

For Immediate Release



On AUB's 149th Founders' Day: President Fadlo Khuri looks back at rich legacy and forward to the future

Beirut, Lebanon- 3/12/2015

“The stakes have always been great at AUB, as have the challenges. We in the AUB community would not have it any other way.”

In a vibrant and colorful ceremony, illustrated by visuals and music, the American University of Beirut celebrated its 149th year of foundation on December 3. The AUB Founders' Day is a day of tradition and pride where the founding fathers of AUB are honored along with the principles they and the university have represented over the decades, such as freedom of thought and expression; tolerance, respect for diversity, and dialogue; creative and critical thinking, life-long learning, personal integrity, civic responsibility, commitment and leadership.

The speaker for this year's ceremony was AUB's new President, Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, who took the audience on a visual journey over 150 years of AUB's history of giving and excellence. After observing that AUB was founded when the world consisted of about 60 sovereign nations, unlike today's 195, and the earth's population was less than third its number today, Dr. Khuri quoted AUB Founder Daniel Bliss in 1871: “This college is for all conditions and classes of men without regard to color, nationality, race, or religion”. He then offered what he jokingly called a “quick recap” of AUB's contributions during the past 150 years of history.

Today, the college that housed a freshman class of 16 students boasts a liberal arts college and research institution with nearly 8,000 students, almost perfectly divided between women and men, and more than 60,000 graduates in practically every country on earth.” President Khuri addressed the question “How did the Syrian Protestant College, the germ of which originated in a small seminary school in Abeih, endure to become the American University of Beirut? How did we come to be so instrumental in virtually every social movement, every scientific advance, every literary and artistic feat in the Arab world?”

The answer to President Khuri was quite simple: “This University, its leaders and its faculty, staff, and students, have always preferred to shape events, rather than be shaped by them. To act, rather than be acted upon. For the past 150 years, we have stood for the highest ideals, even - and perhaps especially - when to do otherwise would have been far easier.” Khuri said that AUB stood strong through world wars, the forging of new nations, the fall of empires, and a merciless civil war, and throughout, it not only remained a force to be reckoned with but was key in the building of nations emerging from under Ottoman control, to rebuilding and fortifying them around the world with the generations of leaders it produced.

Khuri spoke of AUB's "engaged leadership," as, to date, no other institution in history has educated more presidents, prime ministers, members of parliament, and other influential political figures in the Arab world than AUB. "We have helped develop societies from the ground up. Today, we continue to shape the physical and economic landscape of the Middle East in remarkable ways... And through studies on novel technologies and those who applied to society's neediest, AUB continues to lead the way in developing new approaches to societies in turmoil and transformation. This is part of the monumental legacy that makes this University unlike any other in the world."

President Khuri paid tribute to world leaders and pioneers who are known worldwide in their fields and who had all graduated from AUB, "Faris Al Khoury, a graduate and later instructor at AUB, was instrumental in founding the modern Syrian state and twice served as Prime Minister in the 1940s and 50s. Alumnus Ismail Al-Azhari became Prime Minister of Sudan in 1954, and later President. Charles Malik, alumnus and professor, helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, one of the most important documents of the modern era, affirming that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." The current President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, graduated from AUB in 1973 with a degree in Political Studies."

Gender equality was another pillar that was highlighted to distinguish AUB as an administration that admitted women as early as 1924, almost 50 years before some of the biggest world universities opened their doors to women. "Service in times of great need" was another major reason for AUB's endurance and distinction as "what is today call AUBMC has time and again served as a war hospital, staffed by doctors and nurses who made great personal sacrifices in the face of dwindling supplies to be able to keep up with the ever-growing scale of each catastrophe," said Dr. Khuri.

Speaking of the rise of the Nahda that took shape in the late 19th century and pioneers in groundbreaking intellectual and artistic accomplishment in the Arab world, President Khuri named pioneers such as Phillip Khuri Hitti, who graduated in 1908 and is considered the father of modern Arabic studies. Constantin Zurayk, class of 1928, who was proponent of secular nationalism in the Arab world and a peerless thinker who originated the idea of the Palestinian Nakba, Ghassan Tueni, class of 1945, who served as editor of An-Nahar newspaper and came to be known as one of the region's most respected journalists, and Ghada Al-Samman, class of 1965 who did her graduate work in Theater at AUB and has written acclaimed novels about Beirut during the Civil War. Dr. Khuri then acknowledged pioneering research that emerged from AUB in various fields over the past decades and urged the AUB community "to stay at the forefront of pedagogical innovations, using all the tools available to us in this ever-shifting technological frontier, and to re-establish AUB's pre-eminence in the humanities in the Arab World."

Khuri concluded the journey into AUB's history with a call for accessible education for all and a daring to take risks in research and marching up untrodden paths. "We need to make AUB more accessible than ever to the best and the brightest students and scholars everywhere, to become an institution that can attract people from all walks of life, so that they can be transformed by their experience here, and that their impact and ours continues to disseminate far beyond our walls, and reach beyond the limits of their and our imaginations," said President Khuri. "A legacy such as ours should always inspire us to take more risks, to deepen our culture of community service, from the humblest Lebanese villages to the

neediest Syrian and Palestinian refugees, and dare to live up the lofty ideals of the many who have gone before.”

The speech came after the winners of the Founders’ Day Essay Contest were announced and each of the two winners read their prizewinning essays. This year, student competitors were asked to reflect on the role that AUB should play in Lebanon, the region, and the world in the decades to come. First-place winner Nizar Awwad called for the protection of diversity and helping students of all financial backgrounds to join AUB so that “they may have life and have it more abundantly.” Awwad is in his last year at AUB after receiving a full scholarship on the USAID program. Second-place winner, Elena Grissom wrote about AUB as a safe place where students can think outside the box and will continue to impact Lebanon and the region because it is a place of safety for students to explore and question.

The Founders’ Day Ceremony is a longtime tradition that was mixed this year with novelty and ingenuity. Tenor Eliya Francis performed “Nessun Dorma” from Giacomo Puccini’s Opera “Turandot” and “Questa o Quella” from Giuseppe Verdi’s Opera “Rigoletto”. The ceremony was crowned by the traditional procession of the University Board of Trustees and Board of Deans in their academic regalia onto the stage and through the gates of AUB’s historic Assembly Hall.

ENDS

For more information please contact:

Office of Communications, information@aub.edu.lb, 01-75 96 85

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 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 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