



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

2023 Student Commencement Address

Hasan Slika

Beirut, Friday, June 9, 2023

Esteemed members of the Board of Trustees, President Fadlo Khuri, Deans, Faculty, parents, guests, and my dearest colleagues the graduating class of 2023, thank you for giving me the honor to stand in front of you today.

Four years ago, I graduated from this same institution with a BS in Biology. I was sitting on one of these chairs, and I walked on this same stage. Yes, I was happy to have finished a chapter of my journey, and I was excited to start a new one. But do you know what I was most happy about? It was that I was not leaving this place. It was that I had four more years to spend on this campus. I had four more years' worth of memories, friendships, meaningful experiences, laughter, and tears... Simply, I was not ready to leave back then! And here I am, four years later, still not ready to leave. This is not because AUB didn't prepare for the outside world. In fact, it is exactly the opposite of that. I don't want to leave because I am not sure that I can ever find a home like this one and build life-long friendships like the ones I've established here. I am not sure I can find a community like the one we have at AUB. A community where you can engage with people in the most mind-stimulating discussions, but also laugh together at the silliest jokes. A place where you can meet people with all different kinds of views and opinions, but also still be able to express yours freely. A place where you can grow, evolve, flourish, and become a better version of yourself every day.

Sadly, this time I have to leave and so do many of you. However, one thing that makes this departure easier on me is that I believe that we will always come back. I always hope that 10, 20, or 50 years down the line, I will be walking around College Hall on a random Friday afternoon, and I will bump into one of you. We will talk about family, kids, our jobs, and our busy lives... But we will also remember that overnight we spent studying in Jafet, we will remember that time we were lost looking for a class in Nicely, we will remember that time we almost fainted from laughing in front of West Hall, we will remember that cup of coffee we had on Bliss street... and most importantly, we will remember that we are part of the AUB legacy. A legacy that 153 generations of alumni have

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created before us, and which we will proudly carry wherever we go after this day.

And this may seem strange, but one of the things that made me realize why AUB is special is a drawing by a little girl at the St. Jude Children's Cancer Center at AUBMC. The drawing is that of a little elephant that is walking towards a flower, and the elephant itself suddenly becomes full of flowers. Then there is a sentence that says (إليه تسير ما أنت) "you are what you are walking towards). This made me think that this is exactly the importance of AUB: It teaches you how to walk towards what you want. This institution doesn't give you a certain amount of knowledge or a certain set of skills and tells you "Okay, you're good to go." In fact, it teaches you where to look for this knowledge, how to pursue excellence, how to seek experiences that will advance your skills, how to utilize what you learned to empower your community, how to dream big... and then how to dream even bigger and bigger.

And to whom do we owe all this? We owe it to the endless dedication of our teachers and mentors who have paved the way for us to reach this stage and who spared no effort to make sure we receive the best educational experience. So, thank you to the professors and faculty members who have accompanied us during this journey, those of them who left, and those who are still here holding the fort. I also want to thank two specific mentors and role models that I had the chance to interact with closely, President Fadlo Khuri and Dean Raymond Sawaya. Although they did not teach me any courses in the traditional sense, however, through their actions, they taught me critical values that lie at the core of medicine. They showed me how one can be among the most successful and reputable physicians while still being the most humble, humane, and caring.

Last but definitely not least, I want to thank my parents and siblings, for being my earliest teachers in life, for nurturing my ambition, and for always supporting my aspirations.

And please let me congratulate one specific medical graduate of the class of 2023, who is not physically present with us today, but whose kind and cheerful spirit always accompanies us, Wissam Ahmadieh, who left us too early. Wissam will not be receiving one MD degree today, he will be receiving 117 of them.

Before we go, class of 2023, I know that the past 4 years were everything but ordinary ... But I also know that you are everything but ordinary. When I look at you, I see healers that were organizing free clinics on Saturdays at AUBMC to offer underprivileged patients with the healthcare they deserve, I see researchers who were designing top-tier projects despite being on a tight budget, I see entrepreneurs and innovators who were leading startups and

promising initiatives despite the instability... I see a thousand glimpses of hope for the future of this country and its people.

Thank you!