

For Immediate Release



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AUB Officially Opens New Academic Year

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 Mohammad Harajli, deans, trustees, vice presidents, faculty, students and various university stakeholders were present in the ceremony.

Entry of 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: “A life in the world”; he said: “Today, we have the privilege and the responsibility launch towards an even more energetic successful controversial 2018, after a highly impactful and successful academic year just concluded. A great deal was accomplished and yet much seems incomplete somehow.”

“Lost in the current immigration noise is the institutional memory of America’s rise to scientific primacy in the mid-20th century, fueled by the immigration of brilliant, creative minorities seeking escape from the very same ethnic nationalism we are seeing on the rise today.” He added that Vannevar Bush, sensing the trend of Einstein’s and Fermi’s immigrating to America in the interwar period, “developed the blueprint for the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. Within 20 years, the US became the world leader in scientific discovery as well as military power.”

“Today, America, a nation that disproportionately relies on international students and doctoral graduates to accelerate its scientific research mission and its technological and industrial age, may find those students in short supply. The US is faced with policies that not only discourage immigrants from the six mainly-Muslim majority nations that were outlined in President Trump’s original travel ban, but also has manage to dissuade many from the far and near east, as

well as some parts of Africa from committing to graduate and post-doctoral studies in the country that once harbored the world's most endangered refugees," he continued.

"But AUB is different. We inhabit, lead, and embody a patch of fertile dissonance in the Middle East, ever since 152 years ago, when Presbyterian missionaries founded the American University of Beirut as the Syrian Protestant College. Far more successful at disseminating a secular, liberal arts education than it had been in religious conversion, the university took advantage of Lebanon's liberal and diverse population to become a world leader in inclusive education. Battered but unbowed by the Lebanese Civil War, the university has gradually emerged that much stronger for its role as the preeminent seat of higher learning in the Arab world, all while maintaining the spirit of a liberal arts school. One thing we cannot compromise on—and something the American University of Beirut does very well—is to dispel the myths that contribute to the fear of the other. We accept students from every political spectrum, every religious background, and 22% of our students are international. While many graduates retain the same political and religious views that they brought with them, they are far less likely to believe in violent confrontation after an AUB experience, and far more accepting of individuals who are different from them in every way. Several universities in Europe have taken on the mantle of inclusive education as a tool for social mobility and societal cohesion, focusing on excellence through diversity," Khuri said.

"Over 13 years in my previous occupation at Emory, we led the recruitment of 95 faculty members, and never once worried about an individual's background, except with regard to talent, character and fit," he added.

"In my generation Europe was viewed less warmly than the US, in large part due to its Colonial history, a source of suspicion and contempt among the recently colonized and many would say with good reason. "The American Dream" was prevalent even among young Arabs whose disdain for American foreign policy did not prevent them from admiring a United States genuinely coming to grips with its racist past to forge a more accepting, more inclusive, ethnically diverse, more multicultural future," he added. "This was the America that I had grown up dreaming of..., not the constricted, indifferent, increasingly inward-looking US that we have observed lately."

Khuri then spoke about his plea for inclusivity, based on observations from 23 years of his work, "Inclusivity allows you to select, admit, nurture and unleash the very best and brightest, the very people who we can help to ensure a better, fairer, more just and more inclusive world. In fact, recent data from American cities and towns which had an increase in immigration demonstrated a drop in the incidence of violent crimes, despite the publicizing of rare crimes attributable to refugees and unregistered aliens, in their country and in the US, these peoples bring drive, diversity, as well as a palpable thirst for a better tomorrow."

“Like Einstein and Fermi and so many others before you, you emigrated to the United States and became a citizen of that great land, contributing so richly to its cultural and academic capital. So let me say as an American citizen myself, pass us more immigrants please, Mr. Trump. And as a Lebanese citizen I say the same to General Aoun. Our future as a human race, not just our scientific future, which is substantially threatened by a downturn in graduate school education and events, our future as a human race in the critical areas of the humanities, science, engineering and medicine strongly suggests that discouraging one group from reaching for their dream can have far broader consequences than those one might intend. Certainly Lebanon and indeed the Arab World's future is also dependent on economic and social reforms at a minimum. These are the kinds of reforms that will allow the children of Lebanese mothers to become full Lebanese citizens, so that this tiny country can retain, nurture and empower more of the very best and brightest,” Khuri continued.

He said that one of the priorities in the coming years is to “create a 100 million dollar fund to get the best and the brightest students from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Iraq to start to study at AUB to bond together as leaders.”

He concluded, “We’re committed to raising this money, the Board of Trustees and I, so that these people can create lives that are more abundant, more meaningful, and more powerful.”

Following Dr. Khuri’s address was a speech by Sir Fraser Stoddart, a Nobel Laureate, and a chemist of stature who has played a leading role in the development of mechanically interlocking molecules leading to the design and synthesis of molecular machines with myriad applications in industry, health and medicine, environmental protection, personal care, nutrition, and more. Stoddart spoke about his experience in the “university of life”, and advised the youth in the audience on how they can face the opportunities and obstacles awaiting them in their lives. He said,

“Life is not a bowl of cherries. The chances are that you will meet these occasions when everything seems to be against you and this is the real test.”

The ceremony concluded with the Alma Mater.

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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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