



**AMERICAN  
UNIVERSITY  
OF BEIRUT**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**American University of Beirut commemorates 157<sup>th</sup> Founders Day:  
a celebration of educational excellence, civic leadership and citizenship**

The American University of Beirut (AUB) marked the 157<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding on December 3, 1866, with a celebration headed by AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, having Dr. Nassif Hitti as a keynote speaker, a distinguished diplomat, academic, and AUB alumnus. The ceremony, held in the university's historic Assembly Hall, showcased the rich traditions of AUB, including a procession, the awarding of the annual student essay contest winners, and musical performances.

In his opening speech, AUB President Fadlo Khuri reflected on the institution's long-standing commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and community impact. "Traditionally on Founders Day, we look back, we look forward, and we look inside ourselves," Khuri stated, highlighting AUB's roots as the Syrian Protestant College and its evolution into a beacon of liberal education. He emphasized the importance of philanthropy in AUB's history, citing the recent successful fundraising dinner in New York that raised \$6 million for student scholarships and patient support.

Additionally, he emphasized the significance of the university's annual Giving Day which takes place on the same day as Founders Day, describing it as a tradition that "aims to engage our global community of alumni and friends and inspire them to support new opportunities for AUB students and faculty, as well as the greater communities we serve."

Khuri also addressed the university's role during challenging times, underscoring the necessity of providing adequate space for diverse viewpoints and equipping students to critically engage with global challenges, identify societal issues, and devise solutions.

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"Our aim is to graduate dreamers, strivers, and builders of a better world," he added, a vision aligned with that of the university's founding fathers.

The student essay contest winners brought their unique perspectives to the forefront. The first-place winner Mohammed Abo Bakr, MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders Program scholar majoring in business administration with a concentration in business information and decision systems at the Olayan School of Business, inspired the audience with the reading of his essay "Beyond the Red Sea: A Journey of Hope and Human Connection."

"As I reflect on my journey I realize that my story goes beyond being an account of survival and personal development. It stands as a testament, to the influence of compassion, opportunities, and the life-changing potential of education," Mohammed shared during his reading.

Ahmad Konainah, awarded second place, is pursuing dual degrees in computer science at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and business administration with a concentration in entrepreneurship and family business at the Olayan School of Business. His essay explored the odyssey of hope and how education fanned the flames of his civic awakening amid the ashes of war.

Joy Al Ahmar, the third-place winner, currently majoring in environmental health sciences in the Faculty of Health Sciences, brought attention in her essay to how universities are guardians of democratic values, nurturing engaged citizenship in the Global South amidst global challenges.

In the keynote address, Dr. Nassif Hitti, drawing from his rich diplomatic and academic background, eloquently emphasized the significance of dialogue, diversity, and the importance of building bridges. He stressed, "Accepting diversity of views, of values, and ideas is what we need to commit ourselves to at the societal level as well as at the national and the international levels. We need to construct the concept of true genuine citizenship at all these levels."

Addressing the complex situation in Lebanon, Dr. Hitti highlighted, "It is through forging a genuine and consolidated national identity that we can succeed the challenge of the institutionalization of the state apparatus that will remain otherwise hostage to political sectarianism."

Dr. Hitti concluded his address with a powerful message of resilience and optimism, reflecting on his years at AUB. He said, “We have a tall order for reforms, interrelated reforms in different fields. It Is not an easy task but we have no choice but to take this road despite the many obstacles that we have to face, and that for the sake of building a new Lebanon for the generations to come. And as I learned from my student’s days at AUB I strongly believe that we shall overcome, and we will.”

The ceremony ended on a high note with the alma mater and a recessional to AUB's plaza, leaving attendees inspired and hopeful.

**ENDS**

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**Note to Editors**

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 800 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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