

American University of Beirut

Commencement Exercises 2005

President Waterbury's Speech

Your Excellencies, Trustees of AUB, Faculty, Friends, Parents

At every Commencement, all our thoughts go to our graduating students and to the future that awaits them. We cannot know what that future will be. We do know that they will and they must play a role in shaping it.

For the past seven years I have had the honor and privilege of presiding over these Commencement ceremonies. Each time my feelings of hope have been at least counter balanced by my feelings of apprehension. Students themselves, at AUB and at other universities in Lebanon, have talked of migration as much as they have talked about their future in Lebanon and in the region.

This year is different. It is a year of tragedy and a year of hope. The size of the tragedy has set the dimensions of our hopes. Two men have been lost to us under terrible circumstances. Rafic Hariri, businessman, Prime Minister, and Trustee of this university gave his life for you. Let me repeat: he gave his life for you. For decades he knew that you and all young Lebanese are the future of this country, and he used his considerable resources to help give you the capabilities of serving Lebanon and the region. Then, his mission unaccomplished, he gave his life.

Bassil Fuleihan died with him. Bassil was the kind of young, energetic, multi-faceted talent that Rafic Hariri had sought to nurture. He was, not so many years ago, a graduate of AUB like you. He became a promising academic, a World Bank expert, and then returned to serve his country. He was the first of the generation that lived through but did not participate in the civil war to rise to a position of significant responsibility. He was the future. Look at him. Copy him. He was what you all can be or can try to be.

We will never know what your classmate, Khalil Yaghi might have become. At twenty years old he was far too young to leave us, but he

was old enough for us to know how talented and capable he was. There is no worse happening for a parent to lose a child and no worse happening for a university than to lose one of its students.

Despite these losses, my hopes this year outweigh my fears. Lebanese proved that they can, through their will power and determination, change situations that had been the cause for despair. Young Lebanese have proven what their peaceful collective efforts can do. For the first time, in a long time, I think you, graduates of 2005, can look with hope on your future, your future here in Lebanon and your future in the region as a whole.

There is no one who can situate this historic year in the context of independent Lebanon better than our speaker today, Ghassan Tueni. In his youth he was at the barricades in the fight for Lebanon's independence. As Lebanon's leading journalist, he has chronicled this country's and the region's history over the last half century. As a diplomat, he has served Lebanon and the Arab world through his integrity, intelligence, and wisdom. He is, finally, a paragon of the virtues that AUB seeks to instill in its students, passion for the arts and for philosophy, a love of language, and a commitment to citizenship and civic responsibility. Graduates of 2005, remember this year, remember this day, and remember this man, Ghassan Tueni.