

Commencement Exercises 2015 May 29, 2015

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It's time to go, time to take all the memories we shared on this campus and leave. Although our words today must be cheerful echoing the happiness that we should be feeling, our happiness is tempered by the difficult realities of the world we're about to go out to, this world that still has much more to teach us. As each of us embarks on his/her unknown journey, it is worth taking a pause and reflecting on what AUB has taught us, in our classes, but also –and perhaps most importantly- in a campus that has maintained a unique environment of open critical thinking and commitment to religious and national diversity at a time when these values are disappearing rapidly in our region.

I majored in urban design and planning, a field that requires us to engage with cities, and to appreciate their incredible complexity, but also their fragility, and resilience. We learn from them as much as we learn about them. While trying to understand the forces that shape our cities, we were faced with sad, seemingly global patterns of growing inequalities, environmental degradation and, worse of all, indifference. In Lebanon, cities are struggling with the scars of wars from which we have yet to recover. They are facing the numerous challenges of providing shelter, water, and education for countless impoverished populations, many of whom forcefully displaced by poverty and violence from the four corners of the country, the region, and beyond. They struggle each and every moment for a glimpse of hope.

So far, our policies have proven to be fostering segregation. Beirut is becoming day by day a more exclusionary city. We are in a dire need to re-humanize our cities and invest in their public realm by reclaiming the shared meanings that have been missing from our urban spaces. We need to recognize and respect our differences, but also value our diversity and provide it with shared spaces that embody and nourish it. The world renowned American planner Jane Jacobs argued, and I quote *"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."* The world that awaits us is in crisis and we will have to live up to its challenges, and find the determination to play a positive role in it.

As a planner, I have also learned that change is possible, though often, only through small interventions that act like positive chain reactions, through *"a thousand tiny empowerments"*. My experiences at AUB have transformed my educational journey into an ethical engagement.

Two years ago, I came here with this belief that change is possible. The doors of AUB have opened to give me the know-how, but also a way of seeing and interacting with the world allowing me to fulfill this call. Today, the same doors open again, and I leave loaded with lessons that I look forward to turn into practice. We are all extremely lucky to have got the opportunity to be part of AUB and develop our knowledge through all the resources we were offered. This empowers us, but also places a new responsibility on our shoulders to question all the hegemonies that tend to reproduce the inequalities that plague our cities. No matter which faculty we're graduating from, we have a collective responsibility to deploy our knowledge for a better future. Let the degree we earn today be a tool not only to get a good job, but to also make the world around us a better place.

As a graduate, my journey at AUB was short yet full of thriving endeavors. For these I would like to thank:
Our parents, for supporting our untamed ambitions;

Our professors, for teaching us to see the world with critical eyes, we will never cease to remember your guidance;

AUB Staff, secretaries, administrators, janitors, gardeners, and all the others who provide the basis for the institution to be what it is;

My colleagues, we learned from each other as much as we have learned together throughout the courses.

You have all led us to this moment through your support and guidance. Here we pledge not to be just another generation graduating. Instead, let us live up to the expectations of AUB's founders and the legacy of the generations who preceded us and planted the seeds for progress in Lebanon. Let us be proud and creative, but also giving and compassionate.

Class of 2015, I hope you always keep your empathy and moral sensibility dealing with the challenges of life. Let each and every graduate among you be one of those *thousand tiny empowerments*. I wish you all lives full of meaning. Congratulations!