



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

2024 Student Commencement Address

Ghassan Abu Sittah

Beirut, Friday, June 7, 2024

Ladies and gentlemen, trustees, President Khuri, esteemed faculty, colleagues and friends, distinguished guests, and most importantly, the unstoppable Class of 2024 at the American University of Beirut, I wish to thank you for granting me this huge honor.

45 years ago, the African-American writer and activist Audre Lorde warned us that “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” This is as fitting a caution in 2024, in the midst of the 21st century’s first genocidal war, as it was when she first made it 45 years. The difference is that today, as I look yet another graduating class of the American University of Beirut, I am filled with hope that we are making our own tools. The tools that we need to make a future that is ours. A future that is the answer to our dreams and aspirations, a future that heals the suffering and sacrifices of today and that reflects our own cultural and historical past and our future challenges.

Over the past 7 months, we have been asking ourselves the question, why do all of these international agencies, whether it’s the World Health Organization, or the International Committee of the Red Cross, or Doctors Without Borders, or any other organization, fail us whether in Palestine or Syria or Sudan or anywhere else where our people need them most? I believe that this is the wrong question that will always yield the wrong answer. The real question, and the only one that will yield the right answer is, why do don’t we have Islamic or Arab Health Organization, an Arab Committee for the Red Crescent, and Arab Doctors Without Borders. Organizations that value our lives, prioritize our needs and follow our agendas.

I, like many here, am the son of a Nakba survivor. And like the majority of his generation, my father believed that education was the only chance to prevent the erasure that was meant to become our people’s destiny. His generation who had watched everything their families had, both material and social, taken away from them, believed obsessively that the only thing that no one can ever take away from you is your education. Other than that, you can be dispossessed of your money, land and even social status. I firmly believe that it was that belief that saved our people and the generations that came after the generation of the Nakba.

We have sadly learned a lot from this genocide about genocides. And one of the most important things that we have learnt is that in order to wipe out a people you must first wipe out their universities. And to erase a nation you must end the education process.

That is why we must defend our universities and preserve education at any cost.

God bless you.

American University of Beirut

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