President Khuri, Excellencies, Esteemed Faculty, Students and Guests,

I am incredibly honored to be with you today, to share with you some of my thinking on the future of universities on the occasion of AUB's 152nd Founders Day.

It is fitting that AUB has decided to combine Founders Day with Giving Day given that the very act of establishing the university was its most important philanthropic gift. Having established AUB with a $100,000 fundraising campaign, Daniel Bliss seeded a culture of giving that became deeply embedded in its rich history.

From the Founder, to its students, alumni and community of supporters, AUB has both given and received some of the most generous amounts raised for education and research in our region. The late Maroun Semaan's unprecedented donation from any one individual and AUB's Campaign for Excellence, which was chaired by the late Dr. Kamal Shair and raised $170M are just two examples that have become synonymous with AUB's growing stature.

While I hope this year's Giving Day campaign raised at least $1.5 M (to account for inflation), the symbolism of this day extends well beyond any amount or nonmonetary contributions raised in this campaign.

It is hard to know whether when Daniel Bliss established AUB, he could have appreciated that his modest campaign would result in creating one of the most important institutions of the Arab region – renowned for the hope it symbolizes as much as the quality of its education.

To me and my generation, who grew up in Lebanon at a time of hope deficit, AUB was indeed a rare beacon of hope. It represented the better version of a country and region in turmoil. It remained safe, inclusive and resilient when these attributes were in short supply. The hope it gave inside and outside the university has paid off. AUB graduates have gone on to be some of the most successful graduates in the region. Its alumni are not only the most employable but many have taken on leadership roles in government, business, academia and the social sector and some like the late Zaha Hadid became icons in their industries, global ambassadors for our region and role models for all Arab youth.

I have every faith that today's AUB students will be just as successful. This is why I am so proud that the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education currently supports 87 scholars studying on full scholarship at AUB. The Foundation's scholars represent some of the smartest and most socially conscious young people in Lebanon and the region. They appreciate the privilege of studying at an elite regional university and carry the burden of proving that an investment in them will give not only them but also their families and communities an opportunity at a brighter future. Most of all they are preparing to play a role in tackling some of the greatest

challenges of our time as future Environmentalists, Entrepreneurs, Scientists and Social Activists. They are preparing for a life of giving, in service to humanity.

Universities preparing young people for a life in service - is I believe one of every university's most fundamental roles. Today, more than ever, we are in urgent need for universities to lead the charge in service to humanity. Universities need to rededicate themselves fully and without delay to thinking much more openly, creatively and persistently about the challenges we are facing in local communities and across the planet.

Unprecedented challenges require unprecedented solutions. Nothing less than a complete shift in the way universities engage in today's global challenges will be enough.

The world is grappling with worsening and persistent challenges. There are over 68 million displaced persons and refugees across the globe, many of whom originate from this region. The Arab world is home to some of the deadliest armed conflicts, and one of the greatest income gaps where the richest 10% owns almost 70% of the wealth while the poorest 50% hold just 10%. Our landscape is also suffering. Up to 1/5th of fertile land in the middle east and north Africa is threatened by desertification.

While we are dealing with these immediate issues, we are facing exponential technological developments that pose radical changes and threats to everything from our jobs to our security to our very own humanity. For us to be able to cope or adapt successfully, we need to deploy all our collective talents and resources much more quickly than we have ever done.

Universities shape the next generation and are at the epicenter of knowledge and research. Given the urgency, scale and magnitude of the challenges we face today, universities are among the few institutions that can and are best positioned to address these challenges.

Yet, universities face tougher times than ever. They are under scrutiny for everything. They are expected to reform more quickly than the societies they operate in. Public funding for universities has gone down so they have to chase private dollars. They are under pressure to raise tuition fees while spending less on their students and faculty. They must innovate. They must integrate technology. They must change or risk being obsolete. They must be local and global at once. They must defend the value of liberal arts education. They must respond to the changing demands of employers. They have to produce the perfect graduates – entrepreneurs, leaders, noble prize-winners who will change the world…Universities are expected to perform miracles!

Despite how difficult it may be at this time, I believe, and I hope many of you share this view with me that there has never been a more exciting time for universities to have a greater

impact on the world. Our world needs it, today's students demand it and advances in science and technology help make it possible.

But, to be clear, this is not a time to do better at what we are already doing.

The higher education community including universities and the businesses and philanthropic entities that invest in higher education have not always worked together with the urgency and clarity of purpose needed to serve humanity.

Funding models have pushed universities into adopting a mentality of scarcity, competing for a narrow pool of resources rather than favoring a mentality of abundance that would incentivize them to stretch for new goals and create new opportunities.

And, too many private and philanthropic investments into universities have focused on implementing incremental initiatives rather than implementing system wide changes that would yield the best outcomes.

We see the ramifications of the current funding models manifest itself most clearly in the race to the top of rankings, the growing size of university endowments, and the increasingly elite selection processes. Rankings favor the wealthiest universities rather than those who have the greatest positive impact on the world. The endowments of three of the top universities in the world – Harvard, Yale and University of Texas – are equivalent to the combined GDP of the 46 poorest countries in the world. The highest-ranking universities are revered for the students they keep out rather than who they take in.

Going forward, we need to build new types of funding models and partnerships that reverse these counterproductive approaches. We ought to focus on partnerships that further the sense of **urgency and clarity of purpose – the purpose of serving humanity**, that incentivize a mentality of **abundance and** that seek big impact **system-wide approaches.**

It is my belief that when we deploy these approaches, these funding models and these partnerships - and only when we do that - we will be able to drive towards three of the most critical shifts needed in higher education.

Shift #1 -

From investing in reputation and financial security of universities →

    To investing in solving some of the most critical challenges of our time

Marketing and fundraising alone will not guarantee a university's reputation and financial security.

Only a university that dedicates itself to solving some of the most pressing challenges facing its community and the world will be assured it will have the relevance and support of its community, attract top talent, philanthropic money and research funding.

As the adage says, you are what you measure. While not perfect, current impact reports are important in quantifying university contributions, mostly in economic terms. For example, Stanford University claims that its enterprises generate 2.7 trillion dollars in annual revenues and over 5 million jobs, roughly equivalent to the 10th largest economy in the world.

Harvard claims that their living alumni have created over 146 thousand for profit and nonprofit ventures, over 20 million jobs and annual revenues of $3.9 trillion – greater than the gross domestic product of Germany, the world's fourth largest economy.

But, impact is not limited to jobs and revenue.

Sometimes, universities are best positioned to address the problems at their doorsteps. Perhaps no university knows that more than AUB. For decades, AUB's hospital and medical staff have been at the forefront of tending to the injured in Lebanon regardless of sect, origin or financial ability. To carry that kind of burden can only be understood by the unique position of a university like AUB, where urgent immediate needs trump long term headline grabbing initiatives.

And other universities make a niche for themselves working on the less visible challenges like my own alma mater, McMaster University in Canada, which is quietly working on some of the most daunting health issues of our time. In a recent visit, I was struck by the extensive research they have done to understand and address learning difficulties in the classroom resulting from the rise in identified cases of autism, ADHD and other special needs. CanChild's research and inclusive education model is openly available online and will soon offer tool kits and trainings for communities around the world.

All universities can and must improve on their impact in the community. Universities like AUB and McMaster are models for what we need more of – humbly chipping away at inequity and building more inclusivity.

New measurement frameworks such as the Times Higher Education University Ranking to measure institutions' success in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals are a welcome new development and elevate the public perception of the universities most committed to service to humanity.

Overall, the existing models of building reputations through rankings and endowments are working in the favour of a few elite universities. Universities that want to join the ranks of

excellence cannot and ideally would not choose to compete in this model as it stands. They are better served, and can better serve, by shifting to a strategy that focuses their partnerships, resources and talent to solving real problems. This is what will guarantee their relevance, improve their reputation and sustain their futures.

Shift #2

From modest efforts to increase inclusion in student bodies →

   To making education open for all who need it regardless of status and financial ability

Scholarship programs like those offered by the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation, MasterCard Foundation and Gates Foundation are important and have had a marked impact on the lives of thousands of students in the US, Africa and the Middle East. But they cannot be the answer alone. The number of young people who deserve a quality higher education far outweighs what any foundation can offer. Even massive contributions to endowment funds will only reach a select lucky few every year.

In the meantime, inequality in access to education continues to grow. In the US, access to higher education has become one of the most divisive socio-economic barriers of recent times. In the Arab world, youth from the highest economic background are 3 times more likely to go to university than the young people from the lowest economic tier and only 1% of refugee youth everywhere continue to higher education.

Please do not misunderstand me. I believe that every life changed by a university scholarship or financial aid is a life we should celebrate. Scholarships that target students' merit and financial need are precious magnets that shine the light on gems like Al Ghurair Scholar Rasha AlKhateeb from Jordan. Before she became a scholar, Rasha was already a social entrepreneur who started a skills development non-profit called Mindshift, she was Jordan's National Chess Champion, had worked in several companies, organized national tech competitions and participated in the Girls in Tech exchange program which took her to the US and some of the world's top companies including Facebook and Yahoo.

But, for every Rasha, there are thousands more who do not get the chance at continuing their education. For this to change, universities must refocus their efforts from raising funds for a few select students to opening their education to everyone who needs it. With the

advancement in technologies and improvement in online learning, arguments needing to maintain small class sizes or limited campus spaces no longer hold.

The universities most committed to service to humanity will also be the most inclusive. And make no mistake. This is not a privilege of top universities who can afford it.

The University Innovation Alliance is made up of universities as diverse as Georgia State to Purdue. The 11 universities came together with a common goal of innovating within their universities to significantly increase access to education. Today, only 27% of low-income students complete a bachelor's degree in the US. Together they set an achievable goal of increasing that number to 30% by 2022.

One of the University Innovation Alliance members – Arizona State University – is the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education largest partner and offering 500 online Master's degrees to Arab youth in 28 specializations over 3 years.

And AUB is one of two partners to date along with the American University of Cairo on the online learning capacity development project funded by the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education and implemented by MIT.

These types of innovative initiatives are only the beginning. Universities like AUB need to lead the charge in the region if the region is going to scale up access to higher education.

Initiatives to increase inclusivity on university campuses can only result in positive outcomes but to truly have an impact, universities must adopt new approaches that make higher education available to everyone.

Shift #3

From offering skills and tools for the rapid changes in today's workforces →

> **To preserving and reinforcing our ethics and values amidst radical and inconceivable impacts of technological change.**

This is without a doubt the most challenging and uncertain shift. Universities are already bearing the brunt of the pressure to prepare graduates who are instantly employable, even as changes in the world of work accelerate at ever greater rates.

A shift by universities to help make education radically more accessible will help, and will also magnify the change in who we consider to be "students". Early impact studies of MOOCs on platforms such as EdX and Coursera show that short online courses and credentials have had the largest take up among adults who are educated and are already in the workplace. They

enroll in popular courses like coding, data analytics and supply chain management as a way to get ahead in their careers or in anticipation of career changes.

This development has also spurred some universities like Northeastern University to start thinking about university education as membership-based where students will no longer spend 4 years studying for a degree but rather come in and out of university on a regular basis.

Other universities are offering their students the chance to learn and work at the same time so that the transition from school to work is seamless. Waterloo University, a partner of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education is one of the world's largest and most successful providers of Co-op Education. Just over 96% of its co-op graduates obtain a full time job within 6 months of graduating.

But, co-op education, lifelong education, and even MOOCs all still fall into the category of incremental changes. As surprising as that may seem, they are simply not enough.

We live in a time that is not only already experiencing tremendous technological change. We are at the doorstep of an era of inconceivable technological capabilities.

The rapid progress in the ability of humans to manipulate our DNA, to create parallel worlds and very real simulations with augmented reality and virtual reality, and to create artificial intelligence, are just three areas of stunning pending breakthroughs and profound challenges.

These trends could entirely reshape the concepts of work, of purpose in our lives, and the evolution of humans and life on earth and beyond – while also posing immense questions and threats to humanity.

Under such circumstances, the answer from universities can not only be in teaching more coding, artificial intelligence, and other subjects. The answer can not only be to try to respond even more rapidly - and increasingly frantically - to changes in the workforce even as the pace risks accelerating beyond our ability to respond.

Indeed, the answers are not at all clear. And that is why universities will be called upon as some of our most able existing institutions to help humanity steer our way through these as yet inconceivable challenges to society.

This may sound like the first shift I emphasized for universities – the shift to a focus on addressing the world's biggest challenges through a renewed emphasis on service to humanity.

It's more than that. It's about preserving, revitalizing, and guiding our humanity. It's about thinking deeply about what makes us human – our most cherished human traits, ethics, and values. It's about thinking about how we want to evolve as societies and as humanity.

As institutions that have helped steer society in the past, we will need leadership from universities now more than ever. This will be far, far more important than any short-term fixes universities can make, such as trying to keep up with workforce skills amidst accelerating change.

What better resource do we currently have than universities to think through and to embed deep consideration of our humanity, our ethics and values to guide us through these times?

President Khuri, Excellencies, Esteemed Faculty, and Guests,

I truly believe this is a very exciting time for universities. They have the chance to have a greater impact on the world. We need universities to:

Focus on solving some of the most critical challenges of our time

Make education open for all

Preserve, and continue to shape and enhance, our humanity as we navigate radical technological changes.

I know these shifts I am urging are far from easy.

It will take an urgency and clarity of purpose, partnerships that incentivize a mentality of abundance, and strong moral leadership to drive big impact, system-wide changes. I cannot think of a university in the Arab region better suited to take up these shifts than AUB. Just as AUB was a beacon of hope during my own childhood in Lebanon, its leadership in the service of humanity is needed today more than ever.

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