

For Immediate Release



Beirut: 27-5-2016

**AUB awards Honorary Degree to Labaki, Taleb and Zard and graduates 510 and will celebrate tomorrow the graduation of 1566 undergraduate students
Khuri: “Work on a positive change in this world”**

The American University of Beirut (AUB) ceremoniously graduated 510 students in Graduate, PhD, and Doctor of Medicine programs and will celebrate tomorrow the graduation of 1566 undergraduate students.

During the ceremony, AUB granted the honorary doctorate in Humane Letters to film-maker Nadine Labaki, writer Nassim Taleb and chemistry scientist Dr. Samir Zard for their world-renowned achievements in their respective fields.

The ceremony was attended by MP Ali Bazzi representing House Speaker Nabih Berri, and Minister of Education and Higher Learning Elias Bou Saab representing Prime Minister Tammam Salam.

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

President Fadlo R. Khuri

President Fadlo Khuri addressed the ceremony. He said: It has been a long, winding, and unforgettable road. Three, four, five years or more before today, you came here full of hopes and dreams and expectations, hopes and dreams that we hope we have nourished and enhanced, even in the midst of emotional, economic and political turbulence. You leave today equipped with knowledge, with power, and with the belief that you can effect positive change in this world. You have learned much while you were at AUB.

“Today, you will celebrate together. Tomorrow you will step forth into the world, knowing that you are more confident, more able, more resilient, and more determined than you were when you first walked through these timeless gates to be forever transformed” he added.

“Today, in addition to celebrating your accomplishments, we honor three distinguished individuals whose willingness to defy conventional wisdoms has led to their ground breaking, societally impactful work. This year’s honorands are an acclaimed Lebanese filmmaker and actor, a world-renowned author and radical thinker, and a giant of organic chemistry. They have been chosen in recognition of their achievements on the international stage and their determination not to let conventional wisdom stand in the way of their quest for transformative excellence”, Khuri said.

“The great Daniel Bliss shared this faith in the people of the Levant when he determined early in his tenure to one-day leave the governance of the institution to this region’s indigenous people...”

“You are ready now. Now and forever you are AUB's past, present and future, the ambassadors of this iconic city set on a hill which, at 150 years old, taught you—as past generations were taught before us—to dare to dream that you will do what we know you are capable of, that you will change Lebanon, the Arab world, and the broader universe for the better. Congratulations

to you, your families and teachers, AUB Class of 2016, our sesquicentennial year, and go forth with pride, purpose and humility and most of all go with and in peace,” Khuri ended.

The graduating class speech

Medicine student Jana Ghulmiyyah spoke on behalf of the graduating class. She said: AUB did not only give us the knowledge we have today or the degrees that we hold; it was the community that we grew fond of belonging to. In a diverse student body, which is not so easily found in our part of the world, it taught us accommodation. Placing all its students on the same platform, it taught us justice and equality. It is here that we all learned how to communicate better, not only with our patients, but with each other. We learned how to empathize with others and how to become active members of our communities. It is here that we learned how to put our patients and their needs first. We learned how to persevere and work for our goals even when they felt forever out of reach. We learned that in order for us to become invaluable, we must reach far and beyond what is required of us.

The Honorary Doctorates

President Khuri then took the podium again saying that according to the authority vested in him by the university’s Board of Trustees, he is conferring the degree of doctor of humane letters, with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities pertaining thereto, to film-maker Nadine Labaki, writer Nassim Taleb and chemistry scientist Dr. Samir Zard. The three honorands received the degrees and were hooded by Interim Provost Dr. Muhamed Harajli. Each one of them then gave his acceptance speech.

Nadine Labaki

Commenting on the honorary degree and thanking AUB, President Khuri and the members of the Board of Trustees, Nadine Labaki said: I am deeply moved today to be receiving this honor from one the finest universities in our country...

“To tell you the truth, I have been blessed lately. This year has been amazing to me! Four months ago I had a beautiful little girl, two weeks ago I was running for municipal elections with Beirut Madinati (Many of whom by the way are AUB alumni and Faculty, just to tell how great this institution is), two days ago, I wrote the most important two words of my next script: The END and now I’m here receiving this honor from the university I have so long been impressed by” she added.

“This beautiful degree that i am so honored to receive I share with you, my sister, my mother, my husband and my two children (Walid and Mayroun), the beautiful doctors of my life. You allow me to believe everyday that anything is possible”, Labaki ended.

Samir Zard

In his turn, Zard said: Mr. President Khuri, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, and Fellow Honorees, let me first of all say that this distinction fills me with immense pride and gratitude. My heartfelt thanks go to the President and Trustees of the AUB for bestowing upon me this greatest of honors, and to my colleagues of the Department of Chemistry who have nominated me.

“The AUB has always been very dear to my heart, ever since I was admitted in 1971 as a free-auditor summer student. This was at the instigation of the late Professor Suheil Bushrui, of the Department of English Literature and a friend of our family”, he added.

“I should now like to conclude by extending my warmest congratulations to all the young AUB graduates and their proud parents on this very special sesquicentennial commencement ceremony. It is said that you cannot put an old head on young shoulders. I will, nevertheless, add to my congratulations the wise advice of Sir Winston Churchill, the great man himself, who said: “The only guide to a man is his conscience; the only shield to his memory is the rectitude and sincerity of his actions. It is very imprudent to walk through life without this shield, because we are so often mocked by the failure of our hopes and the upsetting of our calculations; but with this shield, however the fates may play, we march always in the ranks of honor.” So, young

graduates make the best of your lives and of the education you have received and march always in the ranks of honor”, Zard ended.

Nassim Taleb

For his part Taleb said: This is the first commencement I have ever attended (I did not attend my own commencement). Further, I have to figure out how lecture you on success when I do not feel successful yet –and it is not a false modesty.

“Success requires absence of fragility. I’ve seen billionaires terrified of journalists, wealthy people who felt crushed because their brother in law got very rich, academics with Nobel who were scared of comments on the web. The higher you go, the worse the fall. For almost all people I’ve met, external success came with increased fragility and a heightened state of insecurity. The worst are those “former something” types with 4 page CVs who, after leaving office, and addicted to the attention of servile bureaucrats, find themselves discarded: as if you went home one evening to discover that someone suddenly emptied your house of all its furniture”, he added.

“I discovered along the way that the economists and social scientists were almost always applying the wrong math to the problems, what became later the theme of The Black Swan. Their statistical tools were not just wrong, they were outrageously wrong –they still are”, he said.

After that, President Khuri and the Deans distributed the degrees to 510 graduates:

Medicine 88

MA / MS 410

PhD 12

Saturday’s Ceremony

Further to this ceremony, AUB will be holding its graduation ceremony for undergraduates on Saturday at 7:30 pm where 1566 undergraduates will receive their degrees. Ceremony speaker will be film-maker Nadine Labaki.

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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