Thank you Bahaa’!
So Bahaa’ is always a tough act to follow! As many of you know, we are in a long standing relationship with Ophthalmology, because almost everyone in my family, including the person right behind you (Nadim Cortas), is visually challenged; and I think I got my first pair of glasses when I was about 10, or 9?!

So the Ophthalmology department was quite small and it was either Drs. Edward Khawam, Samir Salmon, Camille Matta, and I think one or two others, who everyone saw... so it was very interesting time because it was a very talented department and which everyone had a busy practice and yet was still interested in research... and that says something about Dr. Khawam because he is a son of both of the great two traditional academic institutions, and not just academic medical institutions, which probably underpin much of the culture of this nation. Those two are AUB and St. Joseph’s University, where he got his medical training, really the two institutions that for more than 140 years have produced probably 80% of the new knowledge and a disproportionate number of the brightest students, and candidly much of the culture of Lebanon, and certainly the academic culture in this country. And that’s why I thought it was a perfect jumping off point that Dr. Khawam was born in Ghazir, a fundamental part to this nation, a nation which now looks to us in the academic world as it struggles with next steps.

What does Lebanon do next, what does the Middle East do next, in order to find our way out of the current interesting predicament, we find ourselves in? When we talk to the AUB students, the discussions are always interesting, they can be contentious, but we started talking to them in early September about the importance of role modeling - and I am about to reflect on that for a minute. I find it very interesting that you chose Nelson Mandela as that role model for Dr. Khawwam, Bahaa’, because that’s really in many ways for current people of our generation the ultimate and ideal role model. In fact I was in a ceremony two and a half years ago with the leader of the Palestinian secular movement, Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, and he was being feted as the Arab Ghandi. I took him aside afterwards and I said: “Moustafa, You know that my hope for you is that you are the Arab Mandela! Because he got to grow old and make an impact and then still enjoy several generations.”

So that’s one of the things that we’re happy to wish for you, Dr. Khawam! You are a role model but you don’t have to be sacrificed on the pillar of your integrity. You can enjoy the generations of superb ophthalmologists that you have helped train that have now have succeeded you. I have to say, it was my pleasure and privilege to review for the Dean, with the expert collaboration and guidance of two of your star protégés, DRs. Elais Traboulsi and Mohamad Jaafar, and for the AUB Medical Center - the department of Ophthalmology. It was an interesting review, and memorable for many reasons, good and bad! Because the day when I came for the initial discussions with Bahaa’ and the faculty was the also day that President Obama indicated that he would potentially bomb our neighbor Syria for chemical weapons violations, so I think Bahaa’ was kind of surprised to see me coming to meet him in his office.
Ultimately, we conducted really a review that showed that this is a role model department, Dr. Khawam. A department that you can be proud of; a department where collegiality, research, teaching, enterprise, and patient care are all on display with a wonderful sense of individuals whose destiny is a common one and whose belief in the importance of that mission is shared. So from that perspective, you’ve left a tremendous legacy of patient care, of scholarship, and mentorship, and that’s exactly what we want today from our faculty. That’s what we’ve talk to our students about. We talk to them about taking important risks for good reasons and not being afraid to fail but moving things forward in the right direction. From that perspective, you have been an ambassador for AUB for close to six decades and hopefully will be one many more; but an ambassador who, like Nelson Mandela, was on the ground and impactful.

When we talk to students about scholarship, what is the importance of scholarship? The importance of scholarship is not just to innovate and not just to teach but to learn. If you look at the great researchers and the great academicians, they are individuals who are always perpetual students. I remember being seven and seeing the incurable curiosity on the second floor of the Diana Tamari Sabbagh building that inflicted from the infectious perspective, everyone from Samir Atweh as a medical student all the way to Souhail Jabbour, and to my late father. So that idea that the scholar is perpetually curious, that the scholar is always interested and you’ve shown quite impressive evidence by publishing continuously – when I went online - you’ve published articles in each of 5 decades, and if that’s not a commitment to scholarship, I am not sure that is! So you’ve covered the mentorship aspect, you’ve covered the scholarship aspect. So that leaves the service aspect, because if you think of all the fundamental ethos of great academic institutions as I’ve said to the students, to our faculty, to our staff, AUB is great but it should be greater; we need to restore and enhance our self of universal service. You have served generation after generation after generation of patients, of students, and of colleagues, and you have never shied away from responsibility; so for that aspect also you are a role model. So from my perspective with what you have done in your career, and I think it’s safe to say from your colleagues in the department of Ophthalmology, you embody the core values of AUB, the core values of your other Alma Matter St. Joseph - whose president I had the privilege of having breakfast with few weeks ago – and even more than that, the core values of this region, which continues to introduce individuals who are undeterred by the odds, and dare to dream to do great things. The odds against you as a son of Ghazir, training in Baltimore, being in San Francisco, going all over the world to come back and to constantly improve what you’ve been destined but always undeterred by the odds. And for that and for so much more we thank you for all you that have done for AUB and all that you will continue to do for AUB. Thank you very much.