

For Immediate Release



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AUB officially opens new academic year

On the occasion of the official opening of the 2020-21 academic year at the American University of Beirut (AUB), and due to the ongoing health circumstances that require avoiding gatherings, President Dr. Fadlo Khuri addressed the AUB community, family, and friends online from the university's historic Assembly Hall.

Assembly Hall – that usually witnesses the beginning of AUB's academic years with crowds of excited students, faculty, and staff, as well as the traditional academic procession comprising the president, deans, faculty, and trustees – was filled this year with the echo of the Lebanese National Anthem, AUB's alma mater, and President Khuri's address, titled: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Also present were the deans of each of the university's faculties, in addition to a few members of AUB leadership.

Khuri began by asking: "how does our AUB community learn from the liberal arts canon, from history, from ethics, to look after those less fortunate than ourselves, to ensure that more lives are lived abundantly, at a time when we ourselves are feeling neglected, vulnerable, and angry?"

Higher education and healthcare in Lebanon: concerns and hopes

Speaking about Lebanon's current situation, Khuri said, "absent planning and accountability, everything collapsed, including the standards and regulations that should be every state's basis for maintaining the safety and wellbeing of its citizens. After August 4, the evidence of tangled metal, destroyed homes, and broken lives made this shocking defect obvious to the whole world."

"Arguably the country's greatest asset, and our greatest cause for hope, is the head start that Lebanon was given thanks to the pre-existence of AUB and USJ to the founding of the Modern Lebanon in 1920. Much of what is good in the culture and diversity of Lebanon and the region emanates from this inclusive, high quality education and healthcare that these two universities

have provided for generations,” he added. “Its established higher education sector made the newly independent country attractive for people from all over the region and beyond.”

Khuri also spoke about the founding of several universities in Lebanon throughout the country’s history including La Sagesse, LAU, USEK, the public Lebanese University, Haigazian University, the Beirut Arab University, Balamand, the Islamic University, Université Antonine, and Notre Dame-Louaize. “The 11 private universities have come together based on our common purpose and shared mission to educate and create opportunities for future generations,” Khuri said.

He also spoke about the importance of collaborating with universities in Lebanon and around the world, saying, “our goal being nothing less than to emerge as one of the world’s finest universities, and a model for higher education in the Global South.”

Khuri added that another vital asset for Lebanon is its quality healthcare system which has also been threatened by the economic collapse, COVID-19 pandemic, and the August 4 explosion which caused major devastation in hospitals around Beirut with damages exceeding \$150 million. “85 percent of healthcare in Lebanon is delivered by private health systems, and the blast has disabled around 800 of 2,000 teaching hospital beds in Beirut all while the pandemic escalates.”

Speaking about the recent support of for-profit education he said, “it devalues quality in favor of ‘affordability,’ failing to take into consideration that the sharing of common values, such as understanding different cultures, development of critical thinking and analytic skills, and conduct of research, all require investment of resources.”

Khuri added, “The model actualized by AUB and others emphasizes education of the best and brightest in a responsible manner. It values and accounts for the differential between diverse families’ resources by ensuring financial assistance for those who cannot afford tuition. This nuanced model ensures that 60 percent of undergraduate and graduate students at AUB receive some form of financial assistance.”

“In this very dangerous moment for higher education in Lebanon, and therefore for the Lebanese national identity as a whole, we should all be part of the national debate, especially when deliberate, profound, even radical changes in favor of for-profit education are introduced that run counter to more than 100 years of pedagogy and scholarship,” Khuri continued.

What can AUB do?

Khuri asked, “what can AUB do to provide hope, to nurture and graduate scholars and scientists, paragons of virtue that can help overcome despair, disillusionment, and darkness? After all, we

have just been forced to take the most painful decisions in our history in order to save the institution, to reduce our workforce, and release beloved members of our AUB community, our family, during this social, economic, political, humanitarian, and health maelstrom.”

“I believe the answer is that we can still lead by example in so many ways, in our leadership of the USAID-sponsored COVID-19 consortium of private, teaching, and academic health systems in Lebanon; in our physicians’ and nurses’ heroic response to care for the wounded on August 4 and after; in leading an effort to obtain and deliver medications and supplies from our friends and our diaspora in a direct person-to-person action that continues to give hope,” he said.

“We can lead during the worst economic recession since the Great Depression by continuing to place our students in good jobs and top graduate and professional programs in the West and East. We can lead when more than 800 faculty members dedicate themselves to learning and improving their online educational capabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. We can lead by creating opportunities for young people, and old, to obtain a world class, affordable education in order to dream of a better life here in Lebanon and the Arab world, a life based not on fossil fuel production and consumption, but on the preservation of our environment and its energies for future generations,” he added.

“We can lead when we help raise funds for other needy and deserving institutions with whom we partner to face formidable challenges together. We can lead by creating educational opportunities and a medico-social fund for our departed staff to ensure care for them and their families and education for their children. We can lead by establishing an AUB Relief and Reconstruction Initiative to support multiple educational, healthcare, and cultural entities that are vital for the future of Lebanon. We can lead when our magnificent Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service takes to the streets of Beirut to help remove the rubble and help rebuild homes and lives, not just today and tomorrow, but by making a long-term commitment to the communities they serve,” Khuri continued.

“We can lead when a group of independent faculty members come together (under the banner of Khaddit Beirut) to develop concrete, achievable, and evidence-based plans in support of local health centers, environmental health, education, and industry. We can lead when our engineers establish a free hotline to inspect buildings for structural damage and our architects set up an international hub and geographic information system to connect international aid with neighborhood housing reconstruction efforts. We can lead through these and innumerable other community-focused action-research and experiential learning projects that provide food, shelter, medical and other kinds of support, and hope to a suffering population in dire need of it,” he added.

“Finally, we can lead when, even in the direst times, we refuse to strike down or speak ill of our brothers and sisters, if they anger us, hurt us, denigrate the best of our intentions. Rather we can recognize that they are in pain, and they need our support,” Khuri said.

“We lead through Excellence in the Pursuit of the Greater Good, whether in our capital Beirut, in Lebanon and the region, or in the Global South, our greater home. That is how we ensure that in the final analysis, we at AUB are truly our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers,” he ended.

To view the full video of President Khuri’s address, follow this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2P04sVsA5Vs&pbjreload=101>

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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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