

For Immediate Release



## **Russian cosmonaut Georgi Grechko lectures at AUB, says manned trips to Mars imminent**

Beirut, Lebanon- 22/03/2011 - Former Russian cosmonaut Georgi M. Grechko visited the American University of Beirut yesterday, accompanied by Tarek Shuman, director of public relations at the Russian Cultural Center in Beirut, Lebanon. They were both received by Hikmat Beaini, director information and public relations at AUB.

Grechko's talk, entitled "First in Space" was delivered at the Bathish Auditorium in West Hall, and was co-presented by AUB's Office of Communications and the Russian Cultural Center.

Grechko's lecture was on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the first manned space flight, made by cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin.

The event began with the screening of a documentary film on Gagarin, showing the cosmonaut training with his colleagues as well as scenes of the Russian street reaction to the public announcement of the historic flight.

Grechko then showed the audience a number of slides as Shuman translated his explanations into Arabic. Grechko described his personal experience training under water to get used to weightlessness as well as training for emergency splashdown. He went on to describe his record-breaking stay in the Salyut space station, during which he broke the space duration record by remaining in outer space for 96 consecutive days, during his second space flight which began in December 1977. Grechko's first trip into space was in 1975 while his third was in 1985.

Grechko also shared with the audience his experience floating outside of the spaceship in order to test a new space suit, known as the Orlan space suit. He showed photos taken from outer space which revealed the beauty of planet earth as well as the destruction wrought by humans on the environment. Grechko also showed a magnificent sighting of sunset as seen from outer space.

Speaking on future space exploration, Grechko noted that the next step for cosmonauts will be to land on Mars. He said preparations for an international mission to land on Mars are currently under way in Russia. A team of cosmonauts has engaged in experiments in which they simulate life on Mars.

Grechko referred to the effectiveness of the Soyuz spacecraft, whose first launch into space took place in 1967. The Soyuz model is still in use today, he noted, while the US Space Shuttle has reached the end of its service life. Eventually, he said, cosmonauts worldwide will have to employ the Soyuz.

After the lecture, Grechko replied to a host of questions from the audience. He asserted that no other cosmonaut had traveled into space before Gagarin and highlighted the dangers associated with the kinetic heating of atmospheric reentry.

Grechko was asked questions about showering during extended stays in space. On the

question of the benefits of space exploration, Grechko noted that many of the space travel technologies have entered daily use on earth and a new muscle-bracing suit similar to what he wore in space is now being used to help paralyzed people to walk.

Grechko said that he had long wanted to visit Lebanon to examine the Baalbeck temple which he thinks was built by a civilization other than our own.

Georgi Grechko was born on May 25, 1931 in Leningrad. He worked with Sergei Korolev, the designer of the Vostok spacecraft that carried Gagarin into space.

Grechko joined the Soviet cosmonaut team in 1968. Besides the Soyuz program, he was involved in the Soviet moon landing and space shuttle programs, and when that program was cancelled, he went on to work on the Salyut space stations. He was twice awarded the medal of Hero of the Soviet Union and an asteroid was named for him.

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**Note to Editors**

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