It’s a genuine pleasure and privilege to follow Dr. Moueen Hamzeh, our wonderful Director General of the CNRS, to the podium, because I think that his career represents a real road map for the scholar turned leader, both in his time as Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at the Lebanese University, before that as a young scientist himself funded by CNRS and other agencies, I believe; and now as the leader for the last seventeen years of one of the most vibrant, effective and vital branches of the Lebanese government. And it is my good fortune to see him for the second time in twenty four hours because yesterday we were at the government offices to celebrate the recognition of six scholars from various universities: from AUB, from the Lebanese University, from St. Joseph and indeed to celebrate a magnificent accomplishment in Phoenician archeology in Sidon by a great scholar as well, in collaboration with the British Museum. CNRS fulfills a fundamental need for Lebanon, in that it grants opportunities for people to be in the labs, of outstanding people like Ali Bazarbachi, or Mohammad Harajli, or Diana Jalouk, or others. And this is the kernel of science, really the opportunity to have protected time to think, to learn, to write, and to excel is the fundamental underpinning of academic pursuit of knowledge. Without this support, we would be forced to send every one of our children and our children’s children exclusively abroad to learn. And that would be a tragedy, not that there is anything wrong with sending many of our best scholars abroad, but in maintaining a vibrant scientific research community in Lebanon, we must allow ourselves to dream that we can make an impact right here in Lebanon, and in fact to prove to ourselves that we can make an impact in some of the most competitive fields in the world, in everything from archaeology and history, to molecular biology and structural engineering.

The recipients of the scholarship today are role models for this program, this program has grown exponentially, and while many can criticize the Lebanese government and indeed the AUB administration for many things including efficiency, efficiency is rarely the calling card of large organizations, Lebanese government is the number one employer in Lebanon; we’re the second largest employer, so, some inefficiencies inevitably intrude. But working for the last seventeen years, the Director General of CNRS has managed to expand funding and increase efficiency, so that over 80% close to 85% of every Lebanese Lira spent or projected towards research is spent on research. I think that’s a challenge for us at AUB, we have to match that, we have to become more efficient so that every student that Ayad Jaffa or Najat Saliba or other champions, really is given an opportunity to succeed, to excel, and so that our wonderful registrar Moueen Salame is very busy registering these spectacular graduate students. And so that in five years, it’s not eight or fourteen but maybe twenty-one such grants and diplomas that our friend Moueen will be giving us then. So our goal is to increase the traffic, nothing short of enhancing the Moueen (Hamze) to Moueen (Salameh) traffic for AUB, so that our finest students can study, can think freely, and can excel such that we can continue to be for the government and for the people of Lebanon the very best value for academic thought not just here but in the Middle East. Thank you very much and congratulations to our wonderful scholars.