

For Immediate Release



AUB Founders Day: 'Through knowledge we can turn the Arab Spring into an eternal Arab summer'

Beirut, Lebanon- 05/12/2011 – The American University of Beirut's impact on the region and its role in spreading democratic values in the Arab world were the focus of the Founders Day Ceremony held on December 5, 2011.

Following a formal procession of faculty members and senior administrators, AUB President Peter Dorman opened the ceremony, highlighting AUB's influence on its surroundings starting from the time of its founding 145 years ago.

This year, the ceremony had some special participants: Professional actors mimed five of the University's founders - founding father Daniel Bliss, surgeon and campus buildings designer George Post, scientific and Arabic scholar Cornelius Van Dyke, campus library and museum developer Harvey Porter, and professor and long-time Board of Trustee member David Stuart Dodge. The "founders" strolled between Assembly Hall and West Hall, posing for photos with the President and students. Also, a pamphlet highlighting the main founders of the University was distributed during the ceremony, while a promotional campaign in the lead-up to the event acquainted the campus community with its founders.

Tracing the historical context in which AUB was born in 1866—a period of Arab decline and European flourish—keynote speaker and AUB Trustee Emerita Leila Sharaf, who is the first woman to join the Jordanian Senate, noted that the founders then realized that the only way the people of the region could have a better life was through education.

"From the beginning, the founders articulated their educational philosophy that stands until today as the guiding light of AUB," said Sharaf before quoting the University's mission statement: "The University believes deeply in and encourages freedom of thought and expression, and seeks to foster tolerance and respect for diversity and dialogue. Graduates will be individuals committed to creative and critical thinking, life-long learning, personal integrity and civic responsibility and leadership."

Sharaf added that AUB's earliest graduates from all over the Arab world later succeeded in serving and spreading in the region the ideals they held and the expertise they acquired. Many of them had assumed leadership roles in the development of their countries, in the establishment of the emerging states and as representatives of their countries and the region on the international scene.

Taking herself and her family as an example, Sharaf who is also a former minister of information in Jordan, said that her father had also graduated from the University's school of medicine in 1917 and then went on to serve in Sudan.

All was not smooth sailing, said Sharaf, since the region had witnessed two world wars, several coup d'états, occupation, the Palestinian intifadas, and the "victim in all that was democracy."

Nevertheless, Sharaf added, "AUB was with us from the beginning, fulfilling the dream of its founders and contributing to the future of its "home region."

Within AUB's walls, freedom of speech and expression and exchanges of ideas were encouraged. "AUB became the source of ideas and concepts for the Arab future, Arab nationalist thought was developed and matured within its walls as were many components of freedom, democracy, human rights and economic development," said Sharaf.

Meanwhile, "AUB alumni played major roles in the advancement of their respective countries... and were agents of change ...[assuming] leadership positions in professional or official government duties," added Sharaf. "We carried with us the values and backbone of our AUB education and left our impact on our respective societies and their modernizing and development efforts."

Even though they could not bring democracy to Arab regimes, AUB alumni made a lot of advances, and with the recent Arab uprisings, the potential to do more is now greater.

"Our generation has no right to patronize and guide you, as we have failed in handing you over a secure, prosperous, stable and democratic homeland, but we can urge you to get involved," said Sharaf, addressing students.

"Today there is no power to stop you from realizing your dreams of self fulfillment and national accomplishment, because now the role of the individual in our future systems will be significant, and the role of active groups and communities will be effective in the future of the nation." Sharaf said. "But you need to get involved; you cannot stand by the side of the road anymore and watch the parade go by!

"You have chosen a great University; you have been equipped with the best education and exposed to the best personal and public value systems, and you are part of the new generation that can make a difference," she added.

During the ceremony, the winner of the student essay contest, Aliaa Elzeiny's, a political studies senior, read her essay, entitled, "An Egyptian, and Arab, and AUB student," which won her a \$750 prize.

This year's student essay competition asked students to respond to the question: "In light of AUB's historic legacy as an institution that fosters social advancement, what role can our university play in this region during the time of the Arab Spring?"

Second-prize winner Karim Nasr, a biology junior, won \$500 for his essay, "The Arab Winter."

Elzeiny's winning essay highlighted her eye-opening experience as an AUB student, who shed her political naïveté, gaining openness and critical thinking instead, with each course she took.

"As an Egyptian student who graduated from the Egyptian educational system, I accepted the authority's discourse that -I now believe - aimed at a deceptive sense of nationalism that

guarantees submission to authority," said Elzeiny. "With every course that I completed at AUB, and in every discussion in front of West Hall or on the stairs of the Main Gate, I began to grasp the bigger picture. I realized that I should be open-minded, reflective and self-critical."

Shortly after arriving at AUB, Elzeiny learned that she "had a voice" and started to blog.

"AUB provides its students with classroom experiences and on-campus interactions that promote critical thinking, which enables AUB graduates to become active members of their communities," concluded Elzeiny. "It is through combining the power of knowledge, the hope for change, and the will for action that we -as AUB students and graduates - can help to transform the Arab spring into an eternal Arab summer."

ENDS

For more information please contact:

Maha Al-Azar, Assistant Director for Media Relations, ma110@aub.edu.lb, 01-353 228

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.

Stay up to date on AUB news and events. Follow us on:

Website: www.aub.edu.lb

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/aub.edu.lb>

Twitter: http://twitter.com/AUB_Lebanon