Class Reunion 2016 Honoring Ceremony  
July 8, 2016  
President Fadlo R. Khuri’s Speech

Good evening! Mrs. Saab, distinguished alumni, excellencies, the deans and university leadership; greetings to all of you wonderful alumni returning with your family and loved ones to your alma matter in this very special year of this unique institution.

This is our 150th year and whether you graduated in 1946, 1966, 1991, or even 2016 you are the life blood of this university, our most important and valued group among the exceptional global network of friends that this university has.

You’ve been through the AUB experience in its most authentic and transformative sense. You entered into the celebrated portals of this establishment, the best and the brightest of your generation, and lived the mission and purpose that AUB provides to its full.

I was reading an interesting article today about an obscure hitter who became the Boston Red Sox greatest hitter of the last fifty years; off course no one wanted to remember that he was an obscure hitter that no one wanted, everyone was claiming credit, and everyone else in this article was saying: He didn’t find him... I did! She didn’t find him... I did! No that person tried to block it... So in your case, AUB found you and we will take credit for you... So thank you!

When you went forth into the world you became doctors, and engineers, and entrepreneurs, and business people, and creative souls, and homemakers, and public administrators, and leading authorities in health, or educators, or administrators but you have been phenomenal ambassadors and success stories for this university. Whatever your path has been through life, wherever it has taken you once you left here, I am certain that you will have made a difference and you’ll continue to make a difference. You’ve taken what AUB sought to instill in you that it instills in students to this day for a 150 years and used it for the betterment of your society and the world. Because of this it’s hard to describe the admiration and the appreciation that I feel towards each and every one of you!

I have a deep sense of gratitude for your joining us today whether from the furthest reaches of the globe or from Ras Beirut or Ain Mreisseh; this is your weekend, welcome AUB alumni to this all class reunion of 2016 in our 150th anniversary year. I want to extend a special welcome to our most senior distinguished alumni awardees this year, an exceptional group of senior graduates seated to my right who are with us in addition to the 50th and 25th anniversary celebrants. These are alumni who’ve surpassed their 50th anniversary of their graduation, the most senior of all being Dr. Mohammad Ali Al-Hajj - class of 46; and Dr. Mohammad Baalbaki – class of 1942; thank you! We’re honored and very grateful for your presence here today.

My message to the alumni today is one of hope and belief despite the turbulent world around us. I came back to AUB last year in the hope and belief that I and all of us can make a difference here in Lebanon and beyond with leadership of the Arab World’s preeminent institution of higher learning into an even more impactful and influential future. Our team has been focused on building and consolidating an administration that can listen to the various constituencies, the staff, the students, the Faculty, the Board of Trustees, and off course our great and dedicated alumni that do so much to keep the AUB spirit burning all around the world. We’ve worked to empower and reward our educators with a return to a system of academic tenure which is a prerequisite for continuing to attract the best and brightest faculty members. We’ve worked with the student body to help them agree on a new proportional voting
system so that they can taste of representative democracy on campus, a democracy that is so disastrously lacking in this part of the world. In partnership with the workers and staff syndicate council we’ve agreed on new employment terms that were overwhelmingly approved by general assembly. And we started to look at ways to empower the lives and careers of women faculty at AUB; because although they’ve started to reach parity among our overall number of educators, they remained disproportionately represented among those in lower rank positions and those offered shorter term contracts; so we have some work to do there!

This year I started my commencement address with a quote from Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States during World War I, and what he said that resonated to me is “If you want to make enemies try to change something”. Well we’re trying to change AUB for the better with your help. I also quoted my favorite folk musician, the great Bob Dylan who said: Come gather round people wherever you roam, and admit that the waters around you have grown, and accept it that soon you’ll be drenched to the bone, if your time to you is worth saving then you better start swimming or you’ll sink like a stone, for the times they are a changing. Change is something we need to go through together and the dialogue I’ve initiated with you as alumni is the first stage of ever greater collaboration—cooperation that we hope to engender. Honestly, we are not just interested in your checkbooks, although we certainly appreciated the support that allows us to increase the amount of financial aid, and research, and scholarship that we have on this campus. We’re interested in your thoughts, your ideas, your hopes, and your aspirations for this university.

For much of my first year on campus which will officially end on August 31st, I’ve been living out of a relatively small suitcase, which’s resulted in wonderful trips to Europe, North America, the Arab World, and beyond. I’ve met with over 2,000 alumni either collectively or together en masse and individually and I think the groundwork is being laid for a more participatory relationship with our alumni. I’d like to ask you something as you spent time here savoring the beauty of these surroundings where you lived you salad days; the happiest memories of your friendships, the challenges faced and overcome; the rich intellectual social heritage of this incredible campus and its diversity and its inspiration. I hope you’ll reflect on today’s challenges with hope and with perspective and think of the role that AUB can play as the provider of the preeminent liberal thought in the Arab World, in a region where the news of violence, division, and exploitation far outweighs the alternative narrative that’s nurtured here on this campus. Look at our students, they’re happy, they are confident, they are ready to make a difference. Our narrative is a different one than what you see in this region; it is one of hope and inclusivity and diversity; of openness and transparency; of fostering respect and mutual trust; of advancing knowledge and using it in the service of human kind.

AUB matters just as much in 2016 as it did 150 years ago or when you graduated...remember that! You’ve come here in the spirit of belonging and for the rare pleasure of reconnecting with people that meant a lot to you and the places that came to signify a great deal in your past. Please take a moment and allow it to strengthen your sense of being an AUBite, and make it even more firmly rooted, that sense of being part of a global community of distinguished and extraordinary alumni who’re ambassadors for this special university and its ongoing desire to make a difference for all, especially those less fortunate than us.

I want to thank each and every one of the individuals who’ve worked so hard to make sure that this is a perfect weekend for you, the Advancement and Development office and its Alumni Relations’ team and Events Unit... if you’ll stand please! Salma Oweida, Imad Baalbaki, Soha Hmaidan, and the crew!... The Office of Communications, Martin Asser and his team! ... The WAAAUB team and board, WAAAUB
President Wafa Saab! ... But most of all I want to say a sincere thank you to each and every one of you for further affirming your roots, your connections, and your beliefs in AUB, we will not let you down... Thank you very much! ...