

Donna Shalala response to citation

This is for my family many of whom who are here today and for my late grandparents Joseph and Mary Haddad (Smith) and Charles and Adele Shalala.

More than 100 years ago, they left Lebanon for the United States so that their children and grandchildren could have better opportunities.

They would be bursting with pride.

From a very early age, I was blessed with a love, respect and yearning for learning. I received these gifts from my remarkable father who had to drop out of high school during the Depression to help his sisters and brothers. I received these gifts from a very well educated, and very successful Lebanese-American woman. She was the first Lebanese-American woman from my community to go to college and to law school. In fact, in 1948, she was one of very few women in America attending law school. And as she went to classes, she also raised her family.

That woman is my mother, Edna. Her parents were born in Saghbine. By sharing her life experiences, my parents taught me something else about learning. Something that AUB can teach the world. That learning is crucial to the advancement of women and the economies of the Middle East. And the world.

My father was an unusual Arab man for his time, because he believed deeply in the education of women. He urged his friends to send their daughters – as well as their sons – to college. AUB's commitment to educating women dates back more than 100 years. Today, there are almost as many women studying in this elite institution as men. Women make every university stronger. And women graduates of AUB enrich this nation and world.

Why? Because the progress of humankind depends on the progress of women. And the progress of women depends on their progress in learning. We know that women

make 10 to 20 percent more income for every year of education they receive – around the world. In the poorest countries of the world, every year of basic education for women translates into a five to 10 percent decline in the mortality of their infant children.

There is no question that better educated women help make healthier and better societies the world over. And, yet, the global gender gap in education persists. Nearly two-thirds of the illiterate people in the world are women. Of the 130 million children who lack access to primary school around the world, two-thirds are girls.

This is not an American woman pointing her finger at the world. In my own country, women are still not equal in the halls of learning. We don't have enough women in medical schools or engineering programs. Or enough women from minority populations in college at all. Or enough women on faculties of our universities. Educational disparity should concern both women and men. Because in this era of rebirth and rebuilding, no nation can afford to squander the potential of any person.

Thank you again for this great honor.