

AUB Reunion 2022
Honoring Ceremony
June 23, 2022

Keynote Speech on behalf of the Class of 1997
Ambassador Rola Nouredine

Mr. President, esteemed AUB officials, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is such a pleasure to be back at AUB, and a real honor to be speaking to this distinguished assembly.

Tonight is a great opportunity for us alumni to reconnect with our classmates, our professors, and our alma mater; to look back and reflect about our youth, and what it held in idealism, aspirations, and dreams for the future.

25 years ago, we each ventured on a path and pursued professions and occupations guided by our ambitions, personalities, talents, and circumstances.

Joining the Foreign Service was my dream job. At AUB, my interest in public policy was shaped and honed as I majored in economics and focused on politics for my elective courses.

I remember how I was eager to conclude my MBA, all the while preparing for the Foreign Service entry examination. It was a time of excitement on a national level. The country was flourishing and everything looked so promising; it felt like we could achieve anything we put our minds to. I was adamant on civil service.

In keeping with my passion, my end of year project was about marketing... of political figures! This was shortly after Lebanon held its second parliamentary elections after the civil war in 1996.

We were not many AUB graduates to join the Foreign Service then but we were a diverse few who brought with us an alternative perspective to the status quo aspiring to usher a new way of governance, inclusivity, diversity, creativity, and openness – all values developed and nurtured right here on campus. The years we spent at AUB sharpened our sense of politics: politics as a public good, building citizenship and the indispensability of dialogue and transparent discourse.

And we tried...

For the longest time, I felt we were the new generation, having lived through war and survived; we were full of hope and ideals and so much potential to be the agents of change. Yet today, and considering the dire circumstances our country is going through, doubts and skepticism are seeping in. I do not see us anymore as the “new generation” and wonder if we have transitioned to a “lost generation?” What happened and how? Were we complacent? Did we become part of the system? Did we slide into passive cynicism? Did we already feel that the situation was

spiraling? How did we pass from the promise of the best of times to be experiencing the worst of times?

My work in the public sphere was a gratifying experience. To represent one's own country, I believe, bestows upon you a responsibility to be part of shaping its future, but I can't help but feel that we have missed something...

I do not intend to dwell on the reasons our country is struggling nor will I profess to have any robust political analysis as to what has happened... We are probably a twilight generation that came out the other side of war, believing that nation building was at hands reach, but were faced with significant struggles, and chose to mitigate.

However, despite these challenging times we are living in, when you are representing your country abroad, you undergo a perpetual exercise of keeping the hope and dream of that promising future alive. And that is what I feel is important to remind ourselves about.

With 25 years of real-life experience in the bag, we can still be reformed idealists – realists. Keeping the dream alive is very Lebanese; it is our survival mechanism and our core strength. I believe that whenever our core value system and roots are put to the test, we realize that our commitment to them remains unwavering.

As an Ambassador, I was in charge of organizing for the second time the parliamentary elections for the Lebanese diaspora in Switzerland in May of this year. It was a challenge on many fronts, as you can imagine. Despite this, I was heartened by the enthusiasm of the Lebanese and the efforts exerted to render the process a success. It is not about the results of the elections; it is about convening them and knowing that this democratic tradition will not go away.

Today, I humbly acknowledge, I did not know where we would be 25 years after 1997, but I had confidence in a belief that better days were yet to come, and often it is the vision that leads, and keeps the hope. The capacity to project oneself into the future is the best blessing of all. I know today many of us are unable to do so if you live in Lebanon or even abroad, ... but then an event, a manifestation, a success, reminds us that we are here to stay, that we are those who still believe deep down in what Lebanon stands for and still strive, each in our own personal way, to bring the ideal to realization.

Thank you all for your attention and I wish you better and more prosperous days to come.