

For Immediate Release



Keynote speaker Noam Chomsky to the Class of 2013: We must defend the global commons against commercialization, environmental catastrophe, and autocratic rule

Beirut, Lebanon- 15/06/2012 - Another academic year has ended, and another 1485 AUB students have earned their bachelor's degrees, in a ceremony held at the American University of Beirut Green Field on June 15, 2013. A day earlier, more than 500 students received their graduate degrees, and four prominent individuals from the world of academia, space and technology, film-making, and business were awarded honorary doctorates by the University.

[\[See full story\]](#)

A procession of professors and trustees in academic regalia, led by Chief Marshal Huda Zurayk, opened the 144th commencement exercises on both evenings, and both events were live-streamed on several screens on campus and online for the first time in the University's commencement history. Live-tweeting and uploading of photos to AUB social media pages were also made available to everyone, including friends and families of the graduates who could not attend the ceremonies.

“The diplomas you are about to receive will do more than simply certify that you have completed a degree in the program of your choice,” said AUB President Peter Dorman, after congratulating the Class of 2013. “Behind each diploma lie the history and stature of one of the greatest international universities in the world. Behind each diploma lie the universal values that are nurtured on this campus: diversity, freedom of thought, inclusiveness, and sustainability. Behind each diploma lie historic generations of men and women who have left their significant mark in the world, and whose ranks you are about to join.”

Two students addressed their fellow classmates during the commencement exercises.

Mohamed Homayed, vice president of the University Student-Faculty Committee and a candidate for the degree of Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Sciences, invited his fellow graduates to use the “assets of tolerance, understanding and self-motivation, which AUB has equipped us with... to prevent the walls of our beloved country from tumbling down.”

He also invited his classmates to overcome self-destructive sectarian instincts to build a country of love, unity, pluralism, openness and partnership.

For his part, Omar Abdul Sattar Ellaz, a candidate for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Economics, shared personal examples of how AUB had taught him to adopt the values it praises: freedom of expression, exposure to all fields of study, even controversial ones, and the passion for knowledge.

“At AUB, I found the support that I didn’t easily find around me to pursue my true passion,” he added, noting that he had originally felt compelled to study engineering. “And here I am graduating, as an economics student, having in mind that individuals should not forgo their true passion to conform to societal standards that are not fit for them.”

President Dorman then introduced keynote speaker Noam Chomsky as a “trailblazing scholar, world-renowned intellectual, and inspirational political activist...who [has] the courage to fearlessly confront inequality, intolerance, and complacency.”

In his keynote speech, Chomsky focused on the arbitrariness of borders and the challenges to the legitimacy of states, taking examples from the United States, Europe, Pakistan, and the Middle East.

“The legitimacy of borders - for that matter of states - is at best conditional and temporary,” he said. “Almost all borders have been imposed and maintained by violence, and are quite arbitrary...Surveying the terrible conflicts in the world, almost all are the residue of imperial crimes and the borders they drew in their own interests.”

The blurring of borders and challenges to the legitimacy of states prompt a series of questions, noted Chomsky: “Who owns the global atmosphere that is being polluted ...Who will defend the earth? Who will uphold the rights of nature? Who will adopt the role of stewards of the commons, our collective possession?”

“That the earth now desperately needs defense from impending environmental catastrophe is surely obvious to any rational and literate person,” he added. “In the forefront of the defense of nature are those called ‘primitive’: indigenous, tribal..., and in general the remnants who have survived the imperial onslaught. In the forefront of the assault on nature are those who call themselves the most advanced and civilized, the richest and most powerful nations.”

In conclusion, Chomsky said that protesters, such as those in Taksim Square, are currently at the forefront of a worldwide struggle to defend the global commons from the ravages of the wrecking ball of commercialization, environmental degradation, and gentrification and autocratic rule that is destroying Earth.

Chomsky then invited everyone to partake in this struggle “with dedication and resolve, if there is any hope for decent human survival in a world that has no borders, and is our common possession.”

[Chomsky speech, attached]

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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 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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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