

For Immediate Release



Food prices and agricultural unfairness behind Arab Spring – academic

Beirut, Lebanon- 25/04/2012 -The rise in recent food prices and agricultural inequality were a major yet largely overlooked factor in the popular uprisings of last year's Arab Spring, a leading expert on the topic has told an AUB audience.

Rami Zurayk, professor at the Department of Landscape Design and Ecosystem Management at the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at AUB, during a lecture on April 24 2012, said the region-wide upheaval of 2011 had also failed to address underlying social unrest.

"The driving forces of the Arab uprisings have caused a disconnect between people and state, people and land, and people and food," Zurayk told the audience.

Sponsored by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI), the lecture was one of the Arab Uprisings series, part of AUB's Arab Uprisings Research Initiative launched under the guidance of the Provost's office in December 2011. This open-ended, multi-sectoral initiative harnesses AUB's research, analysis and convening resources to engage constructively with the historic changes taking place across the Arab World.

"Dr. Zurayk's perspective is unique and organic," said Rayan El Amine, coordinator of the lecture series and programs manager at IFI. "The lecture series is just one component of the initiative, as the idea is to look at the regional transformations from an interdisciplinary perspective to gain a more in-depth view of what's going on."

Food and farming are key issues for the Middle East and North Africa region, which is the largest importer of food in the world. Food prices in the region have almost doubled in the past four to five years. Tunisia, Egypt and Syria are among the most affected countries and in Lebanon five to six percent of the farming community live off agriculture alone, the majority of which fall under the poverty line.

Zurayk said that at the root of last year's Arab uprisings was a sense of social discontent stemming from inequality and rocketing food prices.

He mentioned that the Arab regimes believed they could put a stop to the popular uprisings by providing a few

Arab countries have the most unequal distribution of land in the world, as the land that allows the production of good crops is kept under the control of the rich and privileged few.

Zurayk argued that most of the investment in imported arms and weapons by states seeking to maintain sovereignty and security would be better spent in helping the rural poor.

He added that the problems contributing to the Arab Spring had still not been solved, and that greater citizen activism was the only way to ensure the demands of greater freedom and rights made during 2011 are not forgotten.

“Social, political and economic changes are bound to happen and our duty is to guide them and make them go in the direction that we as concerned citizens of social justice want, to come up with something that is tangible and can be of use. Not just political slogans,” Zurayk said.

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Note to Editors

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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 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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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