



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American University of Beirut marks 158th Founders Day

The American University of Beirut (AUB) commemorated its 158th Founders Day on December 2, 2024, with a formal ceremony in the university's historic Assembly Hall. The event reflected AUB's enduring commitment to education, service, and its role in addressing regional challenges. AUB Trustee Emerita Carol Bellamy, a globally recognized advocate for education, and a distinguished leader in public service, delivered the keynote address, while the winners of the annual student essay contest presented their perspectives on how AUB can help preserve, protect, and improve pre-university education in Lebanon and the region.

In his opening remarks, AUB President Fadlo Khuri addressed the difficulties faced by Lebanon, its communities, and the university over the past five years, particularly during the last 14 months of conflict, but he stated, "We never put our mission on hold. We all have a sacred duty to serve, lead, educate, innovate, and heal." He highlighted AUB's efforts to assist those in need through its medical and community initiatives, as well as its plans to support Lebanon's recovery, including the urgent need to restore the education sector. "A major aspect of what we need to rebuild is the battered state of primary and secondary education, not only in Lebanon but the world over," he said.

Khuri also spoke about the university's global outreach and the support it has received during this time, noting the importance of collective action in sustaining AUB's mission. The Founders Day celebration coincided with the university's fifth Giving Day. "Today, I call on all our friends around the globe to rise up and proclaim that the people of Lebanon and the region deserve to live abundantly, and that donating to AUB is one of the best ways to make that a reality," he stated.

This year's student essay contest invited participants to answer the question of what more AUB could do to enhance the quality of elementary and secondary education in a way that serves communities and fosters more inclusive societies.

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The first-place essay, *From Stairs to Stars: How AUB Amplifies the Voices of the Forgotten*, was written by Sara Kalloumeh, a senior in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences with a double major in biology and business administration. Kalloumeh's essay vividly recounted her experiences studying on the narrow stairs outside her family's small refuge, driven by the hope that education could be her escape from hardship. She described the transformative moment when she received a full scholarship to AUB through the MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders program, writing, "Walking through the gates of AUB for the first time felt like entering a different world, one where dreams could take root and flourish." Her essay celebrated the university's impact in empowering students and proposed initiatives such as mentorship programs and teacher training to extend AUB's influence in enhancing pre-university education.

The second prize went to Roy El Badawi, a mechanical engineering senior at the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, with a minor in economics and business administration; and recipient of the Lebanese International Finance Executives Scholarship. El Badawi's essay, *A Journey Through Education's Chapters*, highlighted AUB's resilience amidst crisis, its legacy of impactful and relevant education, and its persistence as a beacon of hope for generations to come.

The third prize was awarded to Bissane Izrafil, a sophomore at the Hariri School of Nursing, for her essay *AUB Beyond the Walls*. Izrafil explored AUB's role and legacy in preparing generations to be responsible, innovative citizens who drive meaningful progress across Lebanon and the region. She also proposed the creation of an education innovation lab at AUB to further this mission and impact.

Before the main speech of the day, engineering student Najla Sadek sang a beautiful rendition of "The Prayer" as a musical interlude.

In her keynote address, *Time to Rethink, Re-boot, and Re-energize Education*, Carol Bellamy emphasized the critical role of education in securing the future of nations. She highlighted stark inequities in access and quality, where challenges such as violence, displacement, and economic collapse have disrupted educational systems.

"There are two major challenges: neither of them new. Access to education, and the quality of education on offer. How can we create the global citizens we need when so many of the world's children and young people still miss out on education, and when those in school often leave without the skills they need to function in our rapidly changing world?" she asked.

"Education itself cannot wait. Education can't wait for wars to be over. Education can't wait for governments to function. Education can't wait for budgets to grow. Education can't wait for the 'right time.' Because the 'right time' will never come until we have a good quality education for all," she added.

Bellamy's career in public service includes leadership roles as executive director of UNICEF, director of the United States Peace Corps, chair of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, chair of the Global Partnership for Education, and chair of the International Baccalaureate Board. She has also served 13 years in public office, including as a New York State Senator and as the first woman elected to citywide office in New York City as president of the New York City Council. She has been recognized with France's Legion of Honour and Japan's Order of the Rising Sun for her contributions to education and development.

The ceremony concluded with the alma mater and a recessional to AUB's College Hall plaza.

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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 750 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 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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