

For Immediate Release



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Center for Arts and Humanities at AUB hosts international conference on postwar reconstruction

A conference entitled “Urbicide II: Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine – Postwar Reconstruction” opened today at the American University of Beirut (AUB) to reflect on the implications of the destruction of urban space and shed light on post-war reconstruction and development in the region.

The meeting follows a conference on Urbicide Syria which was convened in April 2016 by Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy, bringing together professionals with backgrounds such as architecture, history, art, philosophy, archaeology, and urban planning from institutions including Cambridge University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and AUB to draft the Venice Charter on Reconstruction. The Charter stresses the importance of understanding problems and crafting solutions during the periods of war as a way to plan a future for war-torn countries. It presents a set of tools and guidelines to lead the process of reconstruction and extends to a global framework applicable to all kinds of Urbicide: the destruction of heritage, towns, and surroundings.

“Cultural heritage constitutes the memory of peoples, it reflects their history and frames their future,” said Dr. Abdul Rahim Abu Husayn, Director of the Center for Arts and Humanities (CAH). “Cognizant of this fact, the world community has engaged in collaborative studies for the assessment and reconstruction of heritage in conflict zones.” Dr. Abu Husayn spoke of the center’s function as “a hub of interdisciplinary research, cultural and intellectual exchange, and debate at the national and regional levels,” pointing out in his speech that the tradition of serving the region, particularly in times of crisis, has been an integral part of AUB’s mission for the past century and a half.

The conference, which started with a moment of silence in light of recent tragic events in the region, was jointly organized by CAH and the Research Center for Islamic Art, History, and

Culture (IRCICA) in Istanbul, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Dr. Halit Eren, Director General of IRCICA, whose speech was read by Dr. Amir Pasic, explained their research center's work which is aimed at the preservation of heritage in war-torn countries around the world. IRCICA is an intergovernmental organizational subsidiary of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) which holds 56 member states including Lebanon and focuses on the preservation of heritage as one of its primary objectives.

In her keynote speech as an expert in disaster risk management of cultural heritage and representing UNESCO as manager of their Emergency Safeguarding of Syrian Cultural Heritage program, Dr. Cristina Menegazzi presented programs undertaken by UNESCO for the prevention before, response during, and recovery after heritage destruction. She indicated examples of collaborative work between the international community and local stakeholders for reconstruction and recovery even during conflict, and offered recommended action to reduce the impact of conflict and raise funds to implement well-studied solutions.

“The preamble to the constitution of UNESCO declares that ‘since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.’ I think we are all part of these men and we can all do something.”

Bringing together experts in architecture, archaeology, urban planning, conservation, restoration, and public health, the conference continues until Saturday and addresses issues focusing on four major conflict zones, each presenting different sets of challenges and calling for different strategies.

“Since its founding, AUB has played a leading role in producing, advancing, and disseminating innovative research and teaching from and about the region, guided by a real understanding and awareness of the long, rich, complex, diverse, and distinguished cultural history of the region,” said Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), Dr. Nadia El Cheikh. “We are in the eye of the storm and this vantage point allows for a unique appreciation, hence this meeting in Beirut that reflects the urgent need to engage with and think critically about the ongoing destructions in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Palestine.”

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 130 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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