

Undergraduate Commencement Ceremony

Welcoming Address

Fadlo R. Khuri - President

May 28, 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 لشرف 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.

Class of 2016, 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.

The bard of our generation and the generation before, Bob Dylan sang of the winds of change in one of his most powerful songs, "The Times They Are A' Changing", the song that each of our three children, Layla, a Class of 2016 Yale College Graduate, Raja and Rayya heard after they first came home from the hospital, of the keepers of the past. In fact your introduction to college could be aptly described by Dylan's opening stanza:

"Come gather round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth saving
Then you better start swimming or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changing"

Yes the waters have grown dark around you. They are deeper and more ominous, but you are far, far fitter swimmers than you were a few short years ago. Think of our three Honorands, three individuals who have been resolute in swimming against the current. Nadine Labaki, actress/film maker/civic activist extraordinaire and cultural icon. Samir Zard, AUB alumnus whose mastery of free radical chemistry has opened doors for entirely novel drug delivery. And Nassim Taleb, revolutionary risk assessor and economic and statistical savant. You share with these Titans, these rejectionists of the status quo, this special day, their and your graduation day.

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.

Dylan's strident song of change continues:

"Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land



And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old world is rapidly aging
Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a changing"

Take a look at your parents and recognize what they have meant to you. And think of Dylan's words in the original context of Khalil Gibran, a known inspiration of Dylan and of ours who wrote in his book the Prophet, النبي: "Your children are not children, they are sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself". Think of your parents who have provided these and other opportunities for you and thank them, and far from obeying Dylan, trust them! But aligning these lessons with that trust that your parents and we have in you, go 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.