

For Immediate Release



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AUB Graduates 1668 Students

Khuri: “Go and change the world for the better”

The American University of Beirut (AUB) completed the second phase of its commencement ceremonies for the current academic year, by graduating 1668 fresh undergraduates.

The impressive ceremony, held on the Green Field in AUB’s lower campus, was attended by members of the Board of Trustees, parents, alumni, and friends.

After the arrival of the graduates’ procession and the procession of the university President, Provost, Deans, Faculty members and Trustees in their full academic regalia, the ceremony began with the Lebanese National Anthem. AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri then spoke.

President Fadlo R. Khuri:

President Fadlo R. Khuri said: “Experience is not what happens to you, but what you do with what happens to you,” said Aldous Huxley. Your journey at AUB has been full of rich and powerful experiences. You entered the gates of this University coming from

various streams of the country, of the region, and of the world. You left your parents' nests to be embraced in this great font of struggle, knowledge and enlightenment, a place committed to inclusivity and diversity, and unequivocally to excellence. You have come a long way to be here tonight, and you have shaped and tailored your personalities through experiences interacting with your fellows, engaging with your professors, and serving in various clubs, organizations, and publications. You have grown through the knowledge you have acquired in both your major and elective courses."

"We hope you have found and achieved that which excites you in your years at this University. I hope you have taken this opportunity to start to explore all you one day will be. We struggle to find meaning, but it is this very struggle that makes us humans. It is inevitably part of this meaning.

We are after all flawed creatures, and our struggles for meaning begin in the early stages of our lives. It is part of our human nature, and we must embrace it, by acknowledging its presence, by understanding it and by constantly trying to overcome it. "Character is built in the course of your inner confrontations. Character is a set of dispositions, desires, and habits that are slowly engraved during the struggle against your own weakness. You become more disciplined, considerate, and loving through small acts of self-control, sharing, service, friendship, and redefined enjoyment," wrote David Brooks, in his bestselling 'The Road to Character'." He continued.

"You will naturally be hesitant before taking a step that pushes you out of your comfort zone. It is the most important decisions that are usually preceded by moments of self-reflection. In these moments, allow yourself to weigh your options, and seize first those options that benefit you and the larger community, equally." He added.

"Our students graduating tonight have a limitless drive to conquer the globe and achieve what they aspire to be. My advice is to avoid being overly competitive with others. Do not allow yourselves to be defined by external distinction and validation. All of you are

gifted, and personal achievements cannot bring you long-lasting satisfaction or inner peace, but rather instant, disruptive moments of pride, and perhaps, illusionary happiness. It is, however, the service of others that can make you whole, and will allow you to lead an inwardly peaceful and fulfilling life.

So, every time you are faced by genuine doubt, recognize that the power to effect meaningful change resides in precisely these defining moments, and that it is in your hands to take a decision that might forever alter the course of your life and those of others. But that decision may well place you in a position where your service will most benefit those around you. In your decision-making process, reflect on Kant's three different but equivalent formulations of the universal moral law:

“Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end.

Thus the third practical principle follows as the ultimate condition of their harmony with practical reason: the idea of the will of every rational being as a universally legislating will.”

Throughout the course of my own life, I have learned that one can serve their fellow man through unanticipated avenues. You are graduating from a University whose founding father, the great Dr. Daniel Bliss, said in words that still resonate to this day “We were not anxious to appear great, but we were anxious to lay foundations upon which greatness could be built.”

The epitome of service is the surrender of entitlement in order to do good for those in greater need. With Lebanon ever precarious, with a war-torn Arab World, and the biggest humanitarian crisis happening right at our door, it is you, our graduates, who are looked to as beacons of hope, hope for a better tomorrow. You are the bringers of change, the salvers of wounds, the providers of hope, and caregivers for communities.

All of this can be achieved only through real doubt and introspection, by service and sacrifice, by application, by knowledge.” Khuri said.

“Today, we miss our dear friend, alumnus, trustee and philanthropist Maroun Semaan whom we all lost last month. We celebrate his meaningful life today through the distribution of the first degrees in Engineering and Architecture under the faculty bearing his name: “The Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture”. I ask you all to join me in observing a moment of silence in his memory.” He continued.

“Go out now into the wider world and do not be daunted by doubt. There is much exciting knowledge to acquire through endurance and stamina. Look around at your classmates, and then go forth into this world with purpose and humility.

Congratulations to you, graduates of 2017, and know that at AUB, you will always have a home. You will find solace in pausing on its beautiful Mediterranean campus whenever your vision is obscured by doubt and distress, by paradox and by pain. Return to your campus whenever you need a renewed sense of purpose. I, today, have hope more than ever, that it is you that will remold and reshape Lebanon, the Arab World and beyond, to best serve our wounded populations, that they, like you, “may have life and have it more abundantly.”

Congratulations, AUB Class of 2017. Go forth and change the world for the better, as all of us assembled here, and most importantly, as you yourself, now know you can!”. He ended.

The Graduating Class Speech:

Faculty of Arts and Sciences students Rim Sinjabe and Hussein Khachfe, delivered a speech on behalf of the graduates.

Khachfe:

“I recall the first time I set foot across Main Gate, a different kind of feeling. Is this the place where the leaders of today’s world got educated? Was I sitting on the same chair in Nicely Hall where a great scientist or innovator once sat? Were the department walls I would be sharing for the next 3 years, be the place that led to the conception of unrivaled ideas and achievements?” Khachfe said.

“My fellow graduates, as each of us embarks on their own path to come, we should not succumb to the naïve unreasonable optimism which states that tomorrow will be a better day on its own. Let me ask you this: Is this the age of post enlightenment, post modernity, the age of the science revolution? The answer is: We don’t know. For the first time in a very long period we, as humans, cannot define what age we are in. And maybe that is for the best. This is not the age of categorical imperatives, nor is it the time of thought restriction, for there is no relevance in defining ourselves. We must make use of this golden opportunity, to make use of the unlimited potential we have and let go of the rigidities old societies had on themselves. This is essential to fill the spaces no generation ever has, and together we will make sure that tomorrow will be a better day.” He continued.

“Friends and family, we did not choose AUB fearing unemployment, nor in greed of its prestige, but because it has proven itself worthy of being deemed the best. AUB, with its 151 years, has shown us and the world the real meaning of excellence: in science, art, engineering, business, research and in so much more. What makes AUB even more special is the student life and experience it has to offer. With the countless opportunities available such as clubs, societies, student government, and volunteer work, AUB proved to be a hub for building and molding the personalities of future leaders.” He said.

“AUB has been a safe haven for its students, a second home and for that we will forever be grateful. Thank you, President Khuri for your tireless efforts to make AUB safe and secure, and providing us with the right mind set and opportunities for open dialogue.

And thank you Dean Nizameddin for being the catalyst of guidance we all need here at AUB. You have both been role models I look up to and I am sure AUB will always be great in your hands.” He added.

“My fellow class of 2017, the memories we have created together will forever remain etched in my mind, and I only hope we can create more of them together as the years pass. Thank you everyone, thank you class of 2017, thank you AUB. Class of 2017 out.” He ended.

Sinjabe:

“Three months ago, I was in Dr. Talal Nizameddin’s office (our Dean of Student Affairs) and after an hour-long conversation, he asked me: Rim, what is your ambition? The question caught me off-guard. What is my ambition? I did not wake up one day and say, you know what, I want to graduate as an honors student, have two degrees, travel the world to represent my university, be on the Rugby League varsity team, win awards – and I certainly did not say, you know what, I want to be valedictorian of the class of 2017 (although I must say I am not particularly saddened by it). So how did all of that happen, I wondered? Did I consciously pursue these goals? Or were they the by-product of the way I led my life? When I look back at every semester I spent at AUB, I see an image of myself: arms fully extended, body fully engaged, focused, intent, pushing through a raging sea of stress and pressure over deadlines, exams, commitments, expectations, problems with family, friends, peers, colleagues, classmates, professors, health issues, hospital beds... the list really is endless.” Sinjabe said.

“Every living, breathing minute was an opportunity to fully realize my potential as a human being- that was my perspective, which ultimately allowed me to discover my purpose. With this in mind, I decided to be both the protagonist and the author of my own story. I decided not to let life just happen to me.” She added.

“There were moments of doubt, believe me. I had plenty of those. Every decision I made was unsafe because it challenged the norm or the supposed secured path to success (so they think!). Then I would remember that I have one purpose, truly only one, and it is to fulfill the highest most truthful expression of myself as a human being. Today, as a political studies major at AUB, I can say that I didn’t let people define who I am because of the major I pursued. I did even more than that, I let them wonder: how is a PS major Valedictorian?” She continued.

“Think, dream, pursue and achieve, class of 2017. Be critical thinkers. Be the generation that made the change by being that change. Come alive, for this is only the beginning!” She ended.

Mouna Haraoui:

Mrs. Mouna Haraoui took the podium to deliver her keynote speech. She said: “I am very proud to be among you today, at the American University of Beirut campus, a prestigious university that is particularly dear to my heart. I have dreamt for many years of pursuing my university education at AUB. Unfortunately it did not happen...”.

“This ceremony is yours and the 3rd of June, 2017 will be a memorable day in your life. Your generation, marked by the revolution of technology and communication, is indeed different than mine. It’s surely more challenging. This is why I am glad to share with you today my story with AUB and my experience in the social and humanitarian fields, knowing that the American University of Beirut focuses on moral values, dedication, culture and welfare...” She continued.

“I would here like to touch on the importance of the opportunity you were given. Please do not take it for granted and be grateful to your parents that have enabled you to join such a prestigious university. I had to work hard to educate myself. As you would imagine, the process was not an easy one. The journey was full of setbacks. However,

my commitment emanated from the heart. My innate optimism, strong determination and fighting spirit helped me reach objectives I had set for myself.” She added.

“We count on you, both men and women, to lead the way through working hand in hand with your fellow citizens... I know the road will not be easy, but just keep trying.

As Winston Churchill said ‘Never, never, never give up’. Dear Graduates, allow me to humbly share with you my experience that extends beyond child care. It reaches into social and cultural fields in an effort to improve the status of Lebanese women and protect the Lebanese national heritage. In fact, in preparation for the Fourth World Conference for Women, Beijing 1995, I focused on improving the state of Lebanese women with respect to gender equality. Following the recommendations of the Beijing declaration, the National Commission for Women was established by the Lebanese government, which I presided as a first lady. A national strategy for Lebanese women was elaborated in cooperation with the NGO Committee of Women’s Issues. It was implemented in light of the data bank published in 1997. Some improvements have been registered in more than one area and some basic achievements recorded toward the elimination of discrimination against women.” She said.

“Dear women professors and graduates present at this ceremony, your number reflects the empowerment we have attained over the last few decades where we can notice: an increase in the percentage of women enrolled at the various educational levels, a substantial growth in the participation of women in teaching professions and educational administration, and an increasing number of women having access to higher education and liberal professions. However, we still find few women appointed to key positions. Their presence is symbolic in economic and political decision making.

I always felt that Lebanon’s heritage was too precious to be ignored. It was imperative to protect it, restore it and promote it. For that purpose, we founded the Lebanese Heritage Foundation in 1996 which is committed to safeguarding our national heritage.” She added.

“As you would imagine a lot has still to be done. I have only begun a journey which seems to be endless if we are to achieve our dreams. Let us dream this evening of a Lebanon where human dignity, integrity and respect of diversity prevail. Where human rights, social justice and dialogue dominate. Where allegiance to our nation is a priority over all other considerations.

I did not have it easy growing up. I persevered to make myself a contributor to society. I try to help out as much as possible... After many years of work, we realize that the moments we truly lived were the moments when we had done things in the spirit of love. Encouraging and motivating you is a duty I feel from the depth of my heart. Life is a challenge. You should always strive to be the best you can be and aim to achieve the highest goals you set for yourself. Your graduation today is one of many achievements to come and paves the way for a new path. Remain optimistic about your goals and never lose hope. Remember great dreams are not forbidden to anyone. Many of your dreams are bound to become reality. Find the job you love, if you don't, create it. Your education is like your pride no one can take it away from you. It is your key to freedom. Have faith in yourself, and consider your mistakes as learning experiences. You will succeed if you believe in yourself and consider defeat a beginning and not an end. The doors may not open easily after this graduation. Having confidence, being real, transparent and honest are the way to success. Rest assured that graduating from a distinguished University like AUB does not only imply having a degree, but makes you a more cultured person, tolerant to diversity, a person who believes in freedom of speech and cherishes democracy. You have all the skills to take on life while respecting others, treating them as equal, and using your knowledge to improve humanity. Keep a corner of your heart for those who will need your help. Doing it will give you great satisfaction and happiness. Stay loyal to your university, teachers and parents and maintain your connections with your new friends on campus; this human chain is not easy to create or find.” She continued.

“You are today's Lebanon and you are the future of Lebanon. You are needed... Respect your roots, your homeland, your past and your family; but know that the mobile

roots, the roots of the heart and the spirit - I mean the love, friendship and the weaving bounds we make through life - are the most valuable. The world we live in today is very hard and difficult: wars, armed conflicts, violence, and terrorism are threatening Man, Earth and Stone.

I can only imagine the miracles that will happen when stability is achieved in our country, our region and throughout the world. In 1992, one year after College Hall crumbled, President Elias Hraoui ended his speech during the corner stone rebuilding ceremony by saying: "...every stone is a foundation for another stone, like the mission of Lebanon where every light has a shadow for a new light". And today on this 3rd of June 2017, I would like to end my speech by saying that each one of you, fellow degree recipients, is a foundation stone and a light." She ended.

The Degrees:

President Khuri and the deans then distributed degrees to the 1668 undergraduate students:

Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences 134

Faculty of Arts and Sciences 622

Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture 525

Faculty of Health Sciences 61

Suliman S. Olayan School of Business 291

Rafic Hariri School of Nursing 35

ENDS

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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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