

For Immediate Release



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AUB Celebrates its 151st Founders Day

The American University of Beirut (AUB) celebrated its 151st Founders Day in its annual ceremony held at Assembly Hall in the presence of members of the Board of Trustees, AUB administration, faculty, students, and the AUB community. The celebration reiterated AUB's commitment to the values instilled by its founders since December 3, 1866.

“On Founders Day, we forget all our challenges and remember again why the university was founded, to create better lives and better opportunities for those who had little, if any, of either,” said AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri. “The university was founded by men who knew and mandated that one day, they would mentor the future mentors, to teach the teachers, to turn over the reins of this great font of learning to the peoples of this part of the world.”

This year's keynote speaker was AUB trustee, Dr. José Zaglul. Dr. Zaglul is president emeritus and founding president of EARTH University, an international private nonprofit institution in Costa Rica dedicated to the teaching of agricultural sciences and rational management of natural resources.

Dr. Zaglul spoke about the key role universities can and must play in catalyzing needed change and partnerships between north and south, but also within countries in the Global South. He gave examples of collaboration opportunities with Latin America and Africa in the fields of medical research for the service of the underprivileged, food security, and research for clean energy. Presenting the example of Costa Rica, Zaglul urged for investment in ethical education and free healthcare rather than investing in weapons.

Dr. Zaglul spoke about values that different founding presidents endorsed at AUB and said that, with increasing global challenges, education and collaboration on research are powerful tools to bring about a “peaceful, just, and prosperous” society.

“We have the responsibility to role-model the behaviors and attitudes that we wish to see in the world... We need to learn to live together as one country, one human race, heal the wounds, build bridges, and become a harmonious society.”

Zaglul, who was nominated for a Nobel Prize for building a sustainable education model in ethical leadership, spoke about the founding fathers’ courage in establishing an institute that produces “leaders who serve.” He added that he has no doubt that AUB will continue to shine as an inspiration to the world as the value-based institution that President Fadlo Khuri promotes. He urged a rekindling of values, attitudes, and responsibilities within the education system that would instill a needed change in the world and secure a sustainable humane future for generations to come.

“Our primary role as educational institutions is to form ethical leaders capable of serving their society,” said Zaglul. “It is not enough to teach science of business or any other discipline if we do not also teach values.”

Dr. Zaglul received his BA in agriculture and nutrition (’71) and MS in animal sciences (’73) at AUB. He received his PhD in animal sciences at the University of Florida. In 1987, he established EARTH University which has graduated more than 2100 leaders from 39 countries dedicated to sustainable development and the construction of a prosperous and just society.

The winners of the Founders Day student essay contest were also announced at the ceremony. First prize was awarded to sophomore Kamel Wehbe, majoring in political studies in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, for his essay “The Foundations of Greatness.” Second prize winners were seniors Nadine Eid and Nadine Abdul Salam, majoring in architecture in the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, for their video “The Roll of Paper,” which played during the ceremony on education that happens “between spaces.” Third prize winner was sophomore Aws Dek Albab, majoring in history in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

This year, the students were asked to write about whether AUB should change the education it provides to have an even more positive and transformative impact on the future of the region and the Global South. In his winning essay, Kamel Wehbe wrote about the “AUB character” that “allowed AUB to produce the largest number of presidents, prime ministers, and leading figures in the Arab world.” But he warned against the possible threat of the pursuit of status that compromises empathy and service. In his essay, which he read during the ceremony, Wehbe called for civic engagement and a continued commitment to the liberal arts model, rather than prioritizing the development of research powerhouses and a utilitarian view towards service.

“Our history is worth being proud of,” said Wehbe. “Our current performance, as the international community bears witness, is worth being proud of. However, we must rid ourselves

of pride and entitlement. Ability breeds responsibility. The region seeps into us just as we seep into it, our relationship is reciprocal. That is why we are the American University of Beirut... we are of the country, the region, and the world. Likewise, the country, the region, and the world, are of us.”

“The world is waiting for us to emerge from turmoil stronger, uplifting our community with us. They are not waiting for us to appear great with credentials or rankings. We are expected to continue laying the foundations upon which greatness is built. I am certain we will not disappoint.”

The ceremony ended with an organ performance of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Herzlich tut mich verlangen by Dr. Ramzi Sabra. Outside Assembly Hall a reception awaited the audience and displayed a tent offering a 360-degree virtual tour of AUB campus.

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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 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 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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