

Khawla Nasser Al Deen
FHS Student's Commencement Address
June 5, 2021

Good evening Dr. Khoury, Dean Sibai, Dr. DeJong, my HPCH and FHS family, my fellow classmates, and graduating students.

It is a great pleasure to be with you today, here on the green oval. I was sitting here on my first day at AUB; I remember thinking that the green oval will become my go-to place to read and relax between classes; but, we all know that this wasn't the case! We certainly did not have enough time together in person, but I am grateful that we shared the journey of academic and personal growth and how we supported each other in times of uncertainty.

Being able to gather here today says so much about the admirable efforts of COVID-19 response champions in Lebanon who worked tirelessly so that we can all regain some sort of normalcy today. As we celebrate volunteerism, I want to extend my gratitude to all the public health champions whose stories we know, and those whose stories we don't yet know, who are making a difference in people's lives in their diverse ways.

Our community has been facing unprecedented hardships, and volunteers have been at the forefront of responding to community needs. While I was mapping volunteer initiatives in Lebanon in response to Beirut Blast with UN Volunteers, my team came across more than 200 diverse individual and group initiatives that together created a wave of social solidarity. Health experts, practitioners, and health students volunteered to provide free checkups, treatment, and rehabilitation. Engineers and engineering students were conducting damage assessments and mapping areas. Urban activists advocated for protecting heritage buildings and establishments. Environmentalists were recycling glass and handling electronic waste... Beyond the classrooms, I learned Public Health from the streets of Beirut. By marching against the patriarchy in support of women's rights, sitting in health circles with environmental activists, standing in solidarity with cancer patients demanding dignified and affordable treatment... To me, this is Public Health.

I am very honored to receive this award and promise to carry it as a recommitment to serve the community. I am grateful to be molded by FHS's mission to promote health justice, and I would like to thank my professors and mentors at FHS- the changemakers, public health, and community development leaders who inspire me daily.

And to the new FHS alumni, congratulations to all of you on your graduation! As we navigate our journey beyond AUB, I hope to continue to reflect on our role in the community and learn from civic engagement. As you go into a new rhythm, I invite you to recenter, check-in, and make a habit of asking yourself, "How do I share my knowledge with the community? What can I change?"

I would like to dedicate this award to my parents, sisters, and partner Fabien who are my role models in compassion and shared their unconditional support and encouragement with me throughout this program.

Shokran!