



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Beirut: Monday, September 05, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The American University of Beirut officially opens new academic year

Khuri: “This must be an opening day that can give cause for genuine hope”

On the occasion of the official opening of the 2022-23 academic year at the American University of Beirut, a ceremony was held at the university's historic Assembly Hall. The event was attended by American University of Beirut trustees, deans, leadership, faculty, staff, and students.

The ceremony began with the entry of the traditional academic procession, which signaled the beginning of the university's 157th Opening Ceremony. This was followed by the Lebanese national anthem. Dr. Fadlo Khuri, AUB president, then addressed the audience with his customary opening day speech, this year titled “Beginnings.”

“Today, we celebrate together new beginnings, and all that possibly can emerge from them,” Khuri said welcoming everyone. He addressed the circumstances the American University of Beirut is going through, answering questions such as what is different about the university this year, and what remains the same.

“At first glance, some things at AUB remain unchanged – our beautiful campus opening its doors to its 157th class of students, a genuinely welcoming atmosphere, outstanding faculty and staff, and opportunities to participate in campus life and engage in the pursuit of self-transformation. Compelling challenges persist: Lebanon's economy remains in the direst of conditions; solutions of all shapes and sizes continue to be floated in electoral campaigns here and across the globe; emigration from this country and region accelerates, particularly among youth but now even among previously more established adults, the instability and crushing unfairness of seeing the financial fruits of lifelong efforts heartbreakingly elusive and inducing real despair,” Khuri said.

He highlighted that “on a fundamental scale, this must be an opening day that can give cause for genuine hope. There must always be hope.”

“Despite the despair that has enveloped our small and seemingly star-crossed home country, I am convinced that hope is genuine. My conviction arises from elements in Lebanon and the region, as well as those specifically at the American University of Beirut. Over the course of this address, I will outline some of the core reasons why I believe those small, imperceptible but tensile strands of hope are starting to emerge,” Khuri added. “These seedlings will one day bloom and create opportunities for new beginnings. Many of these beginnings for the people of Lebanon and the Arab world will emanate, as they have for more than a century and a half, from the American University of Beirut.”

He also spoke about the extraordinary efforts of the faculty, staff, and students of the American University of Beirut across its history and throughout the two world wars as well the Lebanese Civil War. “So many of our most accomplished alumni and faculty either passed through the university or indeed stayed during some of our most defining and demanding crises, of which this era’s concatenation of catastrophes is certainly one.”

He continued, “The American University of Beirut does not exist, grow, and thrive in a vacuum. It requires constant stewardship, careful stimulation and, most of all, a defining purpose. That purpose, that mission, must be guarded and communicated, propagated, and ultimately lived by. It is our shared responsibility to support and shepherd this university, one of the defining jewels of our time and one that can be found in very few – if any – other nation or indeed region.”

Khuri then spoke about new beginnings planned for this coming academic year, having already bridged the Mediterranean to launch a twin campus in Pafos, Cyprus; and the impact that launch will have on the mothership in Beirut. He also raised the question, “how will we communicate that impact and our plans for the future in manners that stay true to our legacy and also advances our forward-looking mission?”

He explained that “after a year of intensive consultation and study, we have updated the logo of the American University of Beirut, as we announced last week. This distinctive new look reaffirms our identity as one of the oldest, most prestigious, and mission-oriented universities, an institution firmly rooted in Beirut but with an increasingly robust global presence. Despite all the changes, when you look back at the AUB logo through history, you will see that our new logo is not so much a departure as a fresh take on our historic identity.”

Khuri added, “As we begin our 157th academic year, embarking on a new era for a university firmly rooted in Beirut but with a more global reach, this new logo is also about new beginnings. It is about refreshing and remaining relevant to new audiences and younger generations. As I said during Opening Ceremony last year, ‘Only dinosaurs, figurative and literal, stand still... and all know their fate.’ The American University of Beirut is and will always remain vital and vivacious, transforming itself to serve its communities and fulfill its mission in the face of changing circumstances and surrounding realities. Yet, as this new logo attests, what really matters about this university – its abiding commitment to excellence and service to the people of this region and beyond – must never change.”

He said, “That abiding excellence must be focused to even greater effect for the general, societal good. Lebanon is far from the first country to witness a calamitous collapse, in this case a socioeconomic one.”

Khuri continued, “Consistent with our values, we must review and renew our own inclusiveness and the sustainability of our student life. One of the most pressing needs in an uncertain Lebanon is to provide some certainty to our students.” He explained that by revising the tuition to allow a gradual shift to a far more stable and meaningful dollar-based tuition over two distinct three-year periods, the university has leveraged its resources to enhance student inclusiveness while also realizing substantial increases in financial aid for students.

“We have refreshed while ensuring continuity, recruiting 78 new faculty members over the past 18 months, stabilizing our losses, seeing regrowth of our core constituents (faculty, students, and staff), convincing more than two dozen faculty members to return to our university from leaves taken during the dark days of the prior period. Consequently, we have recruited and matriculated one of our strongest incoming classes in years, without sacrificing excellence or inclusiveness.”

He added, “We have collaborated with our generous, sustaining partners by investing in a more inclusive, more excellent, better American University of Beirut. Resources provided by our trustees, alumni, and friends as well as critical partners such as USAID, Mastercard Foundation, MEPI, ULYP, and others, are being invested into student scholarships, patient assistance, salary support, and campus growth, and also into new initiatives.”

These new initiatives include AUB Online, twin campuses in Cyprus and the Arab world , enhanced support of student clubs, state-of-the-art student facilities, better advising, greater access to mental health support, stronger and more diverse career counseling, cross-campus programs, and impressive research efforts. “We have done all we speak of together, as one united community, albeit one with diverse viewpoints and perspectives.”

Khuri concluded by saying, “Our identity is clear then. The American University of Beirut remains deeply rooted in Beirut, among the most culturally rich, diverse cities in the world. We are determined to lead in the evolution of a more sustainable Lebanon and Arab world.”

“Only those ignorant of history can ignore our track record and determination to pursue excellence for the greater good, both at home, on our campuses, and across Lebanon, the region, and the world,” he added.

“To our students, pick up a new activity, and expand your scope. Join a club. Immerse yourself in this magnificent institution and all it has to offer. Today, we begin again, and nothing must stop us becoming all we aspire to be,” he ended thanking everyone for their commitment to the American University of Beirut.

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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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