

For Immediate Release



## **AUB panel recommends best course for Arab democracy roadmap**

Beirut, Lebanon- 21/05/2012 -Local and international experts converged on the American University of Beirut on May 18, 2012 to brainstorm over developing a roadmap to democracy for the Arab world.

Organized by AUB and the Global Development Network (GDN), and entitled 'The Road to Democracy: the Arab Region, Latin America and Eastern Europe', a panel of experts met in College Hall to discuss the recent regional events in the context of the quest for Arab democracy.

"Our region is witnessing a unique historical experience ushered by the events of Tunisia and Egypt," said Samir Makdisi, AUB Professor Emeritus of Economics. "While each region has its own unique historical experiences, there are lessons to be learned in both the similarities and differences to face the upcoming challenges."

AUB Provost Ahmad Dallal noted that throughout the world people "are raising their voices, including the United States and Europe, in demand for liberty, equality and justice." He added: "With comprehensive reforms demanded, how can the Arab revolutions succeed in light of their legal complexities, dynastic and tribal traditions and monotheistic religions?"

"This isn't simply a panel meeting but a brainstorming event on a very polemic topic," Gerardo della Paolera, GDN president.

"The three main lessons learned from past experiences are the prioritization of the rule of law, reforming the constitutions and ensuring the security system review," said Pr Boris Vujcic, Croatia National Bank deputy director and GDN board of directors. "The economic outcomes are much easier to predict than the political ones, with firstly a slump in GDP and then a gradual rebound but which can take many years to materialize."

"The Latin American experience was significantly different than the Eastern European and Arab cases," said Pr. Torcuato Di Tella, ambassador of Argentina to Italy. "Whereas the economy of the latter regions went from state-controlled towards privatization, in the Latin American region they moved from extreme neo-liberalism and privatization towards state intervention and protectionism."

"The story is changing everyday in Egypt whereas in the past everything used to be static and predictable," said Noha El-Mikawy, The Ford Foundation regional representative for Middle East and North Africa. "At this stage, we truly do not know who will be ruling Egypt next week."

“The 3 prime movers for the Tunisian revolution were the economic situation, political corruption and technology in the form of the social media proliferation,” said Moaz Labidi, professor of economics at the University of Monastir, Tunisia. “We are now faced with two choices: Either we change the political speech to enhance investments and better the economy or we stay with the radical speech for election purposes and internal political gains.”

Makdisi noted that what applies regionally may not apply, at least with equal measure, to individual countries within each region. While common elements of their democratic transitions may be discerned, each country has its distinctive political and historical experiences that helped shape, or will help shape, their own transformation process.

Makdisi also highlighted the fact that the defining problems of transition confronting the Arab World comprise, among others, abundant oil wealth, a high level of regional conflicts, including the unresolved Arab/Israeli conflict and geopolitical/sectarian conflicts, rising levels of youth unemployment, distorted development, political repression and lagging international development.

“The Arab World is witnessing a sheer epic human drama, with the challenges going beyond political and economical change to dealing with fundamental issues of statehood,” said Rami Khouri, director of the Issam Fares Institute at AUB and panel moderator. “The Arabs want all their demands addressed simultaneously and not sequentially as was the case in most other places, and are demanding change right now, without any prioritization.”

ENDS

**For more information please contact:**

Maha Al-Azar, Associate Director for Media Relations, [ma110@aub.edu.lb](mailto: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](http://www.aub.edu.lb)

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

Twitter: [http://twitter.com/AUB\\_Lebanon](http://twitter.com/AUB_Lebanon)