

Ali Zayour

Student's Commencement Address

October 8, 2021

Dear President Khuri, Esteemed Trustees, Deans, Faculty Members, and AUB Class of 2020

Before I commence, let's be grateful to those who insisted to make this historical event take place after a one-and-a-half-year wait, President Khuri, Dr. Nizameddin, the faculty members and the board of trustees. Not to forget to thank the COVID-19 expert committee who contributed to make this event possible. On behalf of the Graduates of 2020, I would like to also recognize our parents, families, and the loved ones, who are with us virtually now. Thank you all for being supportive, shedding sweat and tears to make our dreams of graduating from AUB come true. Special thanks to my Mum, Salam, and Dad, Akram, without whom, I wouldn't have been standing before you on this stage today.

I was raised up in an environment where education and the love of AUB are unquestionable. They have been implanted in my soul and blood and have become essential parts of my being, influenced by my father who had been a former student at AUB.

I remember when I stepped into AUB, the first courses I took, the first classrooms I attended, how beautiful the environment I found, how happy I felt, and how proud I became. It was an imaginable like world, where diversity and difference are accepted and respected. Life had been flowing smoothly from AUB premises to its surrounding streets, to the neighborhood, and to the whole Lebanese districts and vice versa. However, in the previous two years everything became chaotic in the country, which negatively impacted our lives.

Something has changed: October 17th, August 4th, and COVID-19. The whole country has changed, people have changed, we have changed, and the American University of Beirut started looking for ways to support the physical and mental well-being of its community.

Fellow Graduates of Class 2020,

Despite all the difficulties, we went through, be it the shortage of fuel, the disappearance of most kinds of medicines, the skyrocketing of the essential living commodities prices, and the lack provision of the electrical power, we survived and succeeded in crossing the finish line. However, a lot of thinking and actions are expected from our class of 2020, the leaders of the next generation. How can our country be rebuilt? By whom? What do our country and people need?

Our country needs us to be leaders not followers; selfless not selfish; kind and gentle not harmful and destructive.

Our country needs us to love and accept each other rather than hate and despise one another.

Our country needs us to have faith and hope rather than distrust and despair.

Our country needs us all. There is room for everyone; it's a rich country with abundance of natural resources: fresh water, agricultural land, the beauty of the seashore from the North to the South, the

East and West mountainous chains that attract tourists in Summer and Winter, and above all the Lebanese human capital who proved to be a very successful entrepreneur across the globe.

Our people need to be free-minded, independent, and courageous not closed-minded, enslaved, and cowards.

Our people need a different education system that transforms them from closed-mindedness to open-mindedness, evidence-mindedness, and persevered-mindedness to free themselves from the cult, tribe, and sect-mindedness.

Fellow Graduates of Class 2020,

Do remember by crossing this stage today, we become members of the next generation of leaders that our country and people need, we will be the significant part of this change. So don't allow any circumstances, whatever harsh they are, to keep us locked in time, space, and situations. Let's keep going, chasing our ambitions and dreams. Our journey doesn't end with graduation. It's the beginning to challenge ourselves and defy our potentials. No matter where we go or whatever we do: pursuing more advanced degrees or entering the work force, let's make sure that we go straight and far on our journey to rebuild our country and help our people and if we don't find a way let's make one.

Congratulations Fellow Graduates!