

**Honorary Doctorates Ceremony Acceptance Speech**  
**Neamat Shafik**  
**June 8, 2018**

It is a great honour to accept this degree from the American University of Beirut. Even when surrounded by ignorance, conflict and prejudice, AUB has stood out as a beacon for something different – education, resilience and tolerance. Thank you, Dr Khuri for the kind words of introduction.

I was born in Alexandria, a city that sits, like Beirut, on the Mediterranean and has a history of trading and being open to people from all over the world. My family left Alexandria after the revolution and subsequent nationalisations in Egypt and had to start again from scratch in a new country. Growing up, my father would always say to us “they can take everything away from you, but they can’t take away your brain.” For him, education was what saved us and was the most important asset in life.

This experience, alongside a commitment to spreading opportunity to those less fortunate than myself, has shaped my personal history and career, across my time at the World Bank, the IMF, the UK Civil Service – and currently as Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science, a university that, like AUB, was established with a social purpose.

At a time of increasing global instability, I believe more than ever in the transformative power of education in fostering freedom of thought and expression, the value of evidence and reason in shaping public discourse, and creating a society that values civic responsibility and international relationships.

It is a real pleasure for me to join in AUB a community of distinguished scholars, students, staff and alumni who share a commitment to these ideals.