

For Immediate Release



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Queen of Sweden visits AUB in partnership for Arab youth

In the presence of Her Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden, founding president of Mentor International, the American University of Beirut (AUB) signed a memorandum of understanding with Mentor Arabia on working with youth for better youth health in the Arab world. After opening the Mentor Foundation Exhibition at Jafet Library and touring the AUB campus, the queen, accompanied by Lebanon's First Lady Nadia Aoun, attended the launch of the Youth Mentoring Platform at Assembly Hall.

The MoU formalizes more than a decades' partnership between AUB's Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) and Mentor Arabia, with the common vision to empower children and youth, with a focus on the region, to lead healthy lives and make healthy choices.

"We are excited that colleagues at our Faculty of Health Sciences will be working with Mentor Arabia to develop a Universal Prevention Curriculum, collaborating on research and knowledge dissemination, and facilitating venues for student and faculty engagement," said AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri.

During her visit to AUB, Queen Silvia met with President Khuri and proceeded with him to open the Mentor Foundation Exhibition at Jafet Library, which documents 25 years of Mentor Foundation work and achievements. Following a tour of AUB campus, accompanied by a Swedish and Lebanese delegation and cheered by AUB students and staff, the queen proceeded to Assembly Hall.

Lebanon's first lady, Mrs. Nadia Aoun, representing President Michel Aoun as patron of the event, joined the queen in the launch of the Youth Mentoring Platform.

"I want AUB to be the place where students learn the skills they need to take on today's challenges with an emphasis on the needs of the Global South—tackling topics such as indigenous materials, structures, and climate-responsive buildings; post-conflict and disaster

engineering and architecture; climate change in the Arab region; and low-tech/high-tech innovation for health," said President Khuri who added that AUB is an increasingly diverse university, now home to almost 9,500 students from 94 countries, and an inclusive one that has steadily increased both its need- and merit-based financial assistance to cover 60 percent of the student body and about 80 percent of students who request assistance.

"There are 1.8 billion young men and women aged 10-24 in the world today – the largest cohort of youth in history – and youth in the Arab world make up the highest proportion globally," said Dr. Liliane Ghandour, associate professor at FHS. "The Youth Mentoring Platform will build on today's event and provide young people with opportunities to learn from the struggles and successes of others' who may have succeeded or are still struggling. It will also provide young people with venues to voice their thoughts, their opinions, and their fears and for us adults to listen actively and non-judgmentally. In doing so, we will also make sure to include a diverse group of young people, to tackle a variety of youth concerns, and to follow best practices, and take stock of the latest evidence on the 'effectiveness of mentoring.'"

The platform included a panel discussion with Dr. Farouk El Baz, member of the Science and Technology Advisory Council of the President of Egypt who worked with NASA in the scientific exploration of the moon and the planning of the Apollo program; Mariam Farag, head of corporate social responsibility at MBC Group; Dhafer Labidine, actor and member of Mentor Arabia Friends committee; Jennifer Sulaiman, chief sustainability officer at Zain Group; and Abu, singer and member of Mentor Arabia Friends committee. The participants spoke about the important role that mentorship played in their careers and personal experiences and engaged in dialogue moderated by media figure Zaven Kouyoumdjian and a Q&A session with AUB youth.

"Mentoring has shown to be an effective mode of intervention for youth that improves not only academic and career outcomes but also enhances social and emotional functioning," said Thuraya Ismail, executive director of Mentor Arabia, as she explained the scientifically proven benefits of mentorship in inspiring leadership and overcoming challenges. "Through difficult times and challenges, you need to seek mentorship, you need to see guidance, and you need to believe in people who care for you and want the best for you."

The event concluded with a keynote speech by Queen Silvia of Sweden who thanked President Michel Aoun for his patronage through First Lady Nadia Aoun, and acknowledged AUB for its support and collaboration as a partner in the Mentor program.

"This is my first visit ever to Lebanon, and I feel honored to be here in this platform of knowledge and development," said Queen Silvia who founded Mentor International in 1994 with the goal to reach young people and to make a difference in their lives. During the last 25 years,

the Mentor initiative has implemented projects in more than 80 countries, reaching more than 6 million young people.

“Let me quote a part of the mission statement of the American University of Beirut, 'to encourage freedom of thought and expression and value critical thinking, life-long learning, civic responsibility, and leadership'," added the queen. “These powerful words express some fundamental values on youth and personal empowerment. Their visions come to life, as they work with their mentors, and here in their university, they create a force of change that will contribute positively to the society of tomorrow.”

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 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 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 420-bed hospital.

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