



**AMERICAN
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AUB unveils the “Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory”

The American University of Beirut (AUB) launched the Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory (GGCO) in an event that took place on December 5, 2023 at the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at AUB. This pivotal gathering marked the launch of an initiative dedicated to fostering responsible governance and active citizenship in Lebanon and the region.

The launch event served as a platform for introducing the observatory, sparking engaging discussions, cultivating collaborations, and establishing the groundwork for forthcoming impactful observatory initiatives. Attended by Dr. Fadlo Khuri, AUB president; Dr. Zaher Dawy, AUB provost; university faculty; and staff; in addition to thought leaders, academics, and practitioners; the event aimed to catalyze collective action toward promoting good governance and responsible citizenship within the region.

The Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory at the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at AUB is a new initiative dedicated to exploring citizenship in the MENA region and its connection to good governance. Anchored on pillars of good governance, migration, and constitutions, GGCO aims to provide comprehensive insights on citizenship, educating policymakers, empowering citizens, and fostering dialogue. It aspires to be a globally recognized platform advocating for positive social transformation, inclusivity, equity, and sustainability. GGCO aims to promote good governance and citizenship, with a framework that emphasizes citizenship's role in responsible governance, addresses citizenship-migration dynamics for inclusivity, and advocates for

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constitutions upholding citizenship rights as well as influencing equality-driven policy reforms. The ultimate goal is to create a society where citizens are informed, engaged, and active contributors to democratic values, human rights, and societal well-being.

Dr. Fadlo Khuri delivered the opening remarks, emphasizing, "The Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory is one of our latest endeavors in our journey towards bridging the gap between academic inquiry and tangible societal change, reflecting our unwavering commitment to exploring the intricate tapestry of citizenship and its crucial role in cultivating good governance."

Khuri added, "Our region stands at a pivotal juncture. The challenges we face are formidable, but they are dwarfed by the opportunities that beckon us. The Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory is more than an academic initiative; it represents a movement towards a profound social transformation."

He concluded, "Let us embark on this journey with the conviction that through education, dialogue, and active participation, we can redefine the narrative of citizenship and governance in the MENA region. Let us collectively strive to create a future where every individual is not only informed and engaged but is an active contributor to upholding democratic values, human rights, and societal well-being."

The launch featured a keynote dialogue between Saba Al Mubaslat, Ford Foundation regional director in the MENA region, and Lina Abou-Habib, director of the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship; delving into women's experiences of their identity as citizens; the impact of mobility, uprooting, and re-rooting on their lives; and the gendered aspects of citizenship.

Dr. Saouma BouJaoude, professor, senior advisor to AUB president, and GGCO steering committee member, delivered an insightful introduction, shedding light on critical concerns within Lebanon's citizenship education landscape. He outlined the pressing issues, including sectarianism and identity politics, the absence of a unified national curriculum, the marginalization of citizenship education in official exams, and dominance of the role of learning and memorization with minimal opportunities to discuss controversial issues. BouJaoude also highlighted the adverse effects of political interference, insufficient teacher training, limited civic engagement, and conflicting national narratives.

In his introductory address, Dr. Simon Kachar, lecturer in political sciences and founding director of the Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory (GGCO), spoke about the observatory's alignment with AUB's mission and its endeavor to affect profound societal transformations. He highlighted that two of the most important pillars the GGCO is committed to work based on are “education, as education plays a crucial role in shaping responsible and engaged citizens; and constitution, as constitution establishes the rights, duties, and privileges of citizens, outlining the criteria for acquiring and maintaining citizenship.”

He added that GGCO will strive “with the objectives of empowering citizens to be informed and active participants in their communities and governance processes;” expressing the initiative's aspiration for “the change that should occur in the mentalities of young elites leading to an intellectual and moral revolution that breaks out in Lebanon so Lebanon will be able to play its role internally as a cohesive factor, and abroad as a global cultural hub.”

The subsequent discussion centered on the book authored by Dr. Simon Kachar, “Political Change in a Pluralistic Society: The Experience of Fouad Chehab,” exploring political change in Lebanon's pluralistic society and whether political, cultural, social, religious, and sectarian pluralism is an obstacle to political change, taking the era of President Fouad Chehab, or what was known as “Chehabism”, as a starting point. The book discussion was facilitated by Dr. Tania Haddad, associate professor of public administration, and GGCO steering committee member; engaging Dr. Simon Kachar; Dr. Nassif Hitti, former minister of foreign affairs and emigrants in Lebanon, and Judge Rana Akoum, head of the enforcement court at Jdeidet el Metn.

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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 800 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 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 365-bed hospital.

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