

**A legacy of service**  
**Opening Ceremony address 2016-17**  
**Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri**  
**Monday, September 5, 2016**

Students, faculty, staff, members of the Board of Trustees,

Greetings and salutations as we begin our fall semester at AUB. Hard on the heels of a momentous 2015-16 academic year, I wanted to share my thoughts with you, as we continue to celebrate our sesquicentennial but look to make ourselves even more relevant for the next 150 years.

Eight days ago, I went hiking with my eldest daughter Layla and some friends in Baskinta, home of many extraordinary citizens of Lebanon, but none more distinguished than the poet and author Mikhail Naimy, for many years my favorite Modern Lebanese writer. Naimy's piercing analysis of the human character is never more evident than in *أكابر*, his harrowing series of short stories chronicling the profound fall that comes with the hubris of pride, or in his monumental celebration of the wages and whiles of age, *سبعون*.

As I ambled along, trying to keep up with my far fitter companions, my mind harkened back to the two times I was fortunate enough to spend time with my literary hero, while still an innocent child unexposed to the catastrophe of war. Naimy is known for many things, including his secretaryship of the Pen League in New York, which sought to trigger a rebirth of Arabic literature as a dynamic modern expression for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here one must also acknowledge the other *شعراء المهجر*, the poets of the diaspora, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Elia Abu Madi, Nasib Arida, Nudra Haddad (father of former AUB President Bob Haddad). Naimy may have bristled at the greater acclaim attained by the inspiring but esoteric president of the Pen League, Khalil Gibran, but together they served the extraordinary explosion of Lebanese and Arabic poetry and literature that was the late Arab reawakening, with wit, wisdom, determination and dignity. On my two visits with him in his modest mountain home, once with my IC class and once far more poignantly with my father when I didn't realize we were going to visit Naimy, a few years later, I realized he meant much more to me than just an inspirational leader of an erstwhile literary movement. Quite simply, it was Naimy's writing that connected me with the Lebanese culture and Arabic

language in a manner that balanced my early love of American and English poetry and music. And eight days ago, it was moving to read the words of serene and pious acceptance on Naimy's grave, as inspiring as it had been to sit across from the great man long ago in the presence of another great man, my father, the late Raja Khuri, to hear them converse about their shared bond in the country they both had loved and willingly returned to—as many of us have returned. Even at the age of 11, grateful as I was to my father for this stunning opportunity to visit Naimy, I gleaned their shared bond of service, to their motherland, to the Arab world, and beyond, but most importantly to the people.

That day it was particularly poignant for me to listen to Naimy's thoughts, his belief in his compatriots and in his fellow man. After all, my father was always an incurable optimist, a true believer in all of our better qualities. But Naimy was, at least on the page, something different entirely. His biting wit after all had spared few, not only Khalil Gibran: *Akaber's* bracing tales spoke of a seasoned man whose cynical observations of the foibles of humans were rapier sharp. That Naimy was not in evidence that day 40 years ago in Mount Lebanon. And the gravestone that I visited eight days ago said as much. The words in Arabic were simple, beautiful expressions of a faith that was at once non-denominational but profound:

طفلك  
أنا يا ربي!  
وهذه الأرض  
البديعة، الكريمة، الحنون  
التي وضعتني في حضنها  
ليست سوى  
المهد أدرج  
منه إليك

In English it means simply: "Your child I am, my Lord, and this land, magnificent, generous, tender, in whose bosom you have placed me, is nothing more than the cradle from which I gradually journey to you."

The conversation I heard that day, and the lesson I will share with you now, was a simple message of service to others, of service to those more needy and less fortunate. That day, at the age of 11, I discovered that whatever I wished to do with my life, I was determined to be of service to my fellow man (and woman of

course!). Today, assembled before you, are 24 individuals of service, full professors at a great university, AUB, our most senior faculty. Senior in rank and senior in service, who have given AUB 40 or more years of their careers. Combined, their service adds up to more than 1,000 years at this great port of knowledge. Seated here, honored guests who themselves honor us with their dedication, their example continues to inspire us today.

**Presentation of certificates to senior faculty members with 40 or more years of consecutive service to AUB**

Alexander Abdelnoor, PhD, Experimental Pathology, Immunology and Microbiology

Helga Seeden, PhD, History and Archeology

Farouk Abi Khuzam, PhD, Mathematics

Mohammad-Zuheir Habbal, PhD, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

Jabir Sawaya, MD, Internal Medicine

Murad Jurdak, PhD, Education

Laila Faris Farhoud, PhD, School of Nursing

Nassir H. Sabah, PhD, Electrical and Computer Engineering

Nabil Dajani, PhD, Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies

Ibrahim Salti, MD, PhD, Internal Medicine

George M. Ayoub, PhD, Civil & Environmental Engineering

Jean Gebran Rebeiz, MD, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

Samir Seikaly, PhD, History and Archeology

Adel Barbari, MD, Internal Medicine

Makhlouf Haddadin, PhD, Chemistry

Munir Bashour, PhD, Education

Joseph Simaan, MD, Pharmacology and Toxicology

**Presentation of certificates to senior faculty members with 40 or more cumulative years of service to AUB\***

Abdo Jurjus, PhD, Anatomy, Cell Biology and Physiological Sciences

Shukrallah Zaynoun, MD, Dermatology

Karam Karam, MD, Obstetrics and Gynecology

Tarif Khalidi, PhD, Center for Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies,

Adnan Mroueh, MD, Obstetrics and Gynecology

Samir Khalaf, PhD, Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies

Adib Saad, PhD, Agriculture

Service, not glory, has driven these extraordinary individuals, but it also drove the founding fathers of this academic house. The famous words of Daniel Bliss that were displayed at the graduation ceremony, still resonate: "We were not anxious to appear great, but we were anxious to lay foundations upon which greatness could be built." Mainly, we serve our students and patients—the University also provides extraordinary education opportunities for children of its employees that might be unaffordable in the economic storm that is hitting the Arab world, among many other important tasks. But what you may ask is the epitome of service? In my view it is the surrender of entitlement in order to do good for those in greater need. And who are those in greatest need? The students, whose families may not be able to afford the ever-spiraling cost of a college education? The patients, and their families, who come to our extraordinary medical center and search for hope, for answers, and for relief from pain, from suffering, from overwhelming anxiety? The citizens of our war-torn Arab lands, who look to this university for hope, for sustenance, and for an example that they can hold onto while they grasp hope for a better day? Indeed, on our own threshold we are witnesses today to the most crushing humanitarian crisis in today's world—one third of this country's inhabitants have been torn from their homes in Syria, Palestine and Iraq. That gives Lebanon the highest per capita population of refugees anywhere; and our region hosts no less than 40% of the global refugee population. We are witnesses, but we at AUB are not bystanders. Our launching this semester of the AUB4Refugees initiative, under the Provost's Office, which pulls together all the units at our University involved in addressing and mitigating the crisis, is just one indication of our engagement and how seriously we take our duty to serve those in the greatest need.

Daniel Bliss had also said, and I paraphrase, that men of various religions and diverse faiths, or no faith, could attend this college without having their faith questioned, but would leave it knowing without question, what the thoughts and views of the founding fathers were. And so it is only fair that after a year here the students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and certainly the Board of Trustees of AUB should know what I and our administration believe. And those things which we do not and cannot believe. This institution cannot, nor does it seek to, replace or redress the role of the government of Lebanon, and we therefore cannot solve all of life's misfortunes, challenges and wrongs. We can lend a hand but we cannot solve everything. As a private, secular educational institution, placed in the

Levant, in the words of Bliss, to "lay foundations upon which greatness could be built," we believe that the honor of caring for others in the medical and nursing professions must be earned by example, by humility and sacrifice, by application, by knowledge. It is a gift to be able serve those less fortunate. To those whose arrogance reinforces their view that technical, clinical excellence obviates the need for humility and humanity, and mitigates the obligation to serve those less fortunate, AUB does not owe the honor and the opportunity to practice at our extraordinary institution. Education and aid, financial or otherwise, are a privilege, wholeheartedly given by generous women and men of service. That gift is a privilege and it is an honor and it is not exclusively earned through scholastic excellence, but through sustenance and sacrifice to the Other that we have given. To those few, and they are indeed few among our learned faculty—and I am not looking at anyone in particular here—who believe their time is too valuable to share with our inspiring and aspiring students, this great but humble home of learning is the wrong place for you to pursue your profession.

But these are extraordinarily rare exceptions and for every one of these rare exceptions, there are dozens of inspirational examples to the contrary, and not just from the learned men and women seated amongst you today. What drives a young woman still in the dawn of her faculty life, to risk her promotion and her academic potential in order to mentor and advise students whose need to finish on time is driven by family, financial, and career imperatives so urgent that they cannot wait for another semester? What compels the senior scholar, in the still remarkable autumn of a groundbreaking career, to sacrifice valuable time devoted to phenomenal academic productivity in order to stand, however temporarily, in a senior leadership position? What motivates an incandescent star, whose mentorship and research are exploding before our eyes, to set these things aside while they take the tiller of a great ship of our university, so that their colleagues and students may have life and have it more abundantly? What motivates students and staff, hailing from some of the most dangerous parts of Syria, or the most beleaguered parts of Palestine, or the most despondent parts of Lebanon, struggling through the challenges of their formidable workload and equally formidable cultural adaptation, to add to that already considerable burden by volunteering to teach or to tutor those whose circumstances are even less fortunate? That is the substance of AUB.

In his novel, *the Book of Mirdad*, Mikhail Naimy's protagonist says, "Often you

shall think your road impassable, somber and companionless. Have will and plod along; and around each curve you shall find a new companion." College and university are actually the greatest opportunities to gain the companions of a lifetime. This is true whether you are students, faculty, staff, alumni, even the Board of Trustees. Seize this chance while at AUB, whether you are a member of our busiest research unit or our most humble unit of service. Because in this time of great, turbulent and occasionally terrifying change, as evidenced by the contemptible acts of savagery at sister institutions like the American University of Afghanistan, and the many worthy universities in the Arab world which struggle through a series of daunting challenges, perhaps more formidable than ours, at a time where even the most powerful nations are beset by inequality and embroiled in ugly debates laced with the poison of nativism, and yes racial superiority, it is left to us in the academy to re-commit ourselves to the original ideals of service. To honor and re-invigorate that service, we recognized a few short months ago the enduring commitment of our long-serving staff members on these, our 150th celebrations. Today, we honor in equal part our longest-serving senior faculty members who have either cumulatively or consecutively completed more than 40 years' service. As we acknowledge these illustrious servants of the University, assembled today with more than 1,000 years of service, we have to renew our purpose and undertake a bold new strategic plan for the University. This plan which we started to review with our Board and our faculty and our staff, in the last few weeks, along with our students, has to be inter-digitated with a sustainable—economically, intellectually, environmentally—well-thoughtout Campus Master Plan and it has to be the underpinning of the capital campaign for investors in AUB. The goal of this has to be nothing less that to examine our university's relevance in service, education and research, to renew that relevance and to ensure that relevance for generations beyond and those beyond that. And we have to do this in an unapologetic vein, in a great age of irrational danger when we can look to the words of determined hope, as in Naimy's words, "Aye, fight! But not your neighbor. Fight rather all things that cause you and your neighbor to fight." And fight not for glory but to serve. And serve we will, as we have from 150 years ago until today, and for the next 150 years and beyond.

So I close in thanking all of you that came here, thanks to our Board who travelled from far and wide, and thanks to our administrative leadership and teams and to our faculty, and students, not for all the work that you have done, but for all the work that we are all yet to do together. So thank you, go forth in peace and in

purpose to leave the world a considerably better place than that which you came into. Thank you.

\* Some senior faculty were unable to attend the ceremony in person. Their names were read out and they received their presentations afterwards.