

For Immediate Release



## **AUB lecture: Islam liberates and empowers women**

Beirut, Lebanon- 19/01/2011 - Islam liberates women and empowers them, argued two professors during two recent lectures on the oppression of women held at the American University of Beirut.

Entitled "Women: Oppressed, Suppressed, Depressed" and "Women: Seclusion, Isolation, Exploitation," the January 10-11 lectures were organized by AUB's Insight Club and attended by a diverse audience including club members, international students, and non-AUBites.

Lisa Killinger, an American convert to Islam in 1979, argued that contrary to common belief, Islam does not subjugate women but rather ensures them financial and social rights. Killinger, chair of Diagnosis and Radiology at Palmer College of Chiropractic and a mother of four, said that the religion gave women their rights even before Western societies did.

"Women only gained the right to own property in America in the early 1900s while this right had been given since around AD 630 in Islam," she declared.

Killinger further stated that apart from guaranteeing the Muslim woman the privilege to keep the money she earns for herself, Islam ensures her the right to marry whomever she pleases, the right to vote, and the right to education.

Hiba Khodr, assistant professor of public policy and public management in the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at AUB, supported Killinger's claim that Islam liberated women before the West. Arguing that "Muslim women [were] liberated 1400 years ago," she added that these women "do not need feminism to liberate them."

"Someone who has rights is not oppressed. About 1400 years ago, Islam gave the same rights to women that [western] women could only attain after a series of revolutions," Khodr said. Revealing that four out of five Muslim converts are women, she disclosed that some of these women adopt Islam because of "the status and honor" it bestows on them.

"Muslim women are neither oppressed, suppressed, depressed, nor are they repressed," said Khodr. On the contrary, the religion does not merely "encourage women to achieve their potential; it encourages them to achieve their full potential," she added.

However, Khodr emphasized the need to distinguish between Islam and regional custom. According to her, "women are not allowed to travel alone or drive in Saudi Arabia not as a result of Islam, but because of culture." On the very extreme of such cultural constraints, Khodr mentioned a school of Islamic thought that demanded that women not perform any housework unless paid for doing so.

Khodr and Killinger agreed that even the *hijab* (veil), which many perceive as a form of oppression for the Muslim woman is not. Killinger reminded the audience that wearing the *hijab* is not compulsory in Islam, but is rather the result of personal choice.

"The *hijab* covers the outside, but it uncovers the inside. It liberates you," Khodr told listeners.

Describing the AUB campus as "the most beautiful campus [she's] ever seen," Killinger encouraged students to engage in "deep discussions of faith" on its grounds, which allow for a wide range of religious views.

"Can Islam liberate women?" asked Khodr at the end of her presentation. She replied, "It can, it did and always will."

ENDS

**For more information please contact:**

Maha Al-Azar, Media Relations Officer, [ma110@aub.edu.lb](mailto:ma110@aub.edu.lb), 01-353 228

**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 more than 7,000 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.

**Stay up to date on AUB news and events. Follow us on:**

Website: [www.aub.edu.lb](http://www.aub.edu.lb)

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/aub.edu.lb>

Twitter: [http://twitter.com/AUB\\_Lebanon](http://twitter.com/AUB_Lebanon)