



**AMERICAN  
UNIVERSITY  
OF BEIRUT**

**OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **The Tomorrow's Leaders Gender Scholars Program of the Middle East Partnership Initiative Celebrates Its Fourth Graduation Ceremony at the American University of Beirut**

In a graduation ceremony held at the American University of Beirut, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) of the U.S. Department of State celebrated the graduation of 29 students from the Tomorrow's Leaders Gender Scholars (MEPI-TLS) program for the academic year 2023-2024.

The ceremony was attended by prominent figures, including Sama Habib, spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy in Beirut; David Lewis, MEPI program coordinator; and Maya Barhouche, MEPI program grants manager. From AUB, attendees included Dr. Fadlo Khuri, AUB president; Dr. Zaher Dawy, provost; and Dr. Lina Choueiri, deputy provost. The ceremony was also attended by deans, professors, university staff, graduating scholars, and members of the MEPI-TLS program team.

The Tomorrow's Leaders Gender Scholars program is supported by the United States Department of State and aims at raising students' awareness about gender inequality and equipping them with the appropriate tools to create change as future leaders. Students selected for the program join the vibrant family of gender scholars across various faculties and programs at AUB. By the end of the program, these scholars will have written a research paper for publication, completed two academic courses on gender, participated in several workshops, and accomplished many activities related to gender studies.

The ceremony began with the reception of the university president and guests from the U.S. Embassy, followed by a group photo and the playing of the Lebanese and American national anthems.

Dr. Fadlo Khuri, AUB president, delivered a welcome speech in which he emphasized the university's long-standing commitment to gender equality and inclusivity. He stated, "The university was founded more than a century and a half ago on the very principles of openness, quality, and inclusion, and we have decidedly left no room for discrimination at any level." He added that AUB was among the first universities worldwide to call for gender equality, access, and opportunity, including access to higher education at AUB; and noted that by the 1920s, it

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had already become a co-ed campus, 50 years ahead of the Ivy League and other famous universities in the West.

He continued, highlighting the significance and impact of the program and the values it shares with AUB, "Similarly, the MEPI-TLS Gender Program challenges rooted gender norms and biases. It equips its scholars with invaluable perspectives as agents of change. But equally, I would say it equips its graduates with the knowledge that they're not alone, in this world; in wanting a world that is more fair, more inclusive, less prejudicial, more really accepting of all."

The U.S. Embassy spokesperson Sama Habib stated, "As gender scholars, you have learned about the various ways in which gender affects our daily lives, and you have developed the skills to analyze and address gender-based inequalities. As Malala Yousafzai said, 'we cannot all succeed when half of us are held back'."

She further highlighted the program's role in driving change, saying, "It is in this spirit that we hope you will work to advocate for gender inclusivity in your communities and workplaces. As you enter the next phase of your journey, I encourage you to use your knowledge and skills to challenge stereotypes, advocate for gender equality, and create opportunities for women and girls to succeed."

Habib shed light on the broader impact of the scholars' work. "By promoting gender inclusivity, you help create a world where everyone can reach their full potential, regardless of their gender. I am confident that you will continue to make us proud and inspire others to follow in your footsteps."

MEPI-TLS Gender Director Lina Abou Habib spoke about the program's commitment to gender equality. She noted, "The MEPI-TLS program has exemplified what it means to practice gender equality." Abou Habib pointed out that the program initially focused on Lebanese students but evolved to address discriminatory nationality laws in Lebanon by expanding eligibility to include "Lebanese students as well as students born to Lebanese mothers."

She added, "The impact of the MEPI-TLS program was essentially in touching the minds and hearts of the students and equipping them with the tools to recognize gender based oppression and feel concerned enough to act."

The ceremony included the screening of two short videos showcasing the program's achievements and its impact on both current students and alumni, and concluded with the distribution of certificates to the graduates of the 2023-2024 MEPI-TLS cohort.

The event was followed by a reception, offering graduates, faculty members, and distinguished guests an opportunity to celebrate the scholars' achievements and discuss future initiatives.

## 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 750 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 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 365-bed hospital.

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