

For Immediate Release



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“A millennium of coexistence: Celebrating Druze and diversity”

A conference Organized at AUB

The Center for Arts and Humanities (CAH) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) organized a two-day international conference entitled “The Druze: Celebrating 1000 Years of Diversity.” The academic conference brought together leading scholars who have contributed to the field of Middle Eastern studies with particular reference to the Druze. While focusing on the political, social, and cultural evolution and the political role of the Druze over the past millennium, the conference incorporated their interactions with the various groups that inhabited the same region, resulting in diversity and a rich history. It highlighted the vitality of pluralism, diversity, and coexistence, particularly in today’s world.

“It is not a celebration of the Druze as much as it is a celebration of the history of the region which included the Druze and other groups as well,” said Dr. Makram Rabah, lecturer at the Department of History and Archeology at AUB and co-organizer of the conference. “This is a conference that has top-rate academic scholars doing original research on the Druze as well as the history of the Levant and the wider Middle East. The aim was to show that diversity is important and we cannot face any of the challenges of the region without maintaining this diverse environment.”

The first of its kind, the conference attained wide online participation through livestreaming and was a full house throughout, bringing in many members from the Druze community and the general public. Among supporting Druze NGOs and associations, the American Druze Foundation board flew in from the US to attend.

Director of AUB’s Center for Arts and Humanities and co-organizer of the conference, Dr. Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn noted the appropriateness, timeliness, and even necessity to mark the 1000th anniversary of the Druze, given the principles it reminds us of in today’s challenging circumstances. “The survival and the distinguished roles of the Druze in Bilad al-Sham, which is their historical homeland, was not a freak accident or because of a presumed, imagined, or

aspired-to alliance of minorities but rather the product of a civilization that embraces diversity and pluralism,” he said, as he spoke about the leading role that the Druze played in their respective societies in Lebanon and the Levant.

Being a native of both Aley and Ras Beirut, AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri spoke about the relationship of the Druze and the Protestant educational project in the Levant, and the role of the Druze in setting up indiscriminate schools to all communities. “They very early understood instinctively the importance of a shared voyage and a shared life, not of compromises but of freedom of thought and independence of faith,” he said, drawing a parallel with the diversity within AUB. Khuri added that it was natural that they would then go to the first college in the Levant, and so many of the first graduates of the Syrian Protestant College, the forerunner of AUB, were Druze, who over generations maintain an affinity to AUB.

Judge Abbas Halabi focused in his opening remarks on three axes: The identity, presence, and integration of the Druze over history within the Arab and Islamic region; their role in defending Lebanon’s Arabism, oneness, and independence; and the necessity of flexibility and adaptation in the face of contemporary political, social, and economic challenges, and extremism. He emphasized the significance of this conference in offering new routes to tackling different aspects of history and civilization, and crafting visions for a new generation of youth that will continue to contribute to the role and mission of their homeland, while keeping their identity, beliefs, and rich culture.

Sheikh Sami Abi al-Mouna, president of the Druze Sectarian Council’s cultural committee, also emphasized the Druze’s strong commitment to being integrated with the Arab, Islamic, and humanitarian context, as they maintain their historic identity while at the same time embracing and defending their homelands without any political agendas of their own. He spoke of the principles that have guided the Druze presence and role over the years and emphasized the importance of accuracy, patient and detailed analysis, and the avoidance of preset impressions and prejudice in the proper scholastic study of the Druze thought.

After a keynote address by Dr. Engin Akarli from Istanbul Şehir University about Druze history and the preservation of dignity and community in oneness with humanity, the conference took off with numerous panels and interventions. These covered topics such as historiography, world empires and wars, institutional building, music, theater, architecture, and cultural heritage.

The conference concluded with the opening of an art exhibit on “Women: Diversity and Disruption.” Organized by CAH and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at AUB, the exhibit is an addendum to the last panel of the conference entitled “Exploring Diversity: Language and Cultural Heritage in Artworks.” On display until November 16, 2018 at the AUB Byblos Bank

Gallery, the exhibit displays artworks from the AUB permanent collection, presenting works by Zena el Khalil and Hala Schoukair.

The conference is expected to produce an academic publication within the coming months and has already initiated wide collaborations with academics from institutions worldwide.

“It is of significance that this conference was held at AUB, bastion of enlightenment in a region and world that is going towards extremism,” said Rabah. “We aim to build on this conference and, through further international scholastic collaborations, hold it on a regular basis.”

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Text by Safa Safa
Senior Writer
Office of Communications
American University of Beirut

For more information please contact:

Simon Kachar
Director of News and Media Relations
Mobile: (+961) 3-427-024
Office: (+961) 1-374-374 ext: 2676
Email: sk158@aub.edu.lb

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 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to 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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