

For Immediate Release



AUB to confer honorary doctorates to four luminaries who have left their mark on the world

Beirut, Lebanon- 13/05/2012 -The American University of Beirut (AUB) has announced the names of four international luminaries who will receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters at the university's 144th commencement exercises on June 14, 2013.

This year's honorands will be the linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, and social critic Noam Chomsky of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); Lebanese-American Charles Elachi, director of the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) at the California Institute of Technology; the legendary Egyptian film actress Faten Hamama; and Ray R. Irani, a distinguished international business leader, AUB alumnus, and trustee emeritus. They 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.

Dr. Chomsky is widely known as the "father of modern linguistics" for his pioneering research on generative grammar and human language development. His important contributions to academia are complemented by his tireless advocacy for human rights and freedom of speech. A professor at MIT since 1955, Chomsky's revolutionary theories about the genetic roots of language acquisition are considered to be integral to the study of linguistics. Chomsky's work in language has advanced knowledge not only within the realm of liberal arts and psychology, but also in mathematics and computer science. A critical thinker and prolific writer, Chomsky continually forces scholars and leaders to defend or reconsider conclusions across a broad range of topics including, but not limited to, linguistics, politics, and society. His books include *Syntactic Structures* (1957), *Language and Mind* (1972), *Peace in the Middle East?* (1974), *Knowledge of Language* (1986), *The Minimalist Program* (1995), and *Occupy* (2012). Chomsky has been an outspoken critic of U.S. wars in Vietnam and Iraq and he has written extensively about peace in the Middle East and in support of the Palestinian cause. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Linguistic Society of America.

Dr. Elachi's career has been dedicated to understanding the mysteries and the vastness of space. He holds multiple diplomas including a doctorate in electrical sciences and master's degrees in electrical sciences, engineering, geology, and business. Elachi joined the JPL in 1970, and was appointed its director in 2001. Under his leadership, JPL has led some of NASA's most high profile space research and exploration initiatives. These include the Mars Rovers, highly engineered robotic exploration devices that are probing the planet's surface to

understand its history and composition. Some of his research relating to astrophysics has resulted in the technology behind global positioning systems and mobile phone technology. He is the author of more than 230 publications and holds several patents in active microwave remote sensing and electromagnetic theory. He was awarded France's highest honor bestowed upon foreigners, the *Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur* in 2010 and received the National Academy of Engineering Arthur M. Bueche Award, the Space Foundation J.E Hill Lifetime Space Achievement Award, and Lebanon's Order of the Cedar. Elachi also holds the positions of Vice President of the California Institute of Technology and professor of electrical engineering and planetary science.

Mrs. Hamama, fondly called the Lady of the Arabic Screen, not only changed the Egyptian film industry, but also showed through her roles the extent to which women in Egyptian and Arab societies can be strong, self-determined, and independent. She won her first acting role at the age of eight and at 15, she was enrolled at the High Institute of Acting in Cairo. Early in her career, she took on roles in films such as *Kursi Al L'Etraf* and won the lead role in *Lak Yawm Ya Zalem*, a film nominated for the Prix International at Cannes. As her fame grew, she consciously selected roles that addressed societal taboos including honor killing and divorce. Later in her career, she was drawn to roles that promoted pro-democratic themes, including *Imbaratoriyyat Meem*. She took up television and roles in *Dameer Ablah Hikmat* and *Wajh al-Qamar*. She has received critical acclaim and more than twenty awards for her work from across the region, including Lebanon's Order of the Cedar, and the Star of the Century lifetime achievement award at the Alexandria International Film Festival.

Dr. Irani graduated from AUB at the age of 18 with a degree in chemistry; he then earned a PhD in chemistry in 1957 in the United States, launching his career as a scientific researcher. By 1983, he had firmly established himself in the oil and gas industry. He quickly rose to assume the presidency of Occidental Petroleum Corporation, later serving as Chairman and CEO for over twenty years, and then as Executive Chairman. Under his leadership, Occidental grew to be the fourth largest oil and gas company in the U.S. with 40,000 employees worldwide. Irani has published over fifty technical papers, and holds 150 U.S. and foreign patents. Among his many honors, he was awarded the National Order of the Cedar Medal by the President of the Republic of Lebanon in 1996, was awarded the *Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur* in 2011, and he was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 2012. Irani was elected to the AUB Board of Trustees in 1986, served as co-chair and was granted emeritus status this year.

“Even beyond their impressive curricula vitae, this year's honorands represent excellence across the fields of scholarship, leadership, enterprise, and service to others,” said AUB President Peter Dorman. “Their work and achievements are a source of inspiration to many, not just in Lebanon and the region, but internationally.”

The 144th commencement ceremonies will award degrees to 1090 AUB undergraduates and 310 graduate students.

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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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