS in collaboration with partner institutions and researchers were put at the center of a global dialogue.



MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program aims to prepare students to be agents of change by doing field work, here in Mar Mansour

In parallel, the faculty's commitment to equity and social justice, and the unaffordability of AUB tuition fees to most students, led FHS to take it upon itself to go out and recruit students from the most underrepresented communities. This was made possible with the support of the [MasterCard Foundation](#), starting with a plan to bring 60 Lebanese and non-Lebanese undergraduates living in Lebanon to study for bachelor's degrees. The faculty then suggested the inclusion of five students from sub-Saharan Africa and postgraduate degrees. These scholars became living proof of AUB's capacity to diversify in multiple ways, leading to the current \$27 million [MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program](#) which is open to all majors at AUB at all levels for 160 student in five years comprising 80 students from Africa, 30 Syrian refugees, and 50 Lebanese and Palestinians. Giving the MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program to the wider AUB has spurred everyone's effort to reach marginalized or excluded populations. The latest is the Advanced Student Scholarship Initiative covering tuition fees for up to 130 of the most academically gifted students from all Lebanon's 26 districts. I shall give more detail of the initiative in a future message.

All FHS's endeavors follow the same blueprint. The [Center for Research on Population and Health](#) founded during the deanship of Dr. Huda Zurayk, and currently led by Dr. Hala Ghattas (interim) scans and nurtures creative ideas, answering research questions in a holistic, comprehensive and interdisciplinary way, connecting institutions regionally and internationally. The [Center for Public Health Practice](#) led by Ms. Aline Germani is FHS' bridge to communities here and around the Arab region, building capacity in training and bringing experiences back to the classroom. The [Knowledge to Policy \(K2P\) Center](#) led by Dr. Fadi El-Jardali recommends and facilitates policy dialogues, incorporating advocacy for evidence-based policies. The model is unique to FHS, developed and protected by its faculty, staff and students in a collaborative, sustainable and integrated whole.



Safety sessions conducted by the Environmental Health Department to build capacity in training

### Protecting health in armed conflict

This brings us to the Lancet-AUB Commission on Syria, and the [UNGA side event](#) on protecting health in conflict which is the latest plateau reached under this united vision, which sees FHS leading the charge in one of the world's most significant challenges. To underline its importance of this event, the commission was supported at high level by four permanent UN missions, with the Canadian health minister, the Netherlands' deputy minister of international development, the Spanish deputy foreign minister and the UK permanent representative on the platform. Interventions came from the director of emergency operations for WHO, the permanent representatives of four other UN members, and numerous international NGOs specialized in health and human rights.



© Photo Source: Mission Canada ONU

What this achieves is to keep up the pressure after the failure of Security Council Resolution 2286 to stop attacks against healthcare facilities and personnel in conflict and to table specific measures to secure action and accountability against the backdrop of terrible violations. It brings academicians to the podium who have been absent from global discussions about Syria and other conflicts until now. The voice of science is a credible, powerful one on the policy community and the FHS faculty members present, Dr. Nuwayhid and his fellow co-chair and commissioner Dr. Samer Jabbour, could feel themselves being pulled into the dialogue rather than having to push from outside.

In conclusion, the UNGA event was a tangible step in getting political and policy support for the health agenda in Syria. Ideas developed and disseminated by the Commission—the [“weaponization of health care”](#) and its dismal reality of being the “new normal” in armed conflict—help put new light on the violations and expose them for global discussion and diplomacy. The urgent need for policy dialogue on health in Syria has set this Lancet Commission apart from its predecessors thanks to the engaged FHS approach and the impact has already been garnered ahead of the final publication of its findings. Yes, the challenges to health in our region are beyond comprehension, but the work of the Faculty of Health Sciences under the leadership of Dean Iman Nuwayhid are a source of much needed hope and empowerment.

Best regards,

Fadlo R. Khuri, MD  
President

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