

For Immediate Release



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Nobel Prize Laureate Muhammad Yunus visits AUB:

“Everyone is an entrepreneur”

The American University of Beirut (AUB) hosted Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus over two days and honored high school students who won a competition for best solutions to Lebanon’s agricultural problems at the first Raji and Fawzieh Sinno Promising Leader in Agriculture Award. The award was launched by AUB’s Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences (FAFS) with this year’s theme “Agriculture in Lebanon: Challenges and Solutions.”

Father of both social business and microcredit, Professor Yunus is the founder of Grameen Bank and of more than 50 other companies in Bangladesh. He was named “one of the greatest entrepreneurs of our time” by Fortune magazine in 2012. In addition to the Nobel Prize that Yunus and the Grameen Bank were awarded for the year 2006, he is the recipient of 60 honorary degrees from universities—including AUB in 2006—across 24 countries, and 131 awards from 30 countries including state honors from 10 countries.

In his speech at the awarding ceremony, Yunus spoke about the success of Grameen Bank, the possibility for emulating the model of microfinance to alleviate poverty worldwide, and the importance of entrepreneurship in finding sustainable and accessible solutions to day-to-day challenges of development. Referring to human rights, development, agriculture, rural livelihoods, poverty reduction, and food security, Yunus emphasized the importance of “creating business to solve problems,” transformation and growth through challenging the norm, and the “limitless capacity of every human being.”

“The human being is an amazing creation with enormous, limitless capacity,” said Yunus. “Imagine the kind of world you want and insist on it and, someday, it will happen. Science and technology follow fiction... Don’t follow old roads. Build new ones.”

Forty-one years after founding what started as a village money-lending system for the poor and developed into 26 branches and 24,000 staff in Bangladesh alone, Yunus advised all students to create their sustainable solutions but remember to start small and take the success everywhere.

“Imagine the wildest things possible but always start very small, if you can develop a seed, it becomes a miracle seed and all you have to do now is to keep planting seeds to have a big plantation all over the world. If we solve water shortage problems in one village, in a social business and sustainable way, with our sustainable solution, we can solve the water problem everywhere in the world. Because it works the same way.”

In addition to meetings with AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, Provost Muhamad Harajli, and the FAFS faculty and administration, a gala dinner was hosted by FAFS in honor of Professor Yunus and on the occasion of the launch of the first Raji and Fawzieh Sinno Promising Leader in Agriculture Award. A press conference, discussions, and interviews were also conducted for students, NGOs, and media representatives.

“Everyone at AUB who has come into contact with Professor Yunus has been inspired by the sincerity and simplicity of his message, that one should believe in people and give them a chance to be creative, to be innovative, in order to make a difference in their lives and those of others,” said President Khuri. “This great man, recipient of an honorary doctorate from our university in 2006, before he won the Nobel Prize for that year, has changed the way so many people in the world think. By empowering and enabling women and men from the villages of Bangladesh, he has helped make this a better world. We were honored and delighted to host him and to get to know him and his inspirational story.”

Competing for sustainable solutions in Lebanon’s agriculture sector

The Raji and Fawzieh Sinno Promising Leader in Agriculture Award was established in 2017 with the aim to enhance the visibility of the agricultural sector in Lebanon and to raise awareness on its challenges and opportunities, encouraging young students to study agriculture and pursue it as a career. The competition is open to grade 12 students from all Lebanese schools. Participants are expected to submit innovative project proposals that identify a problem the agricultural sector is currently facing in Lebanon, and propose an environmentally friendly solution that aims to help small farmers with limited resources.

“This day is very special because it emphasizes the role of young future leaders to uphold the agriculture-based economy in Lebanon,” said Dr. Rabi Mohtar, dean of the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, at the first awarding ceremony. “It brings hope that this country can rebound and its agriculture sector can be one of those major pillars in rebuilding the Lebanese economy and it also enforces that there is hope for rural areas for the future development and the future of the nation.

Participants submitted 500-word abstracts of their projects that were reviewed by a jury committee of academic and professional experts in the field. Ten finalists — six of whom were from public schools in Lebanon — were asked to develop their projects further and compete with poster presentations. The jury selected three winners, based on originality, approach, potential impact and efficiency, feasibility, and accessibility of agricultural solutions proposed, among other criteria.

First-prize winner was Hussein Abbass from Khalil Jaradi High School, in Maaraka in the south of Lebanon, who proposed practical steps to the agriculture of eucalyptus in tackling the problem of shortage of bee forage in Lebanon. Second-prize winners were Abdul Rahman Ouwayed and Bilal Hameed from Iman High School in Akkar in northern Lebanon who, through studying the water area of Qammoua in Akkar, presented solutions to Lebanon's sewage-water treatment through the use of natural, plant filters. The third prize went to Sarah Ziadeh from Rawdat Al Fayhaa High School in Tripoli who proposed an environmentally-friendly solution to reduce water consumption needed in agriculture through new technology and new approaches in agriculture practices in north Lebanon.

“It was touching to see young students coming in from rural areas receiving their awards from this legend, it gave us hope that there is a way out of this tunnel to rebuild the agricultural sector in Lebanon and the region with the help of young talents that we have the obligation to promise and support,” added Mohtar.

“The systematic neglect of the productive sectors in Lebanon and especially the agricultural sector have in effect led to a general decay of our ecosystem, which includes our water reserves, our polluted air, and our inability to properly access and use our natural resources for the benefit of our citizens, especially those in rural areas outside Beirut. It is our responsibility to our nation that we work together to stop and reverse this trend,” said Khaled Sinno, CEO of Karma Lebanon SAL, exporter of Lebanese fresh produce, and member of the External Advisory Board at AUB's FAFS.

“A new mindset about Lebanon's economic identity and its role in the region should be our top priority for the years to come,” added Sinno who, in addition to sponsoring this award, is currently focusing on developing and implementing a vision to revitalise the agriculture sector in Lebanon through education, transfer of technology and private sector intervention. “We should join efforts to create a better future for our children and fellow citizens.”

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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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