

For Immediate Release



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AUB's Faculty of Health Sciences conference **analyzes Health Goals for the Arab region**

The “No One Left Behind” conference brought together experts from the region and around the world to discuss the feasibility of reaching health-related targets of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on the Arab world. This three-day event was hosted by the Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) and supported by the International Development Research Center of Canada.

In 2015, the United Nations established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which specify 17 universal goals leading up to 2030. The SDGs are wide-ranging and ambitious. The UN describes them as “a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.”

The goals include no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, reducing gender and income inequalities, economic growth, combating climate change, and improving air and water quality. The SDGs follow the UN Millennium Development Goals, a similar global effort that ran from 2000 to 2015.

“The SDGs represent a monumental undertaking,” said Dr. Carla Makhoul, director of CRPH. “Compared to the Millennium Development Goals, they are more comprehensive, are to be applicable to everyone on the planet, and they link health to multi-sectoral inputs and to broader social forces.”

“The aim of the conference is to provide the space for reflection on the prospects of attaining the health SDGs and the monitoring of progress in the region,” she added.

Dean of FHS, Dr. Iman Nuwayhid, welcomed participants to the conference and noted that all Arab states have committed to the 2030 goals. He then listed several potential obstacles faced by the nations of the Middle East, asking “How can we implement the forward-looking and inclusive goals of sustainable development with daily news of hatred, killing, and divisiveness?”

“We have no option but to continue to work towards a better world,” concluded Dean Nuwayhid, adding that FHS has defined its role as an engaged academic institution with an activist vision. “We work regionally and think and collaborate globally. We see health as a right,” he added.

The keynote address on the first day of the conference was given by Dr. Jean-Paul Moatti, President-Director General of the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement in France. Dr. Moatti has been chosen by UN head Ban Ki-Moon to serve on a panel of expert scientists to write the next report on SDGs. He spoke about some of the issues and challenges of implementing them, including SDG 3—Good Health and Wellbeing.

“In the thirteen targets of the SDG 3, you have all the major issues that should be pursued by public health people, so we should be happy. But at the same time we know that when there are so many targets, it may be a pretext for inaction or it may be a pretext for the government and the decision makers to do what they want,” warned Dr. Moatti. Although there are reasons to be pessimistic, he concluded: “I am very optimistic, because we can change things.”

Following the opening plenary, there was a session on understanding the Arab context in relation to reaching SDG targets. At the end of the first day, a panel of representatives from international organizations, ministries of health, and civil society discussed the SDGs from their different perspectives.

Throughout the second and third days of the conference, sessions tackled issues such as social and political differentials, including gender and economic inequality; health coverage, financing, and utilization; taking account of societal structures such as families, schools, and communities; and advancing comparative research on health in the Arab region.

Throughout the proceedings, CRPH shared tweets highlighting the provocative discussions and messages coming out of the sessions under the hashtag #NOLB2017. The conference ended by looking ahead at possible research themes, tools, and collaborations, with the knowledge that there is a lot of work to be done but also that the possibility of making a positive difference makes the effort worthwhile.

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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 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 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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