

For Immediate Release



Beirut: 2-9-2019

AUB officially opens new academic year:
President Fadlo Khuri highlights the importance
of providing opportunity for a brighter future

The American University of Beirut (AUB) opened its new academic year in an official ceremony held in Assembly Hall, on campus.

The ceremony was headed by AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri. Chairman of the Board of Trustees Dr. Philip S. Khoury, Provost Dr. Mohamed Harajli, deans, trustees, vice presidents, faculty, students and various university stakeholders were present in the ceremony.

The academic procession, comprising the president, deans, faculty and trustees signaled the start of the ceremony. This was followed by the Lebanese National Anthem. President Khuri then took the podium and delivered his address, entitled: “It can happen here.”

After an introduction where he mentioned some alarming episodes from this summer, “from the forced cancellation of the concert in Byblos by AUB’s own “Mashrou Leila” who were present in the ceremony, to the President of the United States urging its closest ally to ban the entrance of America’s only two Muslim congresswoman , to the Hong Kong riots intended to hold on to the populace’s long earned rights to freedom of speech and a fair trial...” he said, “We are not here to rail against the lack of fairness, justice, and opportunity in the world. Rather, we exist to give hope to the hopeless, opportunity to the unfortunate, learning to the deserving, irrespective of their abilities to pay for that world-class education. We do this by recruiting the best and brightest, by sheltering and supporting them through the storms to come, by providing counsel and conscience to the leaders of the region. We are here to provide hope and opportunity for a better and brighter future.”

He continued, “Perhaps it would enjoin us to ask what can happen here to change a country, and a region so the best and brightest young people do not have to leave their homes to gain a fair opportunity to succeed, to assume their natural human rights to health, happiness and to a better life.” He added, “We must ask how to create an environment where the planet, which we are currently consuming at breakneck pace, can rather be cherished and preserved for generations and indeed for millennia to come.”

Khuri then spoke about the fact that much of the most significant progress throughout the course of history has been achieved in periods of stress, suffering, and pain. He then moved on to talk about how anger can in fact be used to bring about positive change. “How do we harness that same anger that properly directed, can resolve lingering issues?” He asked. He then highlighted “aspirational qualities” that British historian Andrew Roberts had discussed in his book about Napoleon, “meritocracy, equality before the law, property rights, religious toleration, modern secular education, sound finances.” He then raised the question, “How can we ensure that the 21st century moves more adroitly towards these goals, and that of conservation of nature, sustainability, inclusiveness, innovation, and equitable distribution of wealth, health and happiness?” Khuri continued, “Let us consider what we at AUB are doing and can do to promote those same qualities in order to model a fairer and more just society, a more inclusive world. We already have faculty making fundamental discoveries that can impact the region. AUB’s Medical Center cares for some of the most ill and unfortunate souls in the region. Our nonacademic staff are models of selfless dedication, showing unparalleled loyalty, purpose, and steadfastness to the university’s mission, in spite of the economic maelstrom that threatens to engulf Lebanon and the Arab world. And our magnificent students, truly the best and brightest of the region and the world, are lighting up villages, educating the underprivileged, entertaining the country and the region with their music and theatre, and creating new value through innovation and application.”

Khuri also spoke about one of the greatest American novels of the 20th century, *The Grapes of Wrath*, written by the 1962 Nobel Laureate John Steinbeck, which “details the poignant travails of the suffering migrant Joad family, once proud landowning farmers in Oklahoma.” He compared it to what is currently taking place in the region. “This experience is being recapitulated to a tragic degree today through the displacement of large swaths of Syria’s agrarian society to Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey. Like the ‘Okies’ of Steinbeck’s masterpiece, Syrian families suffer from hunger, poor access to health care, lack of educational opportunities, crowding, and poor sanitary conditions. Like the Okies, however, they do encounter some who understand and support their plight, and our students and faculty are at the forefront, leading those efforts across the country.” He added, “Our AUB community has built sheltered schools through the Ghata project, surveyed working conditions for migrant children, and built portable electronic medical records, among many other projects. The nobility of individuals who are willing to sacrifice for others, so eloquently brought to the fore in Steinbeck’s masterpiece, reminds me precisely of our remarkable students, faculty, and staff, who give of themselves unselfishly so that others ‘may have life, and have it more abundantly.’ These remarkable members of the AUB community are able to mobilize their anger not for revenge, but for clarity of purpose and for the greater good. They mobilize that anger through increasing expectations of themselves and others.”

“We must continue to support our faculty and staff, our permanent army, as our Board Chair Philip Khoury describes them, by ensuring that they are not subjected to a severe challenge to their quality of life should the region and the country’s economic, social, and political instabilities continue to build,” Khuri said. “To further ease their minds, we pledge to do all we can to mitigate the effects of any serious devaluation in currency or further economic deterioration to prevent our students from graduating on time, our patients from being cared for, and our faculty and staff from being able to provide for their families. We will continue to hold ourselves and our university to the very highest standards of excellence, transparency and accountability. We will act to further stabilize our best and brightest faculty members by gathering and synthesizing all data from our last two rounds of tenure and promotion

applications to ensure a process that is as fair, inclusive, and selective for excellence as possible. Therefore, I am pledging today that these efforts will lead to those faculty members denied tenure in the spring of 2018 having an opportunity to reapply sooner rather than later, given the increased traction, precision and momentum the process has gained after two rounds.”

“As for our students,” he continued, “we have steadily increased both our need- and merit-based financial assistance such that it covers 60% of our student body, with new merit- and need-based programs that will be rolled out this year. At the same time, we are fully aware of their concerns with regard to the necessary benchmarking to dollar tuitions that were necessitated by our long and successful efforts to join the Common Application. As we aspire to have 30% of our matriculating students by 2030 being international, and while we embrace with great enthusiasm the magnificent students we have been privileged to educate from Africa, Asia, the MENA region and all ends of the world, we shall not turn our backs on the brilliant Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Jordanian, and Iraqi students that have formed the bedrock of our student body for many generations, something we have already shown with our MEPI-TL Palestinian students.”

“We pledge to examine every day for lessons learned, for deeds accomplished and for areas of improvement. And we will do so in a manner befitting this great, progressive university, one which admitted women leaders a half century before the Ivy League Schools diversified their gender base,” he stated.

Khuri concluded, “So I say, yes, it can happen here. We can lead by example, provide for our community, and continue to model a fair, just and inclusive society.” Adding that in the final analysis, it is “our dream, that all of our own academic and biologic children and the peoples of this great region whose learning we are privileged to lead, will one day be judged on the content of their character. And to make that dream into a reality, ‘we have promises to keep, and miles to go before we sleep, and miles to go before we sleep.’”

The ceremony concluded with the Alma Mater.

ENDS

Text by:
Sally Abou Melhem
Writer
Office of Communications
American University of Beirut

For more information please contact:

Simon Kachar
Director of News and Media Relations
Mobile: (+961) 3-427-024
Office: (+961) 1-374-374 ext: 2676
Email: sk158@aub.edu.lb

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.

Stay up to date on AUB news and events. Follow us on:

Website: www.aub.edu.lb
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/aub.edu.lb>
Twitter: http://twitter.com/AUB_Lebanon