

GRADUATE CEREMONY

JUNE 14, 2013

President welcoming remarks:

Your Excellency, Minister of Higher Education Hassan Diab, representing President Michel Suleiman and Prime Minister Najib Mikati; Mr. Hisham Jaroudi, representing Prime Minister Designate Tamam Salam; Deputy Ali Bazzi, representing Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berry; your excellencies, members of the AUB Board of Trustees, distinguished guests, friends, and especially the graduates of the Class of 2013 and their families:

MASAA' EL-KHAIR.

IL-YOM MUNAASIBATUN SACIIDATUN LI KULL IL-MUHAADIRIIN JAMIIC(AN):

IT-TULLAAB ILLATHIIN ATAMMU SINIIN DIRAASATIHIM ISSACBA;

*WAL CAA'ILAAT ILLATI SAHARIT CALA TAQADDUMI IBNAA'IHA WA BANAATIHA,
WA CADAMAT-HU CABR IS-SANAWAAT;*

It is my great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all of you, to the 144th celebration of Commencement exercises at AUB, as the university awards diplomas to 501 students receiving graduate degrees. For all of the members of the Class of 2013 at AUB, I offer my warmest congratulations.

Our University is a community of extraordinary individuals and groups, all of whom are passionately devoted to the vigor and the long-lasting success of one of the great experiments in education ever undertaken in the Middle East—chartered over 150 years ago. Yet as individuals at AUB, whether students, faculty, alumni, university staff, proud parents of graduates, as trustees and friends, we are fundamentally one community. The aspirations and values that bind us together are common to all. We believe in the pursuit of excellence; we believe in the free expression of ideas; we believe in the dignity of every human being; we believe in the value of a diverse and engaged body of citizens; we believe that each of us can make a difference.

These ideals are easier to embrace in a protected space such as a university campus; they are harder to practice in the world beyond our walls, and especially at a time when our region is beset by continuing violence. Yet as you make the transition from university life into the first years of your adult careers, you will discover that you are ambassadors—not only for AUB—but for the fundamental values that we hold dear.

This is a momentous time for you and your families, and in this transition I wish you all good luck and Godspeed.

President's introduction of student speakers:

And now it is my distinct pleasure to introduce the student speakers for commencement.

The first speaker is Wajiha Jurdi Kheir, a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Medicine from the Faculty of Medicine.

The second speaker is Rabih Baz Radwan, a candidate for the degree of Master of Business Administration from the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business.

President's introduction of honorary degrees and citations for honorands:

As part of its educational mission, the American University of Beirut is committed to honoring the good that people do in the world. Tonight we continue our tradition of awarding honorary degrees at Commencement, in the presence of our graduating class, their families, our faculty and trustees, and other august public figures.

The four honorands we celebrate today have each exerted a profound impact of their own: through advanced research, publication, and social activism; through the exploration of the vastness of the cosmos; through the art of the cinema and advocacy of women's causes; and through extraordinary business acumen and enlightened philanthropy. In all cases, it requires courage to follow one's deepest convictions, and it is this courage that we hope for and desire in our students—indeed all of our community members. I now have the pleasure of introducing each of our honorands.

President:

I would like to invite Professor Noam Chomsky to the rostrum.

President:

A globally influential thinker and writer, Noam Chomsky has followed a dual career path of trailblazing academic scholarship and erudite social commentary. He is arguably one of the world's leading intellectuals as well as the most famous political activist of the American left.

Chomsky's contributions to the study of language and the mind are legion. At the very beginning of his academic career, he launched a new field of linguistics, revolutionizing how we comprehend language acquisition and human development. His theories have made him a major figure in analytic philosophy and have had repercussions in scholarly areas as far afield as cognitive psychology, computational science, and artificial intelligence. Some academics may have been content to leave it at that, but he has never rested on his laurels.

Noam Chomsky has said that, “It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies,” and he has followed this maxim with enthusiastic diligence. A prolific author, he has framed many of his publications around contemporary societal concerns, including mass media and propaganda, U.S. foreign policy, global economics, international terrorism, human rights, and democracy.

Above all, Chomsky is a champion of the rights of all people to basic human dignity, freedom, and self-determination. Denouncing oppression in all its forms, he has passionately embraced the Palestinian cause, and he remains a fierce critic of U.S. and Israeli policies in the Middle East. He travels extensively, giving lectures, participating in conferences and symposia, and meeting with government leaders as well as common citizens.

Some may see a disconnect between his academic research and his social activism, but both are to be seen as an extension of his unquenchable thirst for knowledge and understanding.

Noam Chomsky has strived to illuminate the human condition through his groundbreaking scholarship, and for boldly confronting inequality and intolerance wherever they may exist. For the courage to follow his deepest convictions and to speak out loudly against the complacent status quo, he is a shining example of what it means to be a deeply engaged citizen of the world.

President:

I now invite Professor Charles Elachi to step forward.

President:

Early on, Charles Elachi was urged by his parents to “reach for the stars” and it seems that he took this advice literally. His prolific career has been spent exploring the vast reaches of space and illuminating the mysteries of our universe. Since 1970, Charles Elachi has served with distinction at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory and has been director of that space agency since 2001, leading some of their most high-profile and innovative space exploration initiatives.

An abundantly educated man, Elachi has earned degrees in physics, engineering, electrical science, geology, and even business administration, and he has had the opportunity to put all of these to good use in his work. Elachi and his teams are investigating some of the most fundamental questions of existence: What are the origins of the universe? Could life exist on other planets? What secrets do our neighboring planets hold? Boldly pushing the limits of our understanding and our capabilities, Elachi continues to seek answers to these questions, still reaching for the stars.

Like any true leader, he understands that teamwork is crucial to achieve results in such complex missions as landing a far-traveling robot on Mars. Beyond his scientific acumen and effective managerial skills, Elachi is an inspiring leader whose exuberance is contagious. Commenting on the successful landing of the rover *Curiosity*, he said, “Mars now is our sandbox, and we are ready to play and learn.”

In addition to his work at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Elachi is an accomplished academic and university administrator. He is professor of electrical engineering and planetary science at the California Institute of Technology as well as vice president of the university.

A prominent researcher, enthusiastic team leader, and intrepid innovator, Professor Elachi has brought great honor to his native land with his bountiful scientific achievements and his outstanding leadership. His exemplary record of service is not only a gift to the citizens of his adopted country and to his home country, but to all nations of this third planet from the sun.

President:

I now invite to the rostrum Faten Hamama.

President:

Icon, legend, luminary: Faten Hamama evokes such grandiloquent titles. Her visceral screen presence has captivated audiences for over 70 years and she remains the “Lady of the Arabic Screen.”

She got her start as an actress while still a child and quickly established herself in Egyptian cinema as a guarantor of box office success and critical acclaim. In the 1950’s and 60’s all the greatest directors of the time – Yousef Wahbi, Ezzel Dine Zulficar, Youssef Chahine, and Henry Barakat—wanted Faten Hamama to star in their films. She reached dizzying heights of popularity during the “Golden Age of Egyptian Cinema” and once said, “I belong to a generation where loving art was everything to your soul.”

Mme. Hamama has tackled all genres of film with great success: romance, mystery, historical pieces, musicals, and drama. Her career can be seen through the prism of a modernizing Egypt and changing attitudes towards women: she began playing demure, feminine characters and later moved on to more challenging dramatic roles, choosing films with powerful messages addressing political and societal themes. She is even credited with having spurred a change to the Egyptian law that forbade Khul' (خلع)—a divorce initiated by the wife—following her influential film, *Oureedou Hallan (I Want a Solution)*.

Her powerful and evocative performances are amazingly natural and filled with emotional sincerity. As one of her countless fans put it, “When she smiles, I want to smile; when she cries, I want to cry.”

Today we acknowledge Faten Hamama for her game-changing work in Egyptian cinema and for raising the level of this artistic medium in the Arab world. We honor her not only for a lifetime of achievement as an actor and producer in film and television, but also as an agent for change in this region. Most of all, we salute Faten Hamama for practicing her craft with supreme grace and dignity and—through her art—helping us to appreciate our own humanity.

President:

I would like to invite Dr. Ray Irani to the rostrum.

President:

Ray Irani has found unparalleled success in whatever he put his hands to: from academic studies to scientific research to the corporate boardroom. He has a talent for recognizing and seizing opportunities, and he also recognizes the need to give back to the community and stay true to his heritage.

Graduating from International College at the precocious age of 15, Ray came to AUB and was promptly identified by legendary Chemistry professor, William West, as being extremely gifted. After securing his bachelor of science, Ray moved on to the University of Southern California, where he finished his doctoral studies at the age of 22. From there, he started work in the agribusiness field and proved himself an exceptional scientific innovator, securing most of his 150 registered patents in the first ten years of his career. Moving from the laboratory to the front office, Ray's leadership abilities came to the fore, propelling him to the top of the corporate ladder in remarkably short time. As CEO and chairman of Occidental Petroleum Corporation for over 20 years, he grew a small and disparate conglomerate into a powerhouse of the oil and gas industry.

To his two alma maters—AUB and USC—Ray Irani has donated generously, funding much-needed new facilities, and has given of his precious time to serve as a trustee. At AUB, he was a member of the board for over 25 years, serving as vice-chair and finally as co-chair for the past 7 years.

Recognized for his deep understanding of international affairs and economics, Irani has been tapped to contribute his wide-ranging expertise on numerous high-level committees and boards of the U.S. government, including the Secretary of Energy's Advisory Board and the White House-sponsored Task Force for Humanitarian Relief in Lebanon.

Today, I am pleased and honored to award Ray Irani our highest mark of distinction for his distinguished contributions to science, his leadership in the energy domain, and for his exemplary service to this university.

President's Closing Remarks:

I NOW HAVE THE DISTINCT PLEASURE OF GREETING ALL OF YOU, FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND IN THE SHADOW OF COLLEGE HALL, AS ALUMNI OF THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT. THE ROAD YOU HAVE TRAVELED DURING YOUR YEARS AT AUB HAS BEEN A DEMANDING ONE, AND YOU ARE TO BE CONGRATULATED FOR HAVING SUCCESSFULLY MET THE ACADEMIC CHALLENGES OF THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY IN LEBANON AND IN THE REGION. SOME OF YOU WILL BE GOING ON TO CAREERS IN LEBANON OR OVERSEAS, OTHERS WILL BE CONTINUING THEIR EDUCATION IN HIGHER DEGREE PROGRAMS. WHEREVER YOUR TRAVELS TAKE YOU, I WISH YOU SUCCESS IN YOUR CAREERS, PERSONAL JOY IN YOUR LIVES, AND PEACE

AND FULFILLMENT IN YOUR COMMUNITIES.

AT THIS POINT I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE KEY ROLE THAT HAS BEEN PLAYED BY YOUR FAMILIES--YOUR PARENTS, YOUR HUSBANDS AND WIVES, EVEN YOUR CHILDREN--WHO HAVE WALKED THIS ROAD WITH YOU, WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED THEIR FINANCIAL MEANS, AND WHO HAVE GIVEN YOU THEIR LOVE AND MORAL SUPPORT. YOUR SUCCESS IS THEIRS AS WELL, AND THEY ARE HERE TO CELEBRATE WITH YOU. SO I WOULD INVITE YOU NOW TO STAND AGAIN, TURN AROUND, AND EXPRESS YOUR APPRECIATION FOR THEIR CONSTANCY AND DEVOTION.