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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Global Health Institute at AUB launches the Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Program

The Global Health Institute (GHI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) announced the launch of its Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Program (EPaPP), that aims to address the challenges, opportunities, and health emergency response in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

To mark the launch of the program, GHI hosted a panel discussion with local, regional, and international experts on epidemic and pandemic preparedness. The event brought together participants from various health-related backgrounds, including physicians, researchers, policymakers, and public health experts. During the panel discussion, the experts shared insights and recommendations on how to better prepare for and respond to epidemics and pandemics in the region. Panelists discussed the importance of collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, the need for stronger health systems, and the role of research in developing effective prevention and treatment strategies.

Dr. Lina Choueiri, deputy provost at AUB, opened the event with remarks highlighting the importance of the program. “It is exciting for us at AUB to be at the forefront of building healthier futures for the people of this region,” she said. Dr. Shadi Saleh, founding director of GHI, emphasized that the main strategic aim of EPaPP is to serve as a platform for research and evidence on epidemic and pandemic preparedness with a special focus on the MENA region, which has suffered significantly in recent years, and where investment in infrastructure has not been at a level that can respond to challenges.

Senior Program Specialist at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada Chaitali Sinha delivered a video address stressing the importance of strengthening national and regional capacity for equitable epidemic and pandemic preparedness. She noted that EPaPP fills an important gap in responding to evidence-based policies by adopting multisectoral approaches. Dr. Zahi Abdul Sater, programs division manager at GHI, introduced the Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Program in a presentation. He stated that EPaPP will be part of the research and policy portfolio, alongside three other programs, and a part of the larger ecosystem at the Global Health Institute at AUB.

The panel discussion featured four experts who shared their insights on how to improve epidemic and pandemic preparedness in the MENA region. Dr. Antoine Abou Fayad, assistant professor at the Department of Experimental Pathology, Immunology, and Microbiology at AUB, highlighted the importance of employing technology and innovation to improve preparedness and response in low-middle-income countries. Dr. Jaouad Mahjour, assistant director-general for emergency preparedness at the World Health Organization in Switzerland, stressed the need for countries to work together to ensure the safety and well-being of all communities. Dr. Souha Kanj, head of the infectious diseases division at the American University of Beirut Medical Center, shared key recommendations on building a sustainable and resilient health workforce in the MENA region that is equipped to respond to future epidemics and pandemics. Head of the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Unit at the Presidency of Council of Ministers at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Lebanon Zahi Chahine, pointed out the impact of the economic collapse in Lebanon on the country's epidemic and pandemic preparedness.

The Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Program, one of four such programs under the GHI Programs Division, is part of GHI's broader mission to promote health equity and improve health outcomes in the MENA region through research, education, and advocacy.

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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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