

For Immediate Release



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AUB awards honorary degrees to al-Shaykh, Kantarjian, Roy and Ulaby and graduates 558 and will celebrate tomorrow the graduation of 1649 undergraduate students

Khuri: “Go forth to make the world a better place than that which you found”

The American University of Beirut (AUB) ceremoniously graduated 558 students in Graduate, PhD, and Doctor of Medicine programs and will celebrate tomorrow the graduation of 1649 undergraduate students.

During the ceremony, AUB granted the Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters to internationally acclaimed novelist, journalist, and playwright Hanan al-Shaykh; renowned physician and leukemia specialist Hagop Kantarjian; advocate of the vulnerable and president and CEO of the Mastercard Foundation Reeta Roy; and distinguished professor and pioneer in radar remote sensing Fawwaz Ulaby for their world-renowned achievements in their respective fields.

The ceremony was attended by Environment Minister Fadi Jreissati representing the President of the Republic of Lebanon General Michel Aoun, and Member of Parliament Nazih Najem representing Prime Minister Saad Hariri. Deputy Prime Minister Ghassan Hasbani and Member of Parliament Dr. Edgard Traboulsi also attended the ceremony, as well as members of the Board of Trustees, senior administrators, deans, professors, parents, and friends.

After the graduates’ procession and the academic procession of the university President, Provost, Deans, Faculty members and Trustees in their full regalia, the ceremony started with the Lebanese National Anthem. AUB President Fadlo Khuri then spoke to the audience.

Fadlo Khuri:

President Khuri addressed the ceremony. He said: “This is the moment when you join the illustrious ranks of the men and women who are proud to call themselves AUB alumni. You

have earned that right through your hard work and courage in the face of challenges. Tonight you celebrate as you take your places among a fellowship of AUB graduates who have transformed the world around us.

But wait a second, I hear you thinking. What is so great about the world in 2019! What have forgoing generations here in the Middle East, or around the world for that matter, what have they done except fight futile wars, degrade Earth's ecosystem, or drive unimaginable inequality between those able to hoard wealth and power and those who have nothing? It would be a glib argument to say, imagine how much worse this world would be without the mitigating effect of AUB graduates, without the leaders that have emerged from this university, who share the enduring values that you have learned, of social responsibility, fairness, integrity, and respect for peaceful dialogue."

He continued: "It is true that, many indicators tell us that our world is becoming less healthy, less happy, less secure, and less viable. The question I put to you on this your evening, AUB Class of 2019, is what are you going to do to make a difference, and make the world a better place."

He added: "In your years at AUB you will have learnt that there is purpose in life—that pivotal word in the AUB motto which you see every time you walk through Main Gate. 'That they may have *life*, and have it more abundantly.' Another American literary great, Ralph Waldo Emerson got it mostly right when he wrote: 'The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.'"

He continued: "Our four honorands this year embody that refusal to accept things as they are, to allow unjust things to pass. In the immortal words of Robert Kennedy: 'Some men see things as they are and ask why, I see things that never were and ask why not.'

After graduating from AUB and spending his career at MD Anderson, Hagop Kantarjian has methodically waged war on leukemia and on the concept that health care is a privilege of the few, not the right of all. Reeta Roy has created a master plan to put a continent to work through the MasterCard Foundation, recruiting universities, entrepreneurs, the public and private sector of nations, to create a future for Africa with learning, jobs, and hope. Hanan al-Shaikh has shattered the myth of the subservient Arab woman in literature, emboldening generations to re-examine the full context of womanhood, and the full possibilities of their futures. As for Fawwaz Ulaby, all this humble Damascene has done since leaving AUB is to revolutionize terahertz technology in the development of new types of industrial sensor applications, helping trigger the Fourth Industrial Revolution. These four have refused to stand passively, in the words of the great John Lennon 'watching the wheels go round'.

Now it is your turn, graduates, to go out into the world full of confidence, privilege, and awake to opportunity. And you will learn, ever so surely, the painful price of privilege as today's reality dawns on you.

Of you, Class of 2019, I have no doubts. You are intent on pursuing that ideal to live well, to live more abundant lives. You have already lit up villages in Akkar and the Beqaa valley; you have given your time to build bridges between Lebanon's refugee and host communities; you have provided for the education and healthcare of the most underprivileged Lebanese, people with disabilities, and migrant workers. You, our students are young leaders in health, in business, in science, in the arts, in agriculture, in engineering a better future. Uganda, Algeria, Ghana, Lebanon, Syria, the United States, France, and other countries across the globe, wait for such leaders. What advice can we give you on your last day as students on this, your beloved campus?"

Khuri said: "I agree with Emerson in principle. Find something meaningful to you to spend your time on. You are the best and the brightest, the hope of the times to come. But you will only fulfill that hope and your dreams and aspirations if you choose to do something that makes you feel fulfilled: a role, a job, a career that can make a difference for you and others. Pursue your passion. Do it well, do it fully, and do it with others whenever you can. Our trustee Marwan Muasher was trained in mechanical engineering, at AUB and at Purdue. Yet he chose to follow his passion, and commitment to political and economic inclusiveness and reform in these, our Arab lands. While the world certainly could use another brilliant mechanical engineer, it cannot do without a brave and tireless intellectual leader, who sees things, in the words of Robert Kennedy, 'that never were and asks why not.'"

He continued: "I wish to disagree ever so subtly with Emerson, much as I admire his idea of a life well lived. Happiness is important. Focus on it. Spend time on it. Live balanced, happy lives, but also lives of purpose where you enjoy what you are doing. Many years ago my colleagues at Emory, complaining about the number of 6 AM meetings I brought them in for, argued that I was skewing their Work-Life Balance. 'That's funny,' I retorted. 'Life is what you get back when I find someone younger and cheaper to do your work!' Instead, perhaps the words of William Shakespeare can modify those of Emerson (and my own obsessive nature). 'Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none.'"

Khuri concluded: "And so my brave, distinguished, and accomplished AUB Class of 2019, go forth in peace, to make the world a better place than that which you found before you. Turn now and salute your parents and families, your friends and your compañeros and compañeras. As Hippocrates, father of occidental medicine once wrote, 'Life is short, art long, opportunity fleeting, experience treacherous, judgment difficult.' But that road is much more enjoyable in the company of friends and loved ones."

The Graduating Class Speech:

Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences student Kelvin Kimani and Faculty of Arts and Sciences student Jana Kontar, delivered a speech on behalf of the graduates.

Kimani:

“I grew up in the streets of Nairobi as a street boy in extreme poverty. I was around two or three years. I barely had food to eat and had to rely on begging from strangers; I had no home or house to go to in the evenings. I slept on pavements or out open in the cold, sometimes even in the extreme weather conditions. I did not have an experience of love, as I had no parents or any relatives, but I equally realized that my life was dependent on the generosity of total strangers. Many are the days that I met kind strangers that made me smile and inked the signature of their generosity on me and equally many are the days that I slept hungry, on the cold pavements since I met strangers who did not have hearts to give.

I remember a day when it was raining heavily. I had no warm clothes and was shivering in the cold, hungry, and with nowhere to go. A couple approached me and asked me why I was not going home; I told them I had no home. They asked me about my parents; I said I had none. They held my hand, took me to a shop, bought me a blanket, some clothes, and food. This incident is a memory that is forever in my heart. It reminds me of my responsibility to humanity and the great hope, love, and life we create when we selflessly give back to those that are less privileged than us.”

He continued: “Life is full of untold stories of heroes and heroines, people who are our shining stars in the darkest hours. My hero happens to be a Catholic missionary Priest that took me from street life and gave me a home and a family. He educated me, instilling in me values that I was never taught in school. He made me understand that the rock bottom life that I came from was a good foundation on which to build and transform not just myself but my community as well. I stand here as a testimony of the selfless sacrifice of that humble priest.”

Kimani added: “Looking at this graduating class of 2019; I cannot but help drift back to my days and times here at AUB and in Lebanon. I am sure we all had exciting times that are now part of our memories. We had challenging times that shaped us to withstand the storms of life in the future. We made friends that we shall eternally cherish. We learned to achieve excellence in the various fields of our endeavor, such that nobody could do it any better; to do the ordinary extraordinarily. In AUB, we have acquired the internal commitment to give back to our communities and humanity. This is manifested in AUB’s many initiatives to support the less privileged in Lebanon and the world over. I have hope for the future, every time I turn around and look at this graduating class. With us, is the philosophy we have learned throughout our time in AUB. We carry with us now significant cosmic values of respecting others opinion, transparency, integrity, accepting people of different races, religious background, and we carry

revolutionary ideas to transform our world for a better tomorrow. We are challenged more than ever, to carry these ideas for the rest of our lives.”

He said: “We are all graduating, gleaming happily and excitedly looking into the future with big dreams and lots of energy eagerly waiting to curve our paths. I don’t know what destiny holds for each one of us here; but I know the happiest and most accomplished among us will be those that will search and find ways of serving others without counting the cost, giving back to the less privileged without expecting recognition and creating hopes in others without tiring. So, as we begin to look towards the future, let us ask ourselves what our contribution to the lives of others and to humanity will be. We will make a living by receiving from others, but we will make a life by giving others.”

He concluded: “Let us today make a conscious decision to let our acquired education, skills, and experiences be a beacon of hope to humanity and those in need. For in serving others, we will be helping ourselves and leaving behind a legacy long after we are gone from this world. Let us not procrastinate the virtue of giving back to humanity for many around the world are desperately waiting for our services. If, I have learned anything as a MasterCard Scholar and AUB student in the last two years, is that I have discovered and appreciated the fact that the simple gift of giving back becomes an elaborate rich aftertaste of a natural blissful feeling, lingering endlessly in my lifetime and the lives of others.

Finally, may you all live in exciting times, find what you are looking for and discover true happiness and joy in giving back and in serving others.”

Kontar:

“Five years ago, we have arrived here full of aspirations. Aspirations of what an education within these halls can help us achieve. We have arrived here with dreams about how our lives would change and how we can inspire change in our community. An unfaltering will to have life, and indeed have it abundantly.

I remember the first day I entered economics excited to learn about the issues I see daily all-over social media: financial crises, taxes and globalization. Only to later find myself working on issues that deal with much more than that. I saw myself working on research that empowers refugees and the poor, research that supports better labor market outcomes for mothers and research that empowers women to enter STEM degrees. I also realized how small changes in the environment, through a simple nudge, can influence behavior to the most positive and desired outcome. With each experience, I appreciated the full worth of my discipline and found my purpose in life.”

She added: “As the days passed by, what started for us as a simple journey to seek knowledge has become a life passion and heartfelt desire to make a difference. Problems previously believed

to be unsolvable quickly dissolved into new opportunities and challenges for us to take on and learn from. We became agents of positive change who sought constant improvement of the conditions and matters around us. Our clubs fight for human rights, our journalists fight for freedom of expression, our researchers fight for societal change, our elections fight for political justice. We came to realize that aspiration is the foundation of learning. Yet, graduating from this institution instills in us the obligation to spread our aspirations into our communities. This is our biggest challenge!”

She continued: “My fellow graduates, each one of us had a multitude of unforgettable and life-shaping experiences during our time at AUB. It might be as simple as a conversation we had in Jafet Library, a competition we took part in, an inspiring talk we attended organized by our favorite club, or a chat we had with students from different backgrounds and with different ideologies. Accumulations of people, ideas and life lessons that I hope we reflect upon and as we leave this academic haven, I hope we pass them on, we share them with the world and use them to build our influence.”

She added: “Thank you AUB for taking our hands on this beautiful journey of change and growth. Thank you for being this environment of diversity, student activism and overwhelming love and support. You’ve been our safe refuge, our meditation retreat and the place where we really feel untouchable.

But now comes the time to test our resilience and vulnerability. Today, we enter a world drowned with its problems: from climate change, to inequality, divisiveness and social marginalization. I can understand that some might feel a sense of despair. I can understand worries about sustainable development, about the wellness of our democracy and civil society, about the future of our country. But we are the generation that will have to push for change and keep pushing harder. And I know we will because it was here that we learned to get comfortable with being uncomfortable and dare to dream and realize our dreams. Tonight, let’s give ourselves the promise to work hard and keep walking the road, to take initiatives and get in the game, to be present, to be in the present, to take risks and above all to embrace change with passion, with integrity, with compassion and with love.”

She concluded: “I cannot leave without thanking all the special people in my life without whom I could not be standing here today. My professors. My friends. My brothers. And most importantly, my parents Iman and Riad, you were my guiding light.”

The Honorary Doctorates:

President Khuri then took the podium again saying that according to the authority vested in him by the university’s Board of Trustees, he is conferring the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters,

with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities pertaining thereto, to internationally acclaimed novelist, journalist, and playwright Hanan al-Shaykh; renowned physician and leukemia specialist Hagop Kantarjian; advocate of the vulnerable and president and CEO of the Mastercard Foundation Reeta Roy; and distinguished professor and pioneer in radar remote sensing Fawwaz Ulaby. The four honorands received the degrees and were hooded by Provost Dr. Mohamed Harajli. Each of them then gave his/her acceptance speech.

Hanan al-Shaykh:

In her acceptance speech, al-Shaykh said: "Thank you for this unexpected honor. I accept this on behalf of the woman of Lebanon."

Hagop Kantarjian:

In his acceptance speech, Kantarjian said: "I was part of the AUB family from 1972 until 1981, including the 6 years of civil war. Our house was destroyed. My family left the country. AUB became my home and family. AUB protected us, gave us food and shelter, and educated us. AUB made us who we are today and for this I am eternally grateful. AUB was a paradise with Saints who educated us and embraced us as their own children."

He concluded: "My deepest gratitude for this tremendous honor."

Reeta Roy:

In her acceptance speech, Roy said: "What an incredible honor it is to join the ranks of degree holders from the American University of Beirut. It is only sweeter coming from President Fadlo Khuri, a leader with vision and a friend."

She continued: "This University sits at a global crossroads, between the Levant and Mediterranean, between Africa, Europe, and Southwest Asia, between the glory of the ancient world and our hopes for a future of greater wisdom and greater peace. That's a legacy to honor, and one I know AUB will live up to."

I am thrilled to be recognized today. But you at AUB are the ones in whom we are placing our hopes. I believe there is no more consequential question for the twenty first century than how to enable young people to create meaningful and dignified work, which will transform our world. I hope you will be partners in that endeavor – lifting up not only yourselves, but your entire communities."

She concluded: “Class of 2019, I will cherish this connection with you for a lifetime. What I will cherish even more are all the wonders, the great and the good, that an AUB education helps you bring into the world.”

Fawwaz Ulaby:

Ulaby said in his keynote address: “AUB has always been part of my soul and identity. I will be eternally grateful and will always treasure this very special occasion.

AUB graduates of 2019: I salute you and I congratulate you for graduating from the very best university in the world, the American University of Beirut!! Join me in a big cheer for AUB.”

He continued: “A graduation address should include some mixture of personal anecdotes and sage advice, so I’ll start by sharing with you a story very dear to my heart about my early days at AUB. The story is about Salwa Nassar. If any of you, today’s graduates, know or have heard of Salwa Nassar, please raise your hand. Very few, not surprising.

Salwa Nassar was born in 1913 and attended Brummana High School—which I also attended, however, many years later. She was the first woman student in the Mathematics program at AUB, and went on to be the first Lebanese woman to earn a PHD in physics, and from a very prestigious school, The University of California at Berkeley.

At AUB, I majored in physics, and in my sophomore year in 1962 I enrolled in a course entitled Quantum Mechanics. The course was highly dreaded by students because the math was unwieldy and the physics of how atoms populate electrons in quantized energy states was unlike anything I had ever seen before. But the instructor was Professor Salwa Nassar, and that made all the difference. The way she explained atomic physics was nothing short of enchanting. She definitely enchanted me and I will forever be grateful to her for opening my eyes to how lasers work, how transistors and integrated circuits are designed and built, and how the universe started with a huge big bang of zillions of hydrogen atoms.

A year after I graduated from AUB in 1964, Professor Nassar became President of BCW, Beirut College for Women, which later became co-educational under the new name ‘The Lebanese American University.’ Unfortunately, Professor Nassar died from Leukemia two years later, in 1967, at the age of 54, but her legacy will live on forever. Please join me in saluting the memory of a great Lebanese scientist and AUB graduate, Professor Salwa Nassar.

The moral of the story is: Be true to yourself and follow your dreams. As AUB graduates, each and every one of you has the education, the training and the skills needed to succeed and to

realize a legacy like that of Professor Nassar. But always remember the famous words of Thomas Edison: ‘Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety nine percent perspiration.’”

He added: “Standing here today, I can’t help but reflect on the huge transformation the world has undergone since I was here at AUB 50 years ago. Not only do we have zillions of cell phones, cameras, computers, social networks, and a whole host of weird names added to our vocabulary—like hashtag and emoji, the far more astonishing change is the population density of planet Earth. 50 years ago, the world’s population was 3.6 billion people. Today, the world’s population has more than doubled to nearly 7.7 billion, so the question one might ask is ‘How did the world manage to double its productivity in agriculture, in energy generation and distribution, in transportation, and in just about every other aspect of what makes society function, from training health professionals and teachers to producing lawyers and bankers, everything needed to support such a huge increase of 4.1 billion people? Who, or what, made such a miracle possible?’ Not only has the world’s population ballooned by several billion people, but the quality of life has also improved quite substantially. Consider life expectancy. Because of better nutrition, hygiene, and huge advances in medicine, facilitated in large measure by a field near and dear to my heart, namely the field of electronics and computers, global life expectancy has increased by 8 years since 1990, with women making slightly greater gains than men (surprise surprise!!). If trends seen over the past 23 years hold, by 2030 global female life expectancy will be 85.3 years and male life expectancy will be 78.1 years. Just for reference, the 2017 life expectancy was highest in Monaco at 89.4 years, followed by Japan at 85.3 years, the US and Europe are in the 80-82 year range, Lebanon is at 78 years, and the list goes on down to the bottom group of Somalia and Afghanistan at 50-52 years. It’s a huge spread, but even in Somalia and Afghanistan, the life expectancy increased by 6 years over the past 30 years. Measured in days, our global life expectancy is increasing by about 6 hours every single day!! So I repeat my question: who made all that possible?

We may offer many different answers, but the overarching common denominator to all answers is: It is the college graduates of the past 50 years that have collectively transformed modern society into its present form and literally saved the world from starvation and war.”

He continued: “We still have many millions of people starving and in abject poverty, and we still witness mini wars here and there, but the competition for resources would have been far far worse had it not been for the transformation led by a group of highly motivated, self-disciplined, well-educated and well-trained individuals comprising no more than 5% of the world’s population.

I speak, of course, of college graduates like yourselves. They saved the world of yesterday, and it is your challenge and duty to save the world of tomorrow. When you graduate from college,

especially from a high-caliber school like AUB, you deserve to be congratulated for your very special accomplishments, but you all also carry with you a social responsibility. Your degree is your very own achievement and no one will ever take that away from you, but that degree also represents society's investment in you.

The fraction of adults who hold a college degree varies widely across the globe, from a high of 54% in Canada, to 44% in the United States, 30-42% in Europe, 17% in China, 10% in the MENA countries—that is, the Middle East and North Africa, and under 5% in many other countries. For the world as a whole, the fraction of the population that holds a college degree today remains relatively small at 6.7%, but that number represents a rate of increase of 40% over the past 20 years. Each and every one of you graduating here this afternoon is part of this very special group. The world population is expected to reach 10+ billion people by 2050, and that's only 31 years away. Your challenge, together with fellow graduates the world over, is to figure out how to support a population increase of 3 billion, while simultaneously dealing with grand challenges like global warming and the root of all wars and conflicts: extreme wealth disparity.

Carrying such responsibilities on your collective shoulders should not detract you from achieving your own dreams. In fact the two are intricately linked together. Your individual successes combine and integrate into a huge societal success.”

He concluded: “I say to the AUB graduates of 2019: I believe in you, and I know deep in my heart that you will prove to be highly successful professionals and a source of pride and inspiration to your families, to your communities and to AUB. Go forward and work together to make the world a better place.”

The Degrees:

After that, President Khuri and the Deans distributed the degrees to 558 graduates:

Medicine 92
MA / MS 439
PhD 27

Saturday's Ceremony

Further to this ceremony, AUB will be holding its graduation ceremony for undergraduates on Saturday at 8:00 pm where 1649 undergraduates will receive their degrees. Ceremony speaker will be Reeta Roy.

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 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 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 420-bed hospital.

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