

Founder's Day 2010: December 6th

President Peter Dorman

Distinguished guests, faculty, students, and staff: it is a distinct pleasure to welcome you all to this celebration of Founder's Day, which commemorates the birth of this great institution in 1866, under the name of the Syrian Protestant College. In the 144 years that have since transpired, the College—and then later American University of Beirut—has grown into the university we know today, dedicated to the education of young men and women and the service of this region, and almost from the beginning an integral part of the city of Beirut.

As it happened, however, the earliest buildings of the campus were constructed well outside the medieval city walls, on a rocky landscape covered with red sands and cactus fields. It may be said that, in time, Beirut embraced the university not only for the opportunity it offered for higher education, but physically enfolded it as well, as Hamra, Ras Beirut, and Ain Mreisseh were first settled with villas and gardens, then shops, apartment buildings, and a tram line.

While we often reflect on the growth of AUB in terms of its academic programs, its students and alumni, its faculty and the research they produce, the hospital and its doctors, no university can exist independently of the neighborhood and the city that together help to mold its inimitable character.

In 1999, a new tradition was started, to engage our students—the life blood of this institution since its founding—in this important occasion. This is the twelfth year that students have been asked to contribute essays on a particular topic, and this year's theme addresses the evolving

relationship between AUB and its surrounding neighborhood. Students were invited to respond to the following:

The topographical and social spaces of Ras Beirut have gone through many changes since AUB was first established in 1866, when this area was only a sparsely inhabited, rocky, and windswept promontory outside the city walls. Since that time, the presence of AUB has shaped the physical layout and social dynamics of the neighborhood that grew up around it, just as the community surrounding us continues to have an effect on the lives of our students, faculty, and staff.

In 2010, what is AUB's relationship to its place, its Ras Beirut neighborhood, and what should it be?

As in past years, the essays were judged by a special faculty committee who volunteered to vet and rank the student submissions. My sincere thanks go to the three faculty members who undertook this special service at my request: Dr. Mona Fawaz, Assistant Professor of Architecture and Design; Dr. Christopher Johns, Assistant Professor of Philosophy; and Dr. Paul Newson, Assistant Professor of History and Archeology. I also extend my personal thanks to all of the students who took the time to write an essay this year.

- The third prize in this year's essay contest goes to **May Chaker**, a junior Business major in the Olayan School of Business.

- Second prize has been awarded to sophomore **Tala Mukkaddam** a Political Studies major in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.
- The first prize winner is **Daria El Samad**, a senior Economics major in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

I take great pleasure in introducing Ms. El Samad, who will now read her essay, entitled “The Space We Occupy: AUB’s relationship to its surroundings.”

It is a distinct pleasure for me to introduce the main speaker for Founder’s Day 2010, Michael C. Williams. Currently the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Michael Williams has spent much of his life pursuing the cause of peace in a long and distinguished career as diplomat, senior advisor, writer, and researcher, with a major emphasis on Asia and the Middle East.

Born in Wales, Williams attended University College London and then the prestigious School of Oriental and African Studies, where he earned his master’s degree and doctorate in politics. He was later the Editor and then Senior Editor for Asia with the BBC World Service and worked for several years as Head of Asia Research for Amnesty International. His long-standing association with the United Nations began in the 1990s with positions focused on human rights in Cambodia and the UN Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia. In 1999, he began a series

of government appointments, serving as Special Advisor to two United Kingdom foreign secretaries and, most recently, as the UK Representative for the Middle East and Special Projects, reporting to former Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Foreign Secretary David Miliband.

With Williams' extensive experience with—and erudite understanding of—the Middle East and Asia, he returned to the United Nations in 2005 as the UN Director for the Asia and Pacific Division, then as the Secretary-General's Special Advisory on the Situation in the Middle East, and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. He has written extensively on topics ranging from Asian politics to international security and peacekeeping. In the fall of 2010, Williams was created a life peer by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II in a ceremony at Westminster Abbey, as Baron Williams of Baglan, taking his seat in the House of Lords on the Labour benches.

Please join me in welcoming Michael Williams, who will speak on the topic of “Common Beginnings, Shared Aspirations: the United Nations and Lebanon.”