

Commencement 2004 President John Waterbury

Your excellencies, graduates of the classes of 2004, parents, friends....

Our commencement ceremony takes place this year, as in years past, against a backdrop of violence, destruction, torture, and lies. Unfortunately in this sorry marketplace no leader can credibly claim the high moral ground. As before, we send our students into a regional and global mine field. We hope AUB has given you the skills, but above all the values, that will help you navigate successfully what lies ahead. We hope that you will be able to do what past generations have failed to do: change the sorry game in which we have all been losing players.

If you feel that is too much to ask, if you feel helpless and at times hopeless, please do the following. As the years go by, think about the man, Vartan Gregorian, who will address you today. From modest origins in Tabriz, Iran, he came to Beirut as a young, nearly penniless man, attended the Collège Armenien, went on to earn a PhD in history from Stanford University, and then to become Provost at the University of Pennsylvania, then President of the New York Public Library, then President of Brown University, and, since 1997, President of the Carnegie Corporation, one of the major philanthropic foundations in the United States.

Vartan Gregorian comes from a people to whom history has not been kind. He comes from a generation in that people's history that knew unprecedented suffering. One could easily understand and forgive Dr. Gregorian had he grown up a cynic and a misanthrope. But, to the contrary, he embraced humanity and life. He learned early on to accept help and to marvel at it, and once having turned the tables on his personal misfortunes, he gave back many fold. He gave back with exuberance, zest, humor, and wisdom.

Dr. Gregorian, welcome back to Beirut.