

AUB confers doctoral degrees to 3 individuals who left their mark on the region

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The American University of Beirut awarded on June 26 honorary doctoral degrees to three individuals who were recognized for their life achievements and advancement of human causes through their fields of expertise: drama and comedy; scholarship and activism; and journalism and diplomacy.

Syrian comedy actor Duraid Lahham, Palestinian professor and rights activist Walid Khalidi, and French journalist and former ambassador Eric Rouleau were awarded their honorary doctorates during a noon-time ceremony in Assembly Hall.

AUB President Peter Dorman introduced the degree recipients, following an official procession of faculty members in academic regalia, led by Chief Marshal Samir Makdisi. Dorman and Provost Ahmad Dallal handed the honorary doctorates to recipients.

“The fundamental purpose for the establishment of this ‘American’ university in Lebanon was to engender an enlightened and responsive impact on the region,” said Dorman. “The three honorands we celebrate today have each exerted a profound impact of their own. Through popular art that reaches and speaks to the concerns of the average Arab citizen; through scholarship and public advocacy that illuminates the history of Palestinians and their current struggle; and through journalism and commentary that analyzes and elucidates the issues of the modern Middle East for Western audiences.

“Confronting inequality and intolerance is rarely an easy path to take. It requires courage to follow one’s deepest convictions and it is this commitment that we hope and desire our students—indeed all of our community members—to embrace.”

Introducing Lahham—popularly known as Ghawar al-Toushi—Dorman referred to his “inspirational life journey... [that] speaks volumes about what can be accomplished given the right combination of talent, opportunity, and determination. Moreover, he lauded art for its ability not just to entertain but also to “create the possibility for change,” by motivating, instigating and shaping our beliefs. “Duraid Lahham has surely entertained; but in addition to making us laugh, he has also made us think.”

Dorman also recognized Lahham's commitment to humanitarian causes, noting that he was named UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador for Childhood in the Middle East and North Africa from 1999 to 2004.

Lahham thanked AUB for the honor in a heart-felt speech interspersed with humor. He ended by saying, “I am only 165 cm tall, and this honor will not make me taller nor more intellectual, but it will make me prouder and more committed and resolved to serve humanity and especially children... who are our future.”

Dorman then invited Professor Walid Khalidi to the podium after describing him as “one of the most influential Palestinian intellectuals of the twentieth century,” and “the voice of the people.” “Walid Khalidi’s record of scholarship is extensive and has helped to portray and illuminate the plight of Palestinians before, during, and after the defining war of 1948... [helping] to destroy the myth that Palestinians left their homes and villages voluntarily, laying bare historical facts



regarding the Israeli planning behind the forced expulsions and ensuing occupation," said Dorman.

University of London- and Oxford-trained Khalidi also taught at AUB and later at Harvard for about 15 years.

Khalidi also co-founded the Beirut-based Institute for Palestine Studies [IPS], a fully independent research organization devoted to the documentation and study of Palestinian affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, he established a number of non-profit organizations. Khalidi recalled his years at AUB and collaborations with a number of colleagues on important projects, including the IPS which he co-founded with the late AUB professor Constantin Zurayk. "Time is swifter than a weaver's shuttle. It is noiseless like thieves in the night," concluded Khalidi. "Even if you take it by the forelock, there is so much unfinished business left behind. But at the threshold of senility, it is good to know there is recognition of whatever footprint one leaves in the sand."

Eric Rouleau former special correspondent and chief Middle East editorial writer at the prominent French daily, *Le Monde*, was the last recipient in the line-up.

Journalist, author, academic, and diplomat, Rouleau is considered to bring "knowledge, depth, and authority" to every story and scoop he made, said Dorman.

"Throughout his life and career, Eric Rouleau has exhibited an enormous depth of understanding about the current events and history of the Middle East and North Africa and great empathy for its people," said Dorman. "His commitment to human rights and dignity can be seen throughout his extensive body of work, and is best evidenced by his unflagging support of the Palestinian pursuit of peace and justice."

"To say that I am honored by the distinction you bestow me would be an understatement," Rouleau said in his acceptance speech. "I am gratified by one of the most prestigious universities in the world, of which I am a long-time admirer."

Rouleau then spotlighted his connection to Lebanon first as a visitor enamored with its charms and hospitality and then as a "concerned journalist" experiencing the tragic events the country went through.

He also referred to the difficulties he faced as both a journalist and a diplomat handling the Palestinian conflict. "It was also no easy task to write on the conflict for a western audience where biased views were quite widespread; at that time a journalist accomplishing his duty had to resist, during tense periods, angry phone calls, insulting letters and sometimes death threats."

"President Dorman, the honorary doctorate you offer me today is a recognition of what I stood for," he concluded.

Attending the ceremony were a number of academics, AUB Board of Trustee members and public officials including former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and Minister Tarek Mitri. The honorary doctorates ceremony was followed by a reception outside Assembly Hall.