

## **Graduate Commencement Exercises Student Speech**

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I grew up in the streets of Nairobi as a street boy in extreme poverty. I was around two or three years. I barely had food to eat and had to rely on begging from strangers; I had no home or house to go to in the evenings. I slept on pavements or out open in the cold, sometimes even in the extreme weather conditions. I did not have an experience of love, as I had no parents or any relatives, but I equally realized that my life was dependent on the generosity of total strangers. Many are the days that I met kind strangers that made me smile and inked the signature of their generosity on me and equally many are the days that I slept hungry, on the cold pavements since I met strangers who did not have hearts to give.

I remember a day when it was raining heavily. I had no warm clothes and was shivering in the cold, hungry, and with nowhere to go. A couple approached me and asked me why I was not going home; I told them I had no home. They asked me about my parents; I said I had none. They held my hand, took me to a shop, bought me a blanket, some clothes, and food. This incident is a memory that is forever in my heart. It reminds me of my responsibility to humanity and the great hope, love, and life we create when we selflessly give back to those that are less privileged than us.

Life is full of untold stories of heroes and heroines, people who are our shining stars in the darkest hours. My hero happens to be a Catholic missionary Priest that took me from street life and gave me a home and a family. He educated me, instilling in me values that I was never taught in school. He made me understand that the rock bottom life that I came from was a good foundation on which to build and transform not just myself but my community as well. I stand here as a testimony of the selfless sacrifice of that humble priest.

Looking at this graduating class of 2019; I cannot but help drift back to my days and times here at AUB and in Lebanon. I am sure we all had exciting times that are now part of our memories. We had challenging times that shaped us to withstand the storms of life in the future. We made friends that we shall eternally cherish. We learned to achieve excellence in the various fields of our endeavor, such that nobody could do it any better; to do the ordinary extraordinarily. In AUB, we have acquired the internal commitment to give back to our communities and humanity. This is manifested in AUB's many initiatives to support the less privileged in Lebanon and the world over. I have hope for the future, every time I turn around and look at this graduating class. With us, is the philosophy we have learned throughout our time in AUB. We carry with us now significant cosmic values of respecting others opinion, transparency, integrity, accepting people of different races, religious background, and we carry revolutionary ideas to transform our world for a better tomorrow. We are challenged more than ever, to carry these ideas for the rest of our lives.

We are all graduating, gleaming happily and excitedly looking into the future with big dreams and lots of energy eagerly waiting to curve our paths. I don't know what destiny holds for each one of us here; but I know the happiest and most accomplished among us will be those that will search and find ways of serving others without counting the cost, giving back to the less privileged without expecting recognition and creating hopes in others without tiring. So, as we begin to look towards the future, let us ask ourselves what our contribution to the lives of others and to humanity will be. We will make a living by receiving from others, but we will make a life by giving others.

Let us today make a conscious decision to let our acquired education, skills, and experiences be a beacon of hope to humanity and those in need. For in serving others, we will be helping ourselves and leaving behind a legacy long after we are gone from this world. Let us not procrastinate the virtue of giving back to humanity for many around the world are desperately waiting for our services. If, I have learned anything as a MasterCard Scholar and AUB student in the last two years, is that I have discovered and appreciated the fact that the simple gift of giving back becomes an elaborate rich aftertaste of a natural blissful feeling, lingering endlessly in my lifetime and the lives of others. Finally, may you all live in exciting times, find what you are looking for and discover true happiness and joy in giving back and in serving others.  
Ramadan Kareem