



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

2024 Student Commencement Address

Darren Walker

Beirut, Friday, June 7, 2024

Thank you, President Khuri—and to the AUB trustees, faculty, and staff.

I am humbled by this recognition—made all the more special by the company in which I receive it.

Dr. Ghassan Abu Sittah and Arundhati Roy: Thank you for your courageous, righteous work—and for the truth and beauty that you bring to this world.

And, of course, congratulations to the extraordinary Class of 2024. I am honored that—with this degree—I will forever be included in your venerable ranks.

It was six decades ago that a thirty-something-year old American pastor, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., prepared a series of sermons that would become his most enduring.

He wrote at the time, and I quote:

“Philanthropy is commendable. But it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice that make philanthropy necessary.”

For a quarter century, these words—this profound challenge—has inspired and informed my work.

You see, Dr. King is saying that philanthropy, kindness, generosity—all of this is well and good... but good is not good enough.

To ensure justice, we also must understand and address the underlying causes that make philanthropy both essential and possible.

This perspective emboldens us—it dares us—to ask the right questions:

- Not just to feed the hungry, or clothe the naked, or house the homeless... but to understand why poverty persists—and then to act, boldly, for change.
- Not just to advocate for peace... but to remedy the cascading inequalities that create the conditions for war.

At its best, higher education, too, compels us to probe why things are the way they are—and how we can improve them.

And AUB has long embodied the best of this tradition:

Asking the urgent questions—and sending generation after generation into the world, prepared to serve, and to build, and to lead.

For [nearly 20 years](#), the Ford Foundation has proudly supported AUB's indispensable mission.

But for more than a century and a half, this distinguished institution has reaffirmed our shared commitment to our shared humanity.

In that spirit, with a grateful heart and in recognition of the values we share, I accept this degree.

Thank you, all.