

For Immediate Release



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AUB Holds the WHO World No Tobacco Day 2020 Award Ceremony

On Tuesday, July 7, 2020, the American University of Beirut (AUB) held the distribution ceremony of the World Health Organization (WHO) World No Tobacco Day 2020 Award under the slogan 'Protecting youth from industry manipulation and preventing them from tobacco and nicotine use'. The prestigious award was granted to this year's winner in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO), Dr. Ghazi Zaatari, Interim Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at AUB.

The ceremony was attended by WHO representative in Lebanon, Dr. Iman Shankiti, AUB president, Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, the Coordinator of the AUB-Tobacco Control Research Group, Dr. Rima Nakkash, WHO members, dignitaries, AUB leadership, family, and friends. Safe physical distancing measures were maintained throughout the event. The ceremony was also broadcasted live on WebEx. Several WHO regional and international members joined the ceremony and gave live testimonies reflecting on Dr. Zaatari's mentoring skills, achievements, and role as an instrumental member of the organization.

In his speech, President Khuri said, "Dr. Zaatari is a distinguished and determined scholar and an advocate for a tobacco-free tomorrow like few others. We are grateful for his outstanding contributions, both past and current, related to tobacco control, tobacco product regulation, and the health effects of traditional and novel tobacco products. All this despite the difficult circumstances that the university, the country, and the world have been going through in 2020." He added, "AUB is doing everything possible to support our committed scholars, as well as physicians, so that their contributions continue, and their visions for a better world and a brighter future become a reality, and so that they can continue to mentor the next generation of stellar students."

Dr. Shankiti welcomed the audience and announced that Dr. Zaatari has received the award in recognition for his efforts in taking action against smoking. She indicated that the WNTD Award recognizes individuals or institutions in each of the six WHO Regions based on their outstanding contribution to the advancement of the policies and measures contained in the WHO

Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and its guidelines, particularly in relation to the theme of World No Tobacco Day. In her address, Dr. Shankiti noted that the WHO will always support the efforts of the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, the American University of Beirut, and all institutions and partners in the fight against smoking, to expand the implementation of all the provisions of the WHO agreement in Lebanon. Dr. Shankiti congratulated Dr. Zaatari, AUB, and Lebanon on an award well deserved at the end of her address.

A renowned pathologist for his distinguished efforts and investigative work on tobacco control, tobacco product regulation, Dr. Zaatari has participated in several civil society activities and served as an expert and speaker on tobacco control and tobacco product regulations at numerous regional and international meetings and congresses.

Dr. Zaatari's journey with the WHO started in 2004 when he joined the Geneva-based WHO Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI) and its Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation (TobReg). In 2008, Dr. Zaatari was appointed by WHO Director General as Chair of TobReg, a position he continues to hold until the present day. The work that he is overseeing at TobReg has culminated in publishing several WHO Technical Reports on Tobacco Product Regulation as well several advisories. After TobReg, in 2005, Dr. Zaatari served on the Executive Committee of the WHO Tobacco Laboratory Network (TobLabNet) and as of 2008, he attends the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the WHO FCTC, held every two years. In 2016 and under his joint initiative with Dr. Vera De Costa E. Silva, the Head of the Convention Secretariat of FCTC, AUB, represented by President Fadlo Khuri, signed a memorandum of understanding to have AUB designated as a global Knowledge Hub (KH) for Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking. At present, Dr. Zaatari serves as its director.

In her turn, Dr. Rima Nakkash said, "Dr. Zaatari made his mark in the field of tobacco control contributing to moving knowledge forward on many fronts due to his involvement at global, regional, and national level and leading multiple tobacco control efforts."

In his final speech, Dr. Zaatari thanked the curators for this ceremony and highlighted the efforts of the American University of Beirut and its effective role in tobacco control. He said, " I leave you with this pondering question: the pandemic of the coronavirus has caught the attention of all world leaders, turned our world upside down, and has claimed the lives of more than half a million people. Yet, there is a pandemic of a bigger magnitude, that of tobacco, which is claiming the lives of 8 million people a year including an estimated 5000 Lebanese and one billion by the end of the century but sadly many leaders and decision makers remain watchful bystanders lacking the resolve to turn around this disastrous tide."

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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 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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