



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

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The American University of Beirut's 159th Opening Ceremony Highlights the University's Role and Impact Today

The American University of Beirut (AUB) celebrated its traditional opening ceremony on Monday, September 2, 2024. Marking the beginning of the new academic year, the ceremony was attended by members of the Board of Trustees, university leadership, faculty, staff, and students, welcoming them to another year of excellence, service, and innovation.

Following the official processional, AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri presented his tenth Opening Day Ceremony address, this year titled, "The benefits of our doubts."

Speaking of current and future needs of Lebanon and the world and AUB's role in addressing them, Khuri urged the audience to strive to believe in the fundamental decency and even goodness of others and "see those qualities that allow us to be generous in spirit and give others the benefits of our doubts." He added, "The very attempt to understand the intentions of others, to treat them as fellow human beings, flawed but with virtues in there somewhere, elevates us, making us more capable in prosecuting the good and great causes of our planet."

Khuri said that the 21st century must not be abandoned as a century of polarization and conflict, but be seized on its major opportunities for course correction. He spoke about the mandate to provide platforms for impact in education, research, and economic opportunities, building on the successful conclusion of the largest capital campaign by a private university in the region. After raising over \$800 million through the [BOLDLY AUB](#) campaign, AUB dramatically enhanced financial aid and patient care, providing access to better lives to many who would not have afforded them otherwise.

The university was also able to establish the [American University of Beirut – Mediterraneo](#) in Pafos, Cyprus, acquire its first community hospital in the Keserwan Medical Center, and launch [AUB Online](#) to expand its educational and healthcare reach. Khuri also announced the next phase of the university's [VITAL strategic plan](#), to launch schools of architecture and design, arts and humanities, and computing and data sciences in the next decade. "Strategic growth to expand our societal impact is vital to sustain the cogency of our mission, of our university," he said.

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Drawing examples from history and eras of world transformation, Khuri emphasized the importance of connecting liberal education with innovation at institutions of higher learning in shaping the 21st century.

In speaking about the selection by great universities of visionary presidents through history to educate, mentor, and empower diverse generations to contribute to a better, more inclusive America and world, and to speak with greater authority, legitimacy, and insight to the most gnawing social ills, Khuri emphasized the crucial role of university leadership that does not opt to appease others while leaving “the untidy challenges of the world to politicians and to capital markets.”

Khuri said, “Today's challenges are both complex and compelling. Problems such as war, inequality, and global warming are of the magnitude that we will need the best and brightest leaders in academia, students, faculty, staff, and administration to join in this struggle to solve these problems wholeheartedly. That is what you collectively represent today.”

Calling for an inclusive approach to citizenship and tackling the thorniest problems, he highlighted the vital duty of universities to prepare the next generation to tackle the fundamental challenges humankind faces. “We recognize that even all the computing power, machine learning, all the human and artificial intelligence we can bring to bear will not even make a real dent in these challenges without our genuine and humane commitment and leadership,” he added.

Referring to the Syrian Protestant College's second president, Howard Bliss, who would transform the college into the American University of Beirut and spoke of turning “doctors, lawyers, and pharmacists into men,” rather than the converse, Khuri called for making AUB's work, mission, and publications count, and materialize the truth that AUB students, faculty, and staff members are fully capable of contributing to a better world.

“The world is full of people who should be heard, who can be taught, who can be won over, who can do good,” said Khuri, referring to the university's mission and philosophy. “This is at the core of the American University of Beirut we all belong to; a rare institution we believe that can inspire, through its citizens and services, the development of better societies, that they too 'may have life, and have it more abundantly.'”

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

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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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