

For Immediate Release



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**AUB celebrates its 153rd anniversary with Founders Day
and commits to help students complete their education despite the current situation**

**Khuri: “It is not for AUB to play a political role
and we will continue to act as a beacon of hope and as a bastion of liberal values”**

The American University of Beirut (AUB) celebrated the 153rd anniversary of its founding with the annual Founders Day ceremony held at Assembly Hall in the presence of members of the Board of Trustees, AUB provost, deans, as well as members of the university administration, faculty, students, and its community. The celebration is an old tradition of paying tribute to AUB’s founders, and a reiteration of AUB’s commitment to the values instilled by them since December 3, 1866. Traditionally, a procession of academic faculty and an annual student essay contest are part of the event, however, due to the unusual current circumstances, the ceremony consisted of a speech by Dr. Fadlo Khuri, AUB President.

Khuri began by describing the circumstances under which the 153 years since AUB was founded have delivered a series of significant challenges to date, including the current political and economic crisis as the most recent. “To describe Lebanon as a place of chronic instability is an understatement,” he said. “For centuries this narrow mountainous region has offered a home and refuge for heterodox religious communities whose divisions cut across the population not just on sectarian, but also social, cultural, and intellectual lines; on the one hand exceptionally cosmopolitan and liberal among its Arab neighbors, with close connections to Europe and America, and on the other a bastion of resistance and nationalism...”

He added, “It is not for AUB to play a political role in this uprising but simply to continue to do what it has done over a century and a half: to act as a beacon of hope and as a bastion of liberal values.” And as Khuri had previously mentioned in the media, he emphasized that “AUB’s role as a university is to be an essential incubator for a better kind of leader in the Arab world, and we shall keep striving to perform that role as we have always done, without fear or favor.”

The president then reminded the audience of his pledge on AUB's Opening Day earlier this year, that as Lebanon and the region move into a period of increased instability AUB is committed, as it has always been, to helping all of its students complete a world-class, fully supported education to the best of its abilities. Khuri highlighted that this commitment has not changed, even if the circumstances under which it shall be delivered have.

Khuri spoke about the economic situation in Lebanon and how it may possibly affect its population in drastic ways that can affect their basic requirements for life. "We are taking steps to protect and secure our community from the impact of further possible deterioration of the economy, including a devaluation of the lira." He mentioned an emergency fund that will be created with the support of the university's Board of Trustees to help alleviate the impact of the crisis on AUB's community, starting with its most vulnerable members. "Most of all, helping the most vulnerable means our students," he said. "Our commitment is that we shall do everything in our power to ensure that all our enrolled students are able to complete their education without dropping out for financial, psychological, or other reasons related to the current situation."

He added that there is a plan to introduce a smart tuition system to enable undergraduate students currently receiving financial aid from AUB, who are living in Lebanon, and whose parents earn their salaries in Lebanese lira, to continue to pay tuition in lira at or near the base exchange rate of 1,515 Lebanese lira to the dollar in the event of a devaluation, in order to alleviate its impact. Any other family which falls into financial difficulty can apply for support through the financial aid program.

Khuri also addressed other issues and challenges the university is, and might be facing such as banks imposing capital controls and not honoring promises to allow transfer of funds to pay salaries or tuition, explaining how they are currently dealt with, and what the plan is in case of further complications.

"Lebanon is more prone to sudden tectonic changes, as we are seeing today, but our role at AUB is to keep delivering continuity, excellence, and the vision of a better tomorrow that all Lebanese, and all Arabs, can and should embrace to pass through our current troubles and build a more abundant future," Khuri said.

"In one respect, Lebanon and AUB have much in common," he continued, "we are both diverse and vibrant communities that can transcend cultural and political divisions, communities where nationality and education can act as stepping stones to a global cultural community." He added, "We shall be judged by the world on how we weather this Lebanese crisis, and whether we emerge as a stronger, better institution, or as a battered and bruised one. If past experience is anything to go by, we could end up bruised, but stronger, battered, but better."

The president concluded, “I would like to remind us not to turn inwards on our Lebanese problems and to be preoccupied by Lebanese solutions to the exclusion of other challenges.” He also reminded the audience that this country is still home to the greatest number of refugees per capita of population in the world, highlighting that AUB continues to lend its service to them in education, healthcare, and helping empower their communities. He then mentioned that one-in-four students at AUB are international, including a significant number of Arab and African students on scholarship programs.

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Text by Sally Abou Melhem
Writer
Office of Communications
American University of Beirut

For more information please contact:

Simon Kachar
Director of News and Media Relations
Mobile: (+961) 3-427-024
Office: (+961) 1-374-374 ext: 2676
Email: sk158@aub.edu.lb

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor’s, master’s, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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