

For Immediate Release



## **Civic engagement and volunteering promoted at AUB fair Ex-Minister Baroud: Social media has helped grow civic initiatives**

Beirut, Lebanon- 05/04/2012 -Civic engagement in Lebanon is increasing as more and more people turn to the internet to organize events and rallies, leading social activists said at an AUB civic engagement fair.

The third Annual Civic and Volunteering Fair, held on April 4, 2012 and organized by the AUB Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service, brought together over 80 NGOs for discussions and activities designed to get more students involved in social issues.

In his keynote address, Ziad Baroud, a social activist and Lebanon's former Interior Minister, said that the rise of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter has helped grow civic initiatives in Lebanon.

“Civic engagement has improved a lot through social media. People with similar interests are connecting faster, at low costs and almost risk-free,” said Baroud. “Those who are unwilling or unable to go to the streets are taking the highways of technology” to get their feelings heard, he added.

Baroud said that social media's role in Lebanon was particularly significant, given the country's plethora of political parties and views.

The former minister added it was important for NGOs and other civil collectives to use social media to reach out and influence national policymaking.

“Partnership is possible, provided you make sure the government understands that it's for the country's own good to listen to what people are saying,” Baroud. “I think that the more you accumulate experience and success stories the more you'll be able to form a lobbying group that could make a break through.”

While praising the role of social media in social activism, Omar Nashabe, a journalist and activist, said internet campaigning had to be used alongside old-fashioned demonstrating and protesting.

“However, there are limits to the virtual activity. Action is also necessary, not just online interaction, you need to move from virtual to interactive and that’s the challenge,” Nashabe said.

Baroud encouraged parents present at the fair to get involved too; social media usage data recorded that 36 percent of male and 27 percent of female users are between 30-54 years of age.

After his speech, Baroud was presented with a commemorative plaque in honor of his commitment and civil service in Lebanon.

In his opening address Provost Ahmed Dallal hailed the fair, which included many collaborative activities and teamwork exercises, as helping to inspire the next generation of campaigners.

“Ordinary people and students were empowered by the sense that they could make a difference,” he said.

Welcoming addresses were also given by Mounir Mabsout, director of the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service and organizer of the event, and Talal Nizameddin, dean of Student Affairs.

An organic food court, a collection of plastic caps, a wheelchair race, a film screening about an Ethiopian domestic worker, and a closing concert by AUB Got Talent winners were all on the list of activities for the well-attended day.

ENDS

PHOTO CAPTIONS: 1- Fair promotes environmentally-friendly principles; 2- Two AUB students participate in the wheelchair race whose aim was to raise awareness for the disabled; 3- (L-R) AUB Provost Dallal, ex-Minister Baroud, and journalist Nashabe

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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 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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