

**Ahdaf Soueif**  
**Doctor of Humane Letters**  
**June 2, 2017**

Mr. President, Trustees and Faculty, students and friends, ladies and gentlemen: today is a day of celebration, when many hundreds of your graduates go out into the world, and I wish them well.

They are going out into a world where they will need to make a difference – and graduating from AUB they are excellently equipped to do so.

In the last 2 decades we have seen violence expanding, populations impoverished and terrorized, the earth depleted. We've seen the ethnic cleansing of Palestine intensify, the torment of Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, the epic and perilous exodus across the Mediterranean, the current triumph of the counter-revolutions in the Arab world, the rise of DAESH and its affiliates and its beloved enemies West and East.

The battle is always about resources, but a modern manifestation of it is an insistence on pinning people down to single simplified identities, and penning them into homogenised and controlled spaces.

And yet the ferocity and sheer brutishness of all this is an indication of the power of the groundswell in the world that seeks to reclaim – and indeed to save – the world.

For we have lived the Arab revolutions, and we've seen the world take them to its heart. We see the just cause and the grace and resilience of Palestine capture the imagination and the goodwill of the world. And we see large portions of civil society across the world stand up for the migrant and the poor. A world community is being formed, and this is where you will find your natural place.

This is not a battle between East and West or young and old or black and white or rich and poor or secular and pious or even Left and Right. It is a battle between those who want a decent life for everyone – and life for the planet, and those who can only comprehend narrow interests. Between those who are happy to pick and choose from among ideas, to create a mix that works,

comfortable with the knowledge that the only constant is change, happy to be always “becoming” – and those who have solidified into dogma of whatever colour.

Lebanon, this beautiful, varied, edgy and energetic country holds a great many lessons for us. Its story, as with the best narratives, is often terrifying, but ultimately uplifting.

And AUB itself is an inspiration, growing, changing, excelling, despite contradictions and fault lines, manoeuvring, battering down and blossoming out, a model of the university as part of civil society, engaged with it and working for it, drawing energy from it and serving it. This is so clear from just a tiny selection of your activities over the last few days - from the spectacular student-led “AUB Outdoors”, to hosting the Environmate Hackathon, to the conference just yesterday discussing how to ameliorate the effects of civil conflict on social structures in the context of Syria to your known engagement with issue of public health.

I offer my congratulations on your graduation, and also on belonging to an institution that treasures and respects its young people, that recognises their - your - potential and helps you fulfil it; that is now sending you out into the world with a top academic qualification, and also with a clear direction towards social engagement.

I am profoundly grateful that by granting me this honour today, you also grant me the privilege of thinking of myself as one of you. Thank you.