

Munib Masri response to citation

Thank you for your warm reception, President Dorman, and AUB colleagues, fellow honorands, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure, pride and appreciation that I accept this honor from the American University of Beirut and the unique opportunity to address you this evening.

I feel humbled to be amongst the list of distinguished persons that have been honored by AUB over the course of its long history in the service of higher education in the Middle East.

AUB's role has not been limited to a generic type of higher education. Instead, it has been a leader in this field with its ideas and ideals which have been imprinted on the thousands of bright minds that have walked through its corridors for a century and a half. AUB's role as a pioneer in the region is perhaps best exemplified through the many institutions that have followed in its footsteps and attempted to emulate its model, methodology and success. It is this pioneering spirit at AUB that encouraged my wife, Angela, and me to partner with the university in launching an institute for energy and natural resources, since we believe AUB is the best placed university in the region to advance this dynamic and impactful discipline.

I wanted to take the opportunity to talk to you this evening about Palestine, my home, which is going through possibly the darkest period in its history. As you know, it is a land that has been under an oppressive military occupation for half a century. It is unbelievable that in the year 2012 one still finds people under occupation. If you had asked me 30 years ago if this was possible, I would have said absolutely not – that the world would not allow such a thing to happen, that the Arabs would not accept for their brethren to live decades under occupation, that a Palestinian people unified both internally and with the diaspora would find a way to break the occupation, and that Israel as an occupier would have the morality, humanity and

common sense to encourage and participate in the creation of a Palestinian state.

And yet, here we are today faced with impotence from the supporters of peace, and entrenched, apartheid-like behavior from its enemies.

An extraordinary and visionary man whose life I followed closely for several decades and who I later met and was fortunate enough to befriend said the following in his speech upon receiving an honorary doctoral degree: “We have dedicated our lives to the struggle for justice, freedom and equality so that our children and youth may enjoy a life of equal opportunity. Education is an important beginning for all people in their quest for self-fulfillment and the realisation of their productive and creative potential.” That man was Nelson Mandela, and his experience and that of his country provide invaluable guidance to us on our similar journey.

Our collective responsibility, whether as educators, philanthropists, business people, political leaders or others, is not to allow injustice to continue in damaging further generations in Palestine, the refugee camps in surrounding countries and further afield. We owe more to these generations than to leave them with this ugly legacy. They need our support and hard work. Our support must come from active philanthropy and civic engagement – Palestine is in need of hospitals, universities, schools, orphanages and a multitude of other healing, educational and support organizations to mitigate the debilitating effects of the occupation. The role of Palestinians in the diaspora with the support of their Arab brethren in this regard is critical. I spend much of my time these days working on initiatives relating to education and healthcare in Palestine and more broadly in the region, both on a personal level and in trying to galvanize external support.

Another area drastically in need of the support and engagement of Palestinians, Arabs and others which I believe has reached an existential point is the safeguarding of the Holy city of Jerusalem as a city of peace serving all 3 religions. Israel is acting with full impunity in trying to purge Jerusalem’s character, residents and future as a city of tolerance and unifying faith. Of the many crimes Israel has committed and

continues to do so through its occupation of Palestinian lands, this is one of the worst and perhaps least reversible.

Finally, our responsibility at a very basic level is to continue working hard and not grow depressed, disenchanted or desensitized. We owe it to younger generations to educate them, give them hope for better things to come and to work tirelessly every day to contribute in whatever way we can to achieve peace and a brighter future. Speaking of these generations, I am fortunate to be joined today by members of my family – I think we are up to 30 or so and hopefully still counting! They have travelled here from nearby Nablus and Amman, and farther away London and Manchester. Of these, the one who should have had the shortest trip ended up having the longest. Last year, he lived across the street and was an AUB student, and he has now come from Atlanta to join us. It was a little over a year ago that an Israeli bullet almost took my grandson Munib's life and it gives me immense joy to see him amongst you today. Through his actions and beliefs, Munib embodies that sense of responsibility and passion for Palestine that I see in the younger generation, and that is why they need our hard work, engagement and support.

It is him and his generation that I hold in my heart when receiving this rare honor, and my heartfelt appreciation again to the AUB family for this special day.