

PRESS RELEASE



AUB confers honorary doctorates to Peter Sellars and Ismail Serageldin

Beirut, Lebanon- 29/05/2014 -The American University of Beirut awarded on May 29, 2015, honorary doctoral degrees to two individuals who made enduring contributions to the arts, humanitarian and environmental causes, and conservation of the cultural heritage.

The award ceremony took place at 8pm on the AUB Green Field, during the 146th commencement exercises for 535 graduate students, among whom were 12 PhD candidates and 84 MDs.

The two recipients were: Egyptian Ismail Serageldin, a humanitarian, noted public intellectual, and author; and American Peter Sellars, world-renowned director of opera, theater, and film, who was also the keynote speaker at the commencement exercises for graduate students.

These notable individuals were selected by AUB in recognition of the enduring impact of their work, their contributions to the advancement of knowledge through research, and their efforts to enrich quality of life in the region and around the world.

The ceremony started with the traditional procession of faculty members in their academic regalia, led by Chief Marshall Huda Zurayk, who opened and closed the ceremony. AUB has been conferring honorary doctoral degrees since 1890, but the tradition was suspended between 1969 and 2002 and was reinstated in 2003.

Attending the ceremony were a host of dignitaries, members of the AUB Board of Trustees, and friends and family of the graduates.

“Our University is a community of extraordinary individuals and groups, all of whom are passionately devoted to the vigor and the long-lasting success of one of the great experiments in education ever undertaken in the Middle East—chartered over 150 years ago,” said AUB President Peter Dorman, in his opening remarks. “The aspirations and values that bind us together are common to all.”

President Dorman acknowledged that the pursuit of values, such as freedom of expression, tolerance for diverse opinions and seeking dignity for every human being, is easier in a protected space such as a university campus, but “harder to practice in the world beyond our walls, and especially at a time when our region is beset by continuing violence.” He added, “As you make the transition from university life into the first years of your adult careers, you will discover that you are ambassadors—not only for AUB—but for the fundamental values that we hold dear.”

Dorman then introduced the first student speaker, Belal Al Rajoub, graduating with a Master of Science in nursing. “Without this special and precious experience at AUB, I’m sure my life would be something completely different,” Al Rajoub said. “I would not have such features of character as determination, self-confidence, purposefulness, commitment and passion. Thank you AUB for giving me the opportunity to have this experience.”

Petra Samaha, a candidate for the master’s degree in urban design, then took the stage, and invited fellow students to take a pause and reflect “on what AUB has taught us, in our classes, but also - and perhaps most importantly - in a campus that has maintained a unique environment of open critical thinking and commitment to religious and national diversity at a time when these values are disappearing rapidly in our region.”

In an impassioned speech, Samaha reminded her peers that they have a role to play in ensuring that the world they live in is less segregated, more diverse, and more humane.

“Let the degree we earn today be a tool not only to get a good job, but to also make the world around us a better place,” Samaha concluded. “Here we pledge not to be just another generation graduating. Instead, let us live up to the expectations of AUB’s founders and the legacy of the generations who preceded us and planted the seeds for progress in Lebanon. Let us be proud and creative, but also giving and compassionate.”

Dorman then introduced each honorand, conferring upon them, successively, an honorary doctoral degree of humane letters. Each recipient delivered a brief acceptance speech.

Dorman described honorand Ismail Serageldin as “both a devoted son of Egypt and a true global citizen.”

“A prolific writer and an expert on sustainable development, Serageldin’s life and career have been marked by a profound dedication to social welfare and pursuing the public good,” said Dorman, noting that he currently is the founding director and chairman of the board of the modern Bibliotheca Alexandrina, which opened its doors in 2002 and has fast become one of Egypt’s premier cultural venues.

“The historical Library of Alexandria was one of the most esteemed institutions of learning and knowledge in the ancient world. Thanks in large part to the vision and determination of Ismail Serageldin, the new Bibliotheca Alexandrina is recapturing the same spirit of openness and scholarship and aspires to be a great center of learning with global reach.”

Before taking on this gargantuan task, Serageldin had a highly successful career at the World Bank, where he championed issues ranging from water resources and education to environmentally and socially sustainable development. “His breadth of knowledge and intellectual curiosity are truly remarkable,” said Dorman. “An astute observer and skillful author, his body of work includes treatises on science and technology, democracy and reform, the environment, culture and arts, as well as access to education and freedom of expression.”

Dr. Serajeldin thanked AUB for giving him the honorary doctorate, saying that it is an honor to receive this degree from a university that links East to West and which emphasizes the values of tolerance and diversity.

“These are exactly the values that the Arab world needs to adopt as we are all facing the paroxysm of terrorism, violence, and barbarism that is plaguing our region,” he said.

President Dorman then introduced artist, director, mentor, and teacher Peter Sellars, describing him as “one of the most compelling, ingenious, and audacious figures of contemporary theater, who pushes beyond the traditional boundaries of theatrical arts to explore the human condition and confront perennial moral issues.”

As a director, Sellars is known for reimagining classical works in modern and unique settings that stand in stark contrast to traditional renditions, added Dorman. An early example was his staging of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* in a swimming pool at Harvard University. Later in life, he turned to the creation of new operas based on major events and figures of the modern era.

For over 25 years, Peter Sellars has taught at the University of California at Los Angeles and is now a Distinguished Professor of World Arts and Culture.

“A teacher and a mentor, he is a firm advocate of empowering the younger generation to pursue their passions with determination but also with humanity and humility,” said Dorman. “He is also an enthusiastic mentor to aspiring artists around the globe ... and has always appreciated that great art lives and thrives everywhere, and he travels extensively to practice his craft and learn from other artists in their native context.

Sellars then gave an impromptu acceptance speech as well as the ceremony’s keynote address.

“Good evening, fabulous graduates,” Sellars opened his speech.

Acknowledging that unlike his times, there will not be jobs waiting for graduates, he said, “So go do something you love. And if the job isn’t there, create it.”

He added, “You are entering the age of the budget cuts.”

What will help you get through this are four things: Love, courage, compassion, and generosity, he continued.

His final advice was:

- Listen, pay attention
- Investigate. Ask the questions that have not been asked
- Energy. Don’t lose energy
- Joy. Enjoy yourselves. Have fun.
- Concentrate. Follow through.
- Equanimity. Treat everyone as your equal particularly the person you really hate and is trying to kill you.

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 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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