

For Immediate Release



## **At an international conference on AUB's 150-year legacy of education, service, and scholarship: 'It's hard to think of Lebanon without AUB, and certainly impossible to think of AUB without Lebanon'**

**Beirut, Lebanon- 14/05/2012** -In less than three years, AUB will be celebrating its 150-year anniversary as one of the oldest and most prominent universities in the region. To commemorate this special occasion a volume of scholarly studies will be produced, evaluating a number of facets related to the history and development of AUB.

These studies were highlighted in a three-day conference held May 13-15 in College Hall, which attracted a number of local and international scholars.

AUB President Peter Dorman, who is a direct descendant of AUB's founding father, Daniel Bliss, opened the conference on a personal note, as he recollected his early childhood years in Beirut. Born at the AUB Medical Center, previously known as the American University Hospital (AUH), Dorman shared some of his fond memories of the campus, recounting how, even to this day older ladies, who used to babysit him, and older gentlemen, who had been delivered by his grandfather, still come up to him, reminding him of the early days - an indication of the importance Lebanese attribute to family and hospitality.

Referring to AUB's inextricable ties "to the history of this beautiful and yet often turbulent country," Dorman rejected the notion that AUB, like many other universities, could ever be "isolated in its ivory tower."

"I find it hard to think of Lebanon without AUB, and certainly impossible to think of AUB without Lebanon," he said, noting that AUB is an American university in the Arab world that pursues its educational and research goals with a distinctly regional emphasis.

Dorman then cited AUB's most recent achievements towards promoting Arab scholarship and interdisciplinary research and education, highlighting the Farouk K. Jabre Center for Arabic and Islamic Science and Philosophy, which will serve as a hub for research and education in these areas; the new Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship which, through research, will promote openness, transparency, and accountability through an informed citizenry; and AUB's leadership role in the preservation and study of Lebanon's artistic heritage and the

promotion of the fine arts through the establishment of art galleries on campus and the acquisition of the major Saleeby Collection.

“This conference commemorates a century and a half of our university’s history,” added Dorman, “and while this milestone deserves to be celebrated with all due pomp and circumstance, it is also an opportunity for reflection - not as nostalgia but as critical reflection.”

Emphasizing that AUB’s ethos is to uphold moral and ethical principles and diversity in all its forms, Dorman concluded: “We are as determined as ever to be an agent for positive change within Lebanon and throughout the region and to advance liberal education and the causes associated with it--those of tolerance, open-mindedness, rational deliberation, scientific argument, and compassionate public service. “

The three-day conference brought together about 20 scholars from Lebanon, the United States and Europe to discuss AUB’s role and influence on various aspects of life in the region, including history, economics, Islamic science, archeology, agriculture, and even regional politics.

In fact, AUB History Professor Alexis Wick noted that AUB acted as the fulcrum of a number of historically defining events, movements and concepts with a heavy influence on Palestine, and had groomed a significant portion of contemporary Palestinian intellectual elite. In fact, Wick, noted that “the very term that has dominated Palestinian politics since 1948, al-nakba, was coined by AUB history professor Constantine Zurayk.”

AUB also played a big role in promoting the culture of aid and relief in the country. Both University of Michigan Assistant Professor Melanie S. Tanielian and AUB PhD student Aaron Tyler Brand addressed the history of relief aid during WWI and AUB’s role in that regard.

“During WWI, actions by Bayard Dodge (a former AUB president) laid the foundation for modern humanitarianism in the 20th century,” Tanielian said.

AUB also succeeded in upholding academic freedoms, while remaining sensitive to its surroundings, said Professor Patrick McGreevy, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at AUB.

McGreevy noted that Daniel Bliss and his colleagues believed that truth had to be preserved and there were times that meant that students didn’t have the right to say anything they wanted. “It’s not the separation from its surroundings that has made AUB what it is, in fact it’s the connection,” McGreevy said. “AUB has been open to influences from the people of this region, that is has been successful and it has indeed developed a very robust sense of academic freedom, perhaps more than any other country in this region.”

It is this connection with its surroundings that has always driven AUB to work on preserving the historical, scientific, archeological or artistic heritage of the region.

In fact, Columbia University Professor of Arabic and Islamic Science George Saliba's studies have revealed the extent to which AUB was deeply committed to the promotion of Arabic/Islamic scientific culture - a commitment that goes all the way back to the early years of AUB's life in the middle of the 19th century.

Through the works of AUB's founding fathers, Saliba demonstrated that AUB was a participant in the production of Arabic scientific culture. According to Saliba, AUB faculty from that generation went as far back as the early classical period of Islamic science and breathed a new life in the scientific technical terms they found in that legacy and put those terms to use in their own reformulation of science that they wished to teach to the early generations of AUB students.

Similarly, Samer Traboulsi, associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina in Asheville, noted that AUB's early founding scholars, Reverends Henry Harris Jessup and Dr. Cornelius Van Dyck, were among the first to encourage the study of Nusayris or Alawites, a subject whose study was previously monopolized by Israelis.

To think that AUB's rich legacy of scholarship, service, and education was largely the result of serendipity is naturally shocking. But the studies of Samir Khalaf, AUB sociology professor and director of the Center for Behavioral Research, have shown that the early American missionaries, who eventually established the then-Syrian Protestant College, were only passing through the country for supplies and had no intention of leaving behind a 150-year-old legacy. What kept the missionaries here was their hatred for the Jesuits, said Khalaf, tongue-in-cheek.

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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 600 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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