

Honorary Doctorates and Graduate Commencement Ceremony

Welcoming Address

Fadlo R. Khuri- President

May 27, 2016

Your Excellences, esteemed guests, our great Board of Trustees; friends, parents and families of our outstanding students, our superb faculty and staff, and yes, our wonderful and exceptional graduates from the AUB Class of 2016! I am honored to greet you and thank you for being here on this very special evening.

أصحاب المعالي والسعادة والسيادة، ضيوفنا الكرام، حضرات أعضاء مجلس الأمناء الأجلاء، أهالي وعائلات طلابنا المميزين، أعضاء الهيئة التعليمية والإدارية الرائعين، ونعم، خريجي الـ AUB الرائعين والإستثنائيين للعام 2016! إنه لشرفٌ لي أن أرحب بكم أحر ترحيب وأشكركم على وجودكم هنا في هذه الأمسية الرائعة.

(French) Excellences, invités distingués, membres du conseil d'administration, très chers parents et familles de nos remarquables étudiants, nos exceptionnels diplômés de la promotion 2016, sans oublier évidemment notre unique corps professoral et administratif.

Chers tous, j'ai l'honneur de vous accueillir à cette soirée qui s'annonce spéciale.

(Spanish) Sus excelencias, estimados invitados, gran junta de beneficiarios, familiares de nuestros excepcionales alumnos, nuestros magníficos profesores y staf, y por supuesto nuestros maravillosos graduandos del AUB de la clase del 2016. Estoy honrado de poder saludarlos y es un placer tenerlos a todos aquí en esta noche tan especial.

"If you want to make enemies, try to change something" said Woodrow Wilson.

It has been a long, winding, and unforgettable road. Three, four, five years or more before today, you came here full of hopes and dreams and expectations, hopes and dreams that we hope we have nourished and enhanced, even in the midst of emotional, economic and political turbulence. You leave today equipped with knowledge, with power, and with the belief that you can effect positive change in this world. You have learned much while you were at AUB. You gained knowledge and confidence and resilience and you learned teamwork. Like our magnificent sportswomen and men who sublimate their own egos for the greater good of the team, you have had to play intellectual tennis, social football, and mental jujitsu. You have emerged stronger and wiser, and now you are ready to start to fly without a safety net. You, the best and the brightest, emerged from your parental cocoon of safety into the social maelstrom that is AUB, immersed in Lebanese and regional and international politics and economics. Now you enter the world with your judgment sharpened and your views, whatever they may be, tested, remolded and strengthened.

Look around you at your classmates. Today, you will celebrate together. Tomorrow you will step forth into the world, knowing that you are more confident, more able, more resilient, and more determined than you were when you first walked through these timeless gates to be forever transformed.

You have some slightly older, but highly accomplished members of your graduating class. Today, in addition to celebrating your accomplishments, we honor three distinguished individuals whose willingness to defy conventional wisdoms has led to their ground breaking, societally impactful work. This year’s honorands are an acclaimed Lebanese filmmaker and actor, a world-renowned author and radical thinker, and a giant of organic chemistry. They have been chosen in recognition of their achievements on the international stage and their determination not to let conventional wisdom stand in the way of their quest for transformative excellence.

One of the most admired Arab filmmakers of her generation, **Nadine Labaki** has won multiple international prizes for her movies “Caramel” and “Where Do We Go Now?” (*Halla La Wen*), which she wrote, directed and took lead acting roles in. The qualities which her cinema work is known for—honesty, authenticity, and humor—are qualities all of us can adopt on the path to a more abundant life. She tackles head-on the stereotypes and taboos of Lebanon today, especially when it comes to the lives of the remarkable women of this country. With her creativity, realism, and appreciation of human life, she has rightfully become an ambassador of Lebanese culture and art to the world. Nadine, we welcome you to the AUB family and are proud to do so.

Nassim Taleb has changed the way the world looks at uncertainty, risk, and unpredictable outlying occurrences—Black Swans, as he calls them. He explains how to survive such potentially threatening global events, and even to benefit from them. His ideas are always challenging of prevailing orthodoxy and bear close attention. When I spoke of “resilience” a few moments ago, Nassim would prefer the idea of “anti-fragility”, the subject of his most recent book, a concept in which an entity grows or even thrives from the disorder and unpredictability that we face in our lives. I hope he agrees that AUB, in its 150th year, is an outstanding example of an anti-fragile entity. And we want you to be anti-fragile people too. We are delighted that Nassim is here with us to help celebrate that gift.

Our third honorand is **Dr. Samir Zard**, a recognized world leader in the field of radical chemistry and a former AUB student who was compelled to leave Lebanon before graduation in the heat of Civil War. Beirut’s loss was Imperial College, London’s gain, and in a prolific career thereafter, he has made significant contributions, developing numerous new reactions that have become a permanent fixture in the field of synthetic chemistry. He has a passion for teaching this science which he sees touching almost everything around us, yet which remains a puzzling mystery to the majority of humanity whose lives have been transformed by its creations and innovations. To you Dr. Zard we also extend a warm welcome as you take your rightful place among our graduates.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, American Senator and Statesman once said: “Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.” The best way to know the facts is to engage in research; one of the fundamental missions and duties of the great research universities which AUB is and always aspires to be. William Osler, a founder of modern American medical education, was known to have remarked: “It astonishes me how many physicians practice medicine without reading. What does not surprise me in the least is how poorly they do so!”

Let's go back then to Woodrow Wilson, America's 28th President, with whose words I opened my speech. His critics, including contemporary statesmen like Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau, would have you believe he retreated into the kind of isolationism we see starting to plague American political thought today. One claim was Wilson left the Arabs to the designs of the imperial European powers who carved up the Middle East during the death throes of empire with such awful consequences. This was far from the truth. Through his Fourteen Point Program launched in January of 1918 advocating the rights of nations to their self-determination, Wilson carried with him what you do today, a belief in the rights and the abilities of the Arab peoples towards self-determination. Ill at Versailles, but unbowed, he worked to limit the mandates of the British and the French to a period that would end with self-governance. He, like you, believed that we are best served as a free people, of ourselves and for ourselves.

The great Daniel Bliss shared this faith in the people of the Levant when he determined early in his tenure to one-day leave the governance of the institution to this region's indigenous people. We see that as our sacred trust, that one day, it will not matter what background a man or woman has in this part of the world before they are chosen for a momentous task, a great role, an awesome responsibility. Yours will be the generation that makes certain that this will come to pass.

Khalil Gibran wrote in his book *The Prophet*, النبي: "Your children are not children; they are sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself". Take a look at your parents and recognize what they have meant to you. Think of your parents who have provided these and other opportunities for you and thank them, and let them know that as you trust them, they must now trust you! But aligning the lessons and skills that you have acquired at AUB with that trust that your parents and we now have in you, you will go forth to effect the change that our generation could not accomplish. Eschew violence and cruelty, and struggle against social and economic disparity. Understand all that you have seen that keeps our societies from being more just. Inspired by what you have done individually and collectively here, go out and change the world for the better. You are ready now. Now and forever you are AUB's past, present and future, the ambassadors of this iconic city set on a hill which, at 150 years old, taught you—as past generations were taught before us—to dare to dream that you will do what we know you are capable of, that you will change Lebanon, the Arab world, and the broader universe for the better. Congratulations to you, your families and teachers, AUB Class of 2016, our sesquicentennial year, and go forth with pride, purpose and humility and most of all go with and in peace.