

**Honorary Doctorates Ceremony and Commencement Exercises Welcome Address**  
**Fadlo R. Khuri**  
**2019**

Excellences, Trustees, Faculty, Staff, Students and especially, the remarkable Class of 2019,

Welcome to your graduation! This is the moment when you join the illustrious ranks of the men and women who are proud to call themselves AUB alumni. You have earned that right through your hard work and courage in the face of challenges. Tonight you celebrate as you take your places among a fellowship of AUB graduates who have transformed the world around us.

But wait a second, I hear you thinking. What is so great about the world in 2019! What have forgoing generations here in the Middle East, or around the world for that matter, what have they done except fight futile wars, degrade Earth's ecosystem, or drive unimaginable inequality between those able to hoard wealth and power and those who have nothing? It would be a glib argument to say, imagine how much worse this world would be without the mitigating effect of AUB graduates, without the leaders that have emerged from this university, who share the enduring values that you have learned, of social responsibility, fairness, integrity, and respect for peaceful dialogue.

It is true that, many indicators tell us that our world is becoming less healthy, less happy, less secure, and less viable. The question I put to you on this your evening, AUB Class of 2019, is what are you going to do to make a difference, and make the world a better place.

Nearly 50 years ago William Stanley Merwin wrote his poem *Good People* in response to the slaughters of the Vietnam War. It is a short but very sharp poem and I would like to read it to you now.

From the kindness of my parents  
I suppose it was that I held  
that belief about suffering

imagining that if only  
it could come to the attention  
of any person with normal  
feelings certainly anyone  
literate who might have gone

to college they would comprehend  
pain when it went on before them  
and would do something about it  
whenever they saw it happen

in the time of pain the present  
they would try to stop the bleeding  
for example with their own hands

but it escapes their attention  
or there may be reasons for it  
the victims under the blankets  
the meat counters the maimed children  
the animals the animals  
staring from the end of the world

“In the time of pain, the present.” Just as Merwin was describing the world in 1972, we are now living in a time of pain, the present. And heeding the warnings of climate scientists, of specialists in water and food security, of historians of tyrannical and demagogical regimes, the pain of our present time may be as nothing compared to the unknown pains that lurk in our future; that is if we do not take action now to change the course of our future stewardship of this planet and the life it harbors.

We cannot accept this state of affairs. We must believe there is something more that we can do than stand on the sidelines, watching “the victims under the blankets, the meat counters, the maimed children, the animals, the animals, staring from the end of the world.”

In your years at AUB you will have learnt that there is purpose in life—that pivotal word in the AUB motto which you see every time you walk through Main Gate. “That they may have *life*, and have it more abundantly.” Another American literary great, Ralph Waldo Emerson got it mostly right when he wrote: “The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.”

Our four honorands this year embody that refusal to accept things as they are, to allow unjust things to pass. In the immortal words of Robert Kennedy: “Some men see things as they are and ask why, I see things that never were and ask why not.”

After graduating from AUB and spending his career at MD Anderson, Hagop Kantarjian has methodically waged war on leukemia and on the concept that health care is a privilege of the few, not the right of all. Reeta Roy has created a master plan to put a continent to work through the MasterCard Foundation, recruiting universities, entrepreneurs, the public and private sector of nations, to create a future for Africa with learning, jobs, and hope. Hanan al-Shaikh has shattered the myth of the subservient Arab woman in literature, emboldening generations to re-examine the full context of womanhood, and the full possibilities of their futures. As for Fawwaz Ulaby, all this humble Damascene has done since leaving AUB is to revolutionize terahertz technology in the development of new types of industrial sensor applications, helping trigger the Fourth Industrial Revolution. These four have

refused to stand passively, in the words of the great John Lennon “watching the wheels go round”.

Now it is your turn, graduates, to go out into the world full of confidence, privilege, and awake to opportunity. And you will learn, ever so surely, the painful price of privilege as today’s reality dawns on you.

Of you, Class of 2019, I have no doubts. You are intent on pursuing that ideal to live well, to live more abundant lives. You have already lit up villages in Akkar and the Beqaa valley; you have given your time to build bridges between Lebanon’s refugee and host communities; you have provided for the education and healthcare of the most underprivileged Lebanese, people with disabilities, and migrant workers. You, our students are young leaders in health, in business, in science, in the arts, in agriculture, in engineering a better future. Uganda, Algeria, Ghana, Lebanon, Syria, the United States, France, and other countries across the globe, wait for such leaders. What advice can we give you on your last day as students on this, your beloved campus?

First, I agree with Emerson in principle. Find something meaningful to you to spend your time on. You are the best and the brightest, the hope of the times to come. But you will only fulfill that hope and your dreams and aspirations if you choose to do something that makes you feel fulfilled: a role, a job, a career that can make a difference for you and others. Pursue your passion. Do it well, do it fully, and do it with others whenever you can. Our trustee Marwan Muasher was trained in mechanical engineering, at AUB and at Purdue. Yet he chose to follow his passion, and commitment to political and economic inclusiveness and reform in these, our Arab lands. While the world certainly could use another brilliant mechanical engineer, it cannot do without a brave and tireless intellectual leader, who sees things, in the words of Robert Kennedy, “that never were and asks why not.”

Second, I wish to disagree ever so subtly with Emerson, much as I admire his idea of a life well lived. Happiness is important. Focus on it. Spend time on it. Live balanced, happy lives, but also lives of purpose where you enjoy what you are doing. Many years ago my colleagues at Emory, complaining about the number of 6 AM meetings I brought them in for, argued that I was skewing their Work-Life Balance. “That’s funny,” I retorted. “Life is what you get back when I find someone younger and cheaper to do your work!” Instead, perhaps the words of William Shakespeare can modify those of Emerson (and my own obsessive nature). “Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none.”

Finally, many of us cross long, arduous roads, lonely, alone. From the experience of a lifetime with my compañera, Lamya Tannous, the company of friends and loved ones is a far better alternative.

And so my brave, distinguished, and accomplished AUB Class of 2019, go forth in peace, to make the world a better place than that which you found before you. Turn now and salute your parents and families, your friends and your compañeros and compañeras. As Hippocrates, father of occidental medicine once wrote, “Life is short, art long, opportunity fleeting, experience treacherous, judgment difficult.” But that road is much more enjoyable in the company of friends and loved ones.

Congratulations, Class of 2019!