

Beacons of Hope
2022 Commencement Address
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Thank you President Khuri.

Congratulations to my fellow honorary degree recipients. And Alef Mabrook to the graduates! You did it!

Your path has not been easy.

In addition to the usual demands of school, you have survived a global pandemic, economic collapse, political turmoil, and crisis after crisis -

You have been tested and you have persevered.

Fueled by the power of this place, you are the next to emerge from this center of knowledge.

I am sure a lot of you are thinking how amazing it is to be graduating from AUB. It is amazing! Just the name alone - AUB - will open doors.

But I'll tell you something.

It is AUB that is proud of you and proud of what you will do.

And as much as you are wrapped in the history, traditions, and legends of this place, this place is only as great as you are and as great as you will be.

And as this university rises, always on the shoulders of its graduates... this world...our world...depends on the work that you will do.

Do not let this moment - today - be your ceiling. Today is NOT your finish line; it is your beginning.

You are powerfully poised to be the most influential generation of our time.

Despite the challenges of the last few years,
Your generation has been the leading voice for change.

In each of you, there is a clarity of vision of how the world should be, not the imperfect place that it is.

Like never before, you have demanded
justice, democracy, equality, and opportunity.

You know, sometimes hope is the hardest thing to find. But being here with you today...all I see is hope.
Everywhere.

In every single one of you.
YOU are the hope that we send out into the world.

And maybe that is what AUB does best - educating ambassadors of HOPE.
I think there must be an incubator of HOPE on campus - some secret HOPE lab in President Khuri's office?

For generations, AUB alumni have been spreading HOPE across the world.

I want to quickly share one AUB alumni story from my family.
It's a story that informs my social justice roots, a story that resonates with our current political reality, and a hopeful story that brings us all together.

It was a different generation.
99 years ago - in 1923, my great uncle Nuri left Baghdad and came to this beautiful campus.
Where are all the Iraqis out there?
He walked where you walked and studied where you studied. He made
lifelong - and life saving - friends here.

And a spark was lit. A vision that made him see how the world could be and should be. His time here cemented a lifetime of idealism and activism - a lifetime fighting for justice.

After graduating from AUB, he went to Boston to study at MIT and then found his way back to Iraq where he founded an organization called the Iraqi Association Against

Imperialism and Fascism - I mean I would join that group today - and with fellow AUB alum, he helped create a new and independent country.

And then in 1937, in what was another most dangerous and momentous of times, Nuri was one of two Iraqis - and a handful of Arabs - who traveled to Spain to fight Franco and the Fascists during the Spanish Civil War. As an International Brigade volunteer, he joined thousands of other freedom fighters from across the world.

They believed in a borderless progressive cause - it wasn't loyalty to a certain race or a religion or even a country - it was bigger than that - it was loyalty to justice, equality and freedom for all.

After being held in a French concentration camp, Nuri was rescued by a fellow AUB classmate working at the Iraqi consulate in Paris. Big lesson here - stay connected with your classmates - they may save your life one day!

Like so many AUB alumni, Nuri used the knowledge, skills, and friendships that he made here - to make the world better. He bravely stood up and risked his life fighting for justice - not because it was easy, but because it was the right thing to do.

He was driven by an unwavering HOPE in a tomorrow that was better than today.

Not only is Nuri's story a quintessential AUB story; but it is also part of the fabric of my family history - it has shaped my parents who are here with me today - and it has shaped me and the path that has placed me in front of you at this moment.

My story is about another fight for justice that happened not too long ago in Flint, Michigan. In some ways, Flint is like so many places in the Middle East - once with limitless promise, now devastated by greed and corruption; devastated by colonial policies and practices. The State took away local democracy and governed the city with unelected and unaccountable figureheads. In other words, it was like an occupation.

Flint's drinking water was poisoned and when I tried to protect my kids, I ran up against a willful blindness, an indifference, to certain people, problems, and places. So many people had their eyes closed, but I could only see.

As a first generation Arab American,
I was taught that we take care of each other and our communities, no matter where that community may be,
that we fight for justice when we ever so acutely see injustice,
and that we try to make the world a better place. My
fight in Flint was driven by these values.

It was hard, but I fought back with science, solidarity, and maybe a little bit of Arab stubbornness and loudness. I helped uncover one of the most egregious environmental and public health injustices of our time - and since then, I have been sharing our playbook of resistance and writing prescriptions for hope.

My story - and Nuri's story - they are your stories. It's about who we are and who we want to be.

I urge you to use the tools you learned here, and the tools you will continue to acquire to each be a piece of the answer,

I urge you to keep your eyes open - to stay vigilant, curious, and compassionate. To keep doing the hard things for the right reasons.
And most importantly, to be bright beacons of HOPE throughout the world.

I urge you because I believe in you. I believe in each of *you*.
You have already proven your determination and your unyielding vision for a better tomorrow.

Remember, today is only the beginning.

Tomorrow you will all open fresh books with blank pages. YOU get to

decide how to fill them.

I can't wait for tomorrow!
Shukren and Mabrook!