

OPENING CEREMONY OCTOBER 2, 2006

Some day I may stand before you at Opening Ceremony and announce that the summer was uneventful, that the economy is growing, that the political leadership is guiding the country along a coherent path, and that AUB is making steady and uninterrupted progress toward becoming one of the world's leading institutions of higher learning.

Dream on. That cannot be my message this year, but, despite the terrible events of the past two and a half months, my message is one of pride and hope. My remarks today are about what we did as an institution to deal with the crisis that was imposed upon us, a crisis that contained the seeds of our own destruction as surely as it threatened the survival of the Lebanese state and political system.

Last June 24, in my introduction to the ceremony for awarding honorary doctorates, I said the following:

Our honorees remind us of lasting values, human will, the rewards of perseverance, and, perhaps above all, the virtue of patience coupled with determination. They teach us how to keep moving when the ground is shaking beneath our feet.

I had no idea at that time just how violently the ground would shake in a few short weeks; I had no idea how powerfully would the situation after July 12 demand our perseverance, patience, and determination. I did not anticipate how the crisis would call forth our humanity toward our colleagues and friends within the AUB family, but even more so toward our fellow citizens whose lives were turned up side down, and too often ended, by the events following July 12.

AUB is nearly 140 years old. Is anyone surprised that we rose to this occasion as we have to all others preceding it?

I

I am going to acknowledge many members of the AUB community who helped us survive the crisis and who also volunteered their time and energy to help many outside our walls. To mention everyone by name would take much more time than we have today. Those whom I do not mention are not forgotten. Your supervisors and I personally know who you are. Many large units of this university, from campus protection, to human resources, to

physical plant and on to the hospital had near perfect attendance. Our ship lost some passengers but the crew stayed at their posts.

As the crisis unfolded, as the bombing of the southern districts intensified and the flood of displaced persons moving north swelled, VP President for Administration, George Tomey, assembled a Crisis Response Team which was comprised of most of the senior academic and non academic managers on campus. In organizing the CRT, George called on his long experience during the Lebanese civil war. It is a pity that George Tomey ever acquired this experience, but all of us at AUB owe him a great debt of gratitude for stepping up when the ground was shaking.

The CRT oversaw the evacuation of foreign students and staff who felt obliged to leave or were instructed by their embassies to do so. **I am sure that all those who had to leave did so with a heavy heart. Some may have felt relief but none were happy. Others, like myself, were trapped outside and uncertain how to return. I can assure you our frustration was profound.**

Many people played critical roles in the evacuation operation, but I want to cite in particular George Tomey, Deputy VP for Human Resources, Jim Radulski, Director of Personnel, Amal Hamadeh, Provost Peter Heath, VP for Finance, John Bernson, Dean of Students Maroun Kisirwani, **Director of Business Services, Dani Asfour**, and Coordinator of International Student Services, Caroline Chalouhi. Azmi Imad, the head of the long standing Emergency Response Team, Registrar Moueen Salameh, Director of Admissions Salim Kanaan, and all their staff and managers, were on hand to assist in this and all other measures dictated by the situation in July and August. Likewise, Antoine Khabbaz, Wadad Husseini, Donna Alam, and Maryam Ghandour assisted Maroun Kisirwani in making sure the Dean of Student's Office was ready for all eventualities.

The CRT also organized the move on to campus of all essential personnel needed to keep the hospital, the power plant, campus protection, and computer and networking services functioning properly. This was quite an amazing operation. Our dormitories and some surrounding hotels were taken over to house this personnel. 700 staff members and their dependents were involved. Penrose Hall became a village in its own right, with the young, the old and all in between living in a multi confessional experiment that went without incident. The Green Oval was flooded in the evening cool with kids

of all ages laughing, playing and mingling. I wish more of us had been around to see it.

None of this temporary lodging of key personnel would have been possible without the dedication of the residence staff of the Dean of Students Office. I want to acknowledge in particular:

Nawal Semaan
Rima Haidar
Hiam Abdel Hadi
Shahnaz Saad
Youmna Sabra
Hisham Merdas
Georges Estephan
Nisreen Fattouh
Esther Kaperilian
Faten Shreim
Ramza Saad
Ghaleb Halimi
Monia Hamzeh

As amazing as the move onto campus itself, was the exodus. When the cessation of hostilities came into effect, all these employees left our dormitories upon the request of their supervisors, and through the extraordinary efforts of Physical Plant and our custodial services the dorms were readied for students in a matter of days.

While these were and are our employees, many of them were and are from the south or from the southern districts of Beirut. As they honored their commitment to AUB, they also mourned the loss of relatives and friends and the destruction of property and businesses. On my visit to the hospital around August 8, I met a nurse whose family had been driven from their home in the south, then from a temporary refuge in the Bekaa, and then, for the third time from a refuge in the Dahiye. She was cheerful and smiling when I met her. She did not recount her tale to me; Gladys Mouro did.

Throughout these weeks campus protection operated at full strength and there was absolutely no breach of security or break down in order anywhere on campus or at the hospital.

Between Campus Protection and the Facilities Planning and Design Unit, led by Samer Maamari and Soheir Mabsout, the large building sites, such as the

Hostler Center and the Scientific Research Building, were protected and some minimal construction activities undertaken despite the absence of much of the work force and the unavailability of imported building materials.

The CRT, and especially George Tomey, took the lead in securing fuel supplies for our power plant, to fill in for the increasing number of hours each day when EDL could not supply power and in anticipation of a time when EDL might have to shut down completely due to the Israeli sea blockade of all tankers en route for Lebanon.

The Power Plant itself is a place and an operation of which AUB should be proud. Not many people go to the power plant. The noise inside from those big generators does not make for easy conversation. But the manager of the power plant, John Abdunur runs a marvelous operation. Perhaps one could not eat off the floor, but to me it looks clean enough to take the risk. John is but one of the many professionals in Physical Plant who kept us going under the leadership of Marcel Romanos.

An inherently cleaner operation, but no less impressive, is Computer and Networking Services. Led by Nabil BuKhalid, CNS kept all our information systems up and running and, crucially, made sure all our vital records from the registrar's, comptroller's and personnel offices were backed up in the event our servers went down during the hostilities.

Imad Dayya, our new comptroller, chose an interesting time to begin his duties at AUB, but, with the help of Nelly Abu Zaki, the transition went without a hitch. When John Bernson had to leave Beirut in early August to take up his new position in the US, Imad was made Acting VP for Finance. This was all probably a good deal more than he had bargained for. I am equally grateful to Dean Huda Zurayk who agreed to become Acting Provost when Peter Heath took a well deserved break from his duties. Huda played a major role in working out policies for faculty compensation and back up plans in the event the university was unable to resume classes in the near future. She was an integral member of the CRT, and once the cessation of hostilities was announced we immediately put into effect a plan that **she helped shape** to complete the summer session and begin the fall semester on September 27.

A crisis atmosphere sometimes leads to the cutting of corners in basic procedures. The Internal Auditor's office however maintained vigilant oversight of all financial operations through out the summer under the leadership of Dani Saad el Dine.

The Development Office both in New York and in Beirut undertook a major and successful campaign to raise money for the Emergency Medical Fund, about which I will say more in a few moments. Suffice it to note that to date some \$1.2

million has been raised for that fund thanks to the efforts of Development. Among the many Development staff members who worked tirelessly during the crisis, I want to mention in particular Joe Manok who rose to every challenge put before him.

You all know that Beirut and Lebanon were invaded by journalists for several weeks. AUB was in the spotlight. It is unfortunate that it took a war to put it there. Ibrahim Khoury and all his staff did a remarkable job in dealing with the press and in getting AUB's story out. I think that effort was important in focusing attention on the nation's fuel crisis. Ibrahim in turn is proud of the efforts of Henry Mathews, Sana Murad, Maha al-Azar, and Rami Salame in projecting AUB's image to the media. Thanks also to Nada Sbaiti who kept a rapidly changing website up to date, intelligible, and attractive.

Finally, I would like the secretarial and administrative staff of the Fifth floor of College hall to represent the hundreds of secretaries, administrative assistants, clerks and messengers who took considerable risks to report for work each day: Annie Kasparian, Mary Jaber, Soha Humaidan, Mary Khairollah, Maral Dadourian, Najwa Khoury, Mazen Korfali, Lamia Hussein, Nabil Sukkarieh, Patricia Assaf, and Hassan Jaber. Andre Nahas, Director of Institutional Planning and Process Improvement, was a steady presence throughout the weeks of crisis. AUB is a machine with thousands of moving parts. If only a few parts are missing or broken, the machine will seize up and come to a halt.

II

Different generations of AUBites have learned a basic lesson: keep our doors open, keep our staff in place, teach whenever and wherever possible. We are masters of the old adage: use it or lose it. What I have so far described are the efforts, wonderfully successful, to keep AUB in business. But many AUBites did a great deal more than that. Let us look at various initiatives to bring AUB's skills and talents to bear on the humanitarian crisis facing the country.

Unsurprisingly it was the Faculty of Medicine and the hospital that moved first to address the health and patient care needs of the displaced population. VP Nadim Cortas, with the support of the Development Offices, built an Emergency Medical Fund to bring medical care to populations lodged in schools and other shelters, to treat the wounded, to sort and deliver emergency medical supplies and to offer out patient services to those driven from their homes. While all of the staff at the hospital and in the Faculties of Medicine and Health Science were involved, we need to acknowledge especially Ghassan Hamadeh, Iman Nuwayhid, Adnan Mroueh, Fuad Ziadeh, Gladys Mouro, Marina Hajj, Munthir Kuzayli, Thuraya Arayssi, and Amin Qazzi who directly led this effort.

I salute also the student Red Cross Society, led by Acting President Salma Bou Ezzedine and Kamal Berberi, who acted in support of the Emergency Medical Fund.

As soon as the hostilities broke out, others immediately volunteered time to bring aid to the victims. **Nahla Houalla**, Salma Talhouk and Rami Zurayk were among them. Rami turned the focus of the Healthy Basket organic produce project on to supplying produce to some 800 displaced families. Salma Talhouk liaised with various NGOs to facilitate their operations and with the Emergency Medical Fund team. When I asked her for her impressions of these efforts she wrote this to me:

I do not know all those engaged in the overall university relief efforts but I was struck by the dedication of Ali a janitor (I think) at FHS who was meeting all our needs and helping everybody even though he had lost his home.

The AUB community faced the most hateful moments with love and compassion towards its own members and the displaced communities that mushroomed in its vicinity.

A remarkable initiative was the brain and heart child of Sharif Abdalnur of our civilization sequence program and a long standing activist in AUB's theatre undertakings. Sharif started something called Theatre under the Bombs directed at the hundreds of children traumatized by death, destruction and displacement. He worked daily with hundreds of these children in the Ras Beirut area, helping them find ways to express and relieve their fears and grief through acting, pantomime, circus performances. Sharif is still going strong. As he wrote me:

Since the war ended I have spent my time training trainers in various villages and areas in the south and Beirut. So far I have trained a little under 200 trainers to work with traumatized children.

Faculty in Architecture led by Huwayda al-Harithy and Mona Harb, launched the Reconstruction Unit, involving several faculty colleagues as well students in architecture and urban planning. They directed their attention to the reconstruction process in a number of southern towns including Bint Jbeil, Aita Shaab, Siddiqin, and Quleileh, as well as Dahiyeh and Chiyah. Their involvement is only just beginning.

So too are the efforts of a Reconstruction Task Force that I brought together toward the end of August. The goal is to bring a multi- or inter disciplinary focus on the challenges of reconstruction and to seek the most appropriate ways in which the expertise of AUB's faculty and students can be brought to bear on these challenges. This is necessarily a long term initiative and the task force is working on a strategy at the present time.

Finally, let me salute the several non-Lebanese who elected to stay here during the crisis. None will be surprised that Jean Marie Cook could not imagine herself anywhere else. She has long made it clear under what circumstances she is prepared to leave Lebanon. But there other ex-patriots who were not so obvious. Patrick and Betsy McGreevey may stand in for them all. Patrick is the Director of our Center for American Studies and Research, a scholar of the Erie Canal in the northeast United States. One could easily imagine Patrick and Betsy picking up stakes and heading home to Buffalo. However, he and Betsy did quite the reverse. They wanted to live Lebanon's crisis with the Lebanese, and Patrick wrote passionately and eloquently about this experience in several publications.

III

As you all know Isareli air and ground assaults cleared most of southern Lebanon of its civilian population. When I returned to Lebanon in early August, I heard the Dr. Nagy Saghir of our Faculty of Medicine, had lost family members in Bint Jbeil. I sent him a message of concern and received this message from him:

Dear John,

Thank you very much for your kind words. In fact, I have lost a few distant relatives, and my Aunt, Khadijeh Turfeh, 95+ years old and her daughter, my cousin Suad Turfeh, 60 years old. We just recovered their bodies from under the rubble at their destroyed house in Bint Jbeil. We buried them yesterday. I have another old aunt, Maryam, whom we managed to pull out from Bint Jbeil two weeks ago; She had dehydration and renal failure and respiratory failure. She's now slowly recovering in the ICU at AUH.

Having gone to Bint Jbeil yesterday for the burial, I discovered how destructive, I believe, this war has been. Seeing it on TV and in newspapers, is nothing compared to being there and talking to the people who lived thru its horrors. This has to be the last war Lebanon goes thru!

We always wish that nobody goes thru wars. Modern weaponry has become so destructive that I think we should all urgently work for the goal "No more wars"!

Sincerely,

Nagi

I believe that Nagi Saghir's attitude in the face of loss is fully in the spirit of AUB. He seeks an end to violence, not revenge. As a faculty member and a physician his oath and his duty is to protect life, to help people build for the future. That is

the mission of all of us at AUB. A university is a repository of knowledge, it is a place in which knowledge is created, but above all it is a factory for the future. **The physicians' guiding command is "do no harm". That is AUB's command as well, to which I would add, "Do some good!"**

Today, despite the events of the summer, despite our doubts and fears about the near future, **7202 students have registered at AUB. 984 are graduate students while the rest are undergraduates including 480 freshmen Twenty percent of the undergraduates are non Lebanese.** These students are in our hands. They will build someone's future. I hope it will be Lebanon's and the region's. But the important point is that we at AUB, and in all institutions of learning and training, are the force for the future. It is a lofty task, a mission more sacred than ever, a challenge that we, the faculty and staff, should accept with joy and with humility. And if there are students here among us today, I say to you, don't let us fail you.

May I ask all those whom I have mentioned to rise, and would the audience please join me in thanking them.

Now will all please rise for Alma Mater.