

For Immediate Release



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## **AUB Graduates 1649 Students**

**Khuri: “Now it is your turn to go out into the world full of confidence, privilege, and awake to opportunity.”**

The American University of Beirut (AUB) completed the second phase of its commencement ceremonies for the current academic year, by graduating 1649 fresh undergraduates.

The impressive ceremony, held on the Green Field in AUB’s lower campus, was attended by Minister of National Defense Elias Bou Saab and his wife Julia Boutros, Member of Parliament Henri Helou and his wife, former minister Wafaa Dika Hamza, former minister Pierre Raffoul, acting Director General of Vocational and Technical Education Dr. Hanadi Berri, as well as members of the Board of Trustees, senior administrators, deans, professors, parents, and friends.

After the arrival of the graduates’ procession and the procession of the university President, Provost, Deans, Faculty members and Trustees in their full academic regalia, the ceremony began with the Lebanese National Anthem. AUB President Dr. Fadlo Khuri then spoke.

### **Fadlo Khuri:**

President Khuri said: “This is the moment when you join the illustrious ranks of the men and women who are proud to call themselves AUB alumni. You have earned that right through your hard work and courage in the face of challenges. Tonight you celebrate as you take your places among a fellowship of AUB graduates who have transformed the world around us.

But wait a second, I hear you thinking. What is so great about the world in 2019! What have forgoing generations here in the Middle East, or around the world for that matter, what have they done except fight futile wars, degrade Earth’s ecosystem, or drive unimaginable inequality between those able to hoard wealth and power and those who have nothing? It would be a glib argument to say, imagine how much worse this world would be without the mitigating effect of

AUB graduates, without the leaders that have emerged from this university, who share the enduring values that you have learned, of social responsibility, fairness, integrity, and respect for peaceful dialogue.”

He continued: “It is true that, many indicators tell us that our world is becoming less healthy, less happy, less secure, and less viable. The question I put to you on this your evening, AUB Class of 2019, is what are you going to do to make a difference, and make the world a better place.”

He added: “In your years at AUB you will have learnt that there is purpose in life—that pivotal word in the AUB motto which you see every time you walk through Main Gate. ‘That they may have *life*, and have it more abundantly.’ Another American literary great, Ralph Waldo Emerson got it mostly right when he wrote: ‘The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.’”

He continued: “Now it is your turn, graduates, to go out into the world full of confidence, privilege, and awake to opportunity. And you will learn, ever so surely, the painful price of privilege as today’s reality dawns on you.

Of you, Class of 2019, I have no doubts. You are intent on pursuing that ideal to live well, to live more abundant lives. You have already lit up villages in Akkar and the Beqaa valley; you have given your time to build bridges between Lebanon’s refugee and host communities; you have provided for the education and healthcare of the most underprivileged Lebanese, people with disabilities, and migrant workers. You, our students are young leaders in health, in business, in science, in the arts, in agriculture, in engineering a better future. Uganda, Algeria, Ghana, Lebanon, Syria, the United States, France, and other countries across the globe, wait for such leaders. What advice can we give you on your last day as students on this, your beloved campus?”

Khuri said: “I agree with Emerson in principle. Find something meaningful to you to spend your time on. You are the best and the brightest, the hope of the times to come. But you will only fulfill that hope and your dreams and aspirations if you choose to do something that makes you feel fulfilled: a role, a job, a career that can make a difference for you and others. Pursue your passion. Do it well, do it fully, and do it with others whenever you can. Our trustee Marwan Muasher was trained in mechanical engineering, at AUB and at Purdue. Yet he chose to follow his passion, and commitment to political and economic inclusiveness and reform in these, our Arab lands. While the world certainly could use another brilliant mechanical engineer, it cannot do without a brave and tireless intellectual leader, who sees things, in the words of Robert Kennedy, ‘that never were and asks why not.’”

He continued: “I wish to disagree ever so subtly with Emerson, much as I admire his idea of a life well lived. Happiness is important. Focus on it. Spend time on it. Live balanced, happy lives, but also lives of purpose where you enjoy what you are doing. Many years ago my colleagues at Emory, complaining about the number of 6 AM meetings I brought them in for, argued that I was skewing their Work-Life Balance. ‘That’s funny,’ I retorted. ‘Life is what you get back when I find someone younger and cheaper to do your work!’ Instead, perhaps the words of William Shakespeare can modify those of Emerson (and my own obsessive nature). ‘Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none.’”

Khuri concluded: “And so my brave, distinguished, and accomplished AUB Class of 2019, go forth in peace, to make the world a better place than that which you found before you. Turn now and salute your parents and families, your friends and your compañeros and compañeras. As Hippocrates, father of occidental medicine once wrote, ‘Life is short, art long, opportunity fleeting, experience treacherous, judgment difficult.’ But that road is much more enjoyable in the company of friends and loved ones.”

### **The Graduating Class Speech:**

Student Arman Khederlarian from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business spoke on behalf of the graduating class. He said: “Wednesday, September 2, 2015. My first day as an AUB student. I had recently graduated from a small Armenian school in the heart of Beirut, and here I was - making my way from upper campus to OSB in a university with more than 10,000 students. I was overwhelmed with feelings of excitement and anticipation as I entered my first class in this prestigious university. It was an accounting course, and although I did not know anyone in my class or even had a single clue of what accounting is, I could sense that this was the beginning of a very exciting journey. Fast forward 4 years, I have completed a dual degree in business and economics, I have traveled the world: from LA to Athens, NY to Montreal, Florida to Germany representing AUB in international competitions. I have lifted multiple trophies with the AUB football varsity team and been part of a batch of AUB students that managed a 1-million-dollar portfolio in the financial markets. I was elected as a student body representative to the University Student Faculty Committee, and finally I stand here, in front of all of you today, giving this speech. I mention all of these to shed light on the fact that AUB is not just any other university. AUB is an institution that is ready to take in any student, no matter the race, ethnicity, religion, or gender – and to provide them with a pathway to success and the ability to excel. And that is what all of the students here today have done in one way or another. All of our hard work has paid off and the end of this wonderful journey is upon us, and it is now time to say goodbye and to move on to the next adventure.”

He continued: “On that note, on behalf of each and every student, I want to say – thank you. Thank you to all the parents and families out there who have supported us throughout our lives

and sacrificed everything, to give us everything. To my mother, Pateel, and my father, Hrant, the love and care you have shown me throughout my life has been more than I could have ever wished for, and for that I am eternally grateful. Thank you to our professors, faculty members, administration and every other person who has helped make AUB the astounding university it is today because you have allowed us to gain an educational experience like no other in the region. Thank you to our classmates and fellow students, without whom this experience would not have been as unique and exciting as I'm sure it has been for each and every one of us.”

He added: “AUB, we will miss you, we will also miss the champions league final tonight, but honestly AUB, I'm sure I speak on behalf of most if not all the students present here today that the years we have spent on this beautiful campus will forever live in our memories as some of the most beautiful and enriching days of our lives. And even though in a few months the AUB Class of 2019 will be spread out all over the world, I know that each and every one of us will always be ready to give back to AUB and to Lebanon.”

He concluded: “AUB has been the gel that has kept the more than 1600 of us graduating students together. But the time has come for our paths to diverge. And even though we might be chasing different paths with different goals - there must be one thing that unites us: our drive to achieve greatness. Mediocrity is the enemy, and hard work, dedication, and perseverance are the tools that will help us overcome it. Stay hungry AUB graduates. Stay motivated. Take risks. Dream big, and do not settle for anything less than what you truly want to achieve in life and do everything in your power to achieve it. We owe it to ourselves to put in all the time, talent, and effort required to change ourselves, our country, and our world for the better. The fact that we are all graduating from this prestigious university is a great step in the right direction. But it is exactly that, a step. Our journey to success has only just begun. And if our goal is to reach the stars then AUB has taught us how to get there. Be proud of what you have accomplished, and be even prouder of the things that you will accomplish in this amazing journey that we call life.”

### **Reeta Roy:**

Advocate of the vulnerable and president and CEO of the Mastercard Foundation Reeta Roy, who had received the honorary doctorate in humane letters during yesterday's ceremony, took the podium to deliver her keynote speech. She said: “Congratulations. You've made it. You've taken your last exam, turned in your last paper, and you are now graduates of the American University of Beirut class of 2019.

You've enjoyed your last AUB Outdoors as students, probably feeling guilty because you should have been studying for finals. You saw things you thought you would never see in your lifetime, like the United Faculty finally defeating Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, on penalty kicks, in the Big Game. And today you join the ranks of distinguished alumni.”

She added: “Over these years together, you have grown into a remarkable community. You won slam poetry contests and business school case competitions, debate prizes and architecture awards. You’ve been recognized as the top Arab women in computing. You’ve volunteered to teach English to Syrian refugees and Arabic to foreign exchange students. You’ve made something beautiful. Now you’re passing through the Main Gate into the rest of your lives.”

She continued: “The world outside feels different today. You’re graduating at a moment in time that is simultaneously wondrous and monstrous. It’s a moment of unprecedented advancements and possibilities, of biotech and artificial intelligence, of innovations, cures, and breakthroughs. But this is also a moment of conflict, heartbreak, and manmade catastrophe—what my friend Dean Iman calls ‘the hard reality out there.’ It’s a world of unmatched connectivity, yet also a tower of Babel where everybody seems to be talking and nobody seems to be listening. A world where the phone in your pocket holds more data than the great ancient libraries, yet the distinction between information and wisdom is painfully clear.

How – amid such terrible beauty, such dizzying change – do you rise above the rancor, the noise, the meanness, and the tempting quick fixes to find your life’s purpose? How do you discover happiness, harmony, meaning? In the words of a great poet we lost this past year, Mary Oliver: ‘tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?’”

She added: “I have no certain answers or lectures to offer. But I can tell you what I have seen. The process of discovery – the act of becoming – takes a lifetime of work. As long as you’re alive, this work will never be done. For all that we accomplish, we all remain works in progress. My message today is about the work you will have to do for yourselves, and the work you will do for each other.

For many of you the first challenge you will confront, upon graduating, is to work on yourself – to find a job and choose a direction. Know broadly where you want to go. Be open to what comes your way. In fact, put yourself in the path of lightning.”

She said: “I have always been a dreamer. When I graduated, my plan was simple: change the world. And like many dreamers, I didn’t get the job I wanted. And I watched my classmates, one after another, land high-paying jobs as investment bankers, consultants. I doubted my place in the world.

After graduate school I worked briefly at the United Nations. To my surprise, I found it wasn’t for me. Several rejections later, I was offered a position at a global health care company – a far cry from the world-changing law and diplomacy. Or so I thought.

My corporate journey brought me for the first time to Africa – a continent that over time has become central to my own life’s story. My corporate career turned out to be an extraordinary classroom. It brought me to the worlds of public policy, ethics, philanthropy, and social change. In an unexpected, unplanned, and completely marvelous way, it prepared me for my role at the Foundation today. I just didn’t know it then.”

She continued: “As you look back, life will teach you that planning is best done in retrospect. As you look forward, what you really need to be is to be open and ready for new experiences. This fact still astounds me. Someone who grew up in a very small town in Malaysia is now at the helm of a global foundation based in Canada that was endowed by an American company and is focused on addressing issues of poverty in Africa and here in Lebanon. Life rarely occurs in a straight line.

Of course, living in Lebanon, you know that. Finding creative ways to navigate life’s twists and turns seems to be part of the country’s DNA. That’s the spirit that led AUB students, in the darkest days of the civil war, to dream up and then make real the first-ever AUB Outdoors. It’s a spirit of creativity – even defiance. That same spirit can help you thrive in a complex world.

That’s the spirit of the AUB students who started the Green Shift in Tripoli. When the trash system failed the city, they didn’t complain or place blame. They found solutions. So, I want to salute the remarkable AUB students who are also building Lebanon’s recycling sector and teaching a new generation to shift to a sustainable lifestyle.

In that same spirit, three young AUB undergraduates from Somaliland and Rwanda started an award-winning NGO called Solace for Somaliland. They took what they learned here at AUB to solve of problems of their home communities.

You should be very proud that these change agents, these social innovators are AUB students. And we are honored that they are also Mastercard Foundation Scholars.”

Roy said: “There’s a world of solutions to be had, but not if you look away from the problems. Learn to embrace the problems in your midst – to love them, even – and you will find not just solutions, but meaning and success along the way.

We never solve problems alone. We need community. In times of uncertainty, the world needs more human engagement. More understanding across cultures, not less. In a turbulent world, community can be a source of solace, stability, and solutions.”

She added: “All of us are part of multiple communities that make up the fabric of our lives: professional communities, intellectual communities, cultural communities, and spiritual

communities. Some we were born into, others we joined, and some we lead. You may come from a small village but find yourself initiated into a tribe of architects and engineers. It's limiting to be seen in only one frame. Each of us holds multitudes. It's worthwhile to see each other that way.

Be generous in welcoming others. Be greedy in learning from them. Take a moment and think of people you never would have met had you not been at AUB. Think of what you would have missed without that encounter.

So I encourage you to put yourself in the path of an encounter that could be life changing: the encounter with difference. This is a path where strangers become friends. Where different cultural threads become part of the fabric of common humanity. Today this school is harkening back to its finest traditions, when people gathered here to seek knowledge from across Africa and Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. Let that spirit of welcome be part of what you take with you."

Roy concluded: "The problems of the world are often caused by community – but they can be solved by community too. Think about what you will contribute. Think about the character of the communities you enter and build. Will they be walled off or welcoming? Built on common resentments or common humanity? When they come up short, as all communities do sometimes, do they hold outsiders responsible and lash out or do they hold themselves accountable and learn? You will be shaped by your communities. But make no mistake, you will shape your communities as well. And sometimes a single voice can be decisive. Let that voice be yours. Use it.

Let me close with the wisdom of another of my favorite writers. Khalil Gibran. Because he is the best. 'You work that you may keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth....when you work you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music.' 'Work,' the poet writes, 'is love made visible.'

Today may feel like an end, but it's also a beginning. Today the world stands before you. In fact, the hopes of villages, small towns, your communities, rest on your shoulders. Don't be daunted. I know you will do amazing things. You have knowledge, friends, and a community you have built here. And as you pass through the Main Gate today, may you find joy in the journey and your purpose in the problems you solve, and 'may you have life, and have it more abundantly.' Good luck!"

### **The Degrees:**

President Khuri and the deans then distributed degrees to the 1649 undergraduate students:

Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences 124  
Faculty of Arts and Sciences 618  
Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture 494  
Faculty of Health Sciences 70  
Suliman S. Olayan School of Business 305  
Rafic Hariri School of Nursing 38

**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 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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