

For Immediate Release



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AUB Conference on refugees **examines inclusion and social cohesion**

In partnership with the Embassy of Canada to Lebanon, The American University of Beirut (AUB) Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) held a conference addressing “Refugees and Social Cohesion: How to Reduce Social Tensions in Lebanon,” convening experts and civil society actors from multiple sectors to concentrate on policies and programs related to refugees.

The one-day conference brought together government officials, journalists, think tank experts, policy makers, academics, and members of various NGOs to discuss the issue of radicalization, the situation of refugees in Lebanon, and the impacts of programming designed to improve social cohesion.

Director of the Issam Fares Institute, Dr. Tarek Mitri, opened the conference with a speech focused on Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees and urged that ethical considerations should be paramount when addressing refugee issues.

"It is true that Lebanon is facing problems as a result of the Syrian asylum, which cannot be denied, and that national and international policies are insufficient in dealing with them," said Mitri. "It is also true that mobilizing the Lebanese against the Syrians and turning the call for their return into something like calling for their deportation is unethical behavior that warns of great dangers. This behavior does not facilitate a safe return, but rather greatly harms, materially and morally, both the Lebanese and the Syrians."

Canadian Ambassador Emmanuelle Lamoureux also spoke at the opening ceremony and noted that, over the past two years, Canada has been implementing its strategy for the region with an approach based on diversity and inclusion. This strategy includes investing \$2 billion in concrete

efforts such as humanitarian support to refugees, development assistance to host communities, counter-terrorism efforts, and programs to assist stabilization and peace in vulnerable areas.

“When we build diverse and inclusive teams, supporting diverse and inclusive projects, we promote a peaceful coexistence between host and refugee communities, which in turn leads to social cohesion and prosperity for both,” said Lamoureux. “This is how we will be able to win, collectively, the fight against radicalization and hatred and contribute, in our modest way, to a safer and more peaceful region and world.”

Representing Lebanon’s Minister of State for Displaced Affairs Mouin Merhebi, his legal advisor, Safwan Mostapha, highlighted the need for fair and non-discriminatory media coverage of refugees in Lebanon.

“The fight against extremism requires a balanced media policy, which unites and does not divide, which broadcasts social awareness and rejects the discourse of racism and hatred,” said Mostapha. “It emphasizes the dignity of the displaced under the rule of law until safe return to their home.”

Throughout the rest of the conference, diverse panels focused on the factors of radicalization, refugees in Lebanon, and activities that support social cohesion. The first panel aimed at analyzing the concept of radicalization in order to better understand it and ultimately counter it. The second panel delved into the specific situation of refugees in Lebanon and included Mireille Girard, country representative of the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, among others.

The final panel of the day saw presentations on five projects that promote social inclusion through active programming and direct interventions in the Lebanese context. These included projects such as engaging Syrian and Lebanese women to promote social stability in the Beqaa; supporting inclusive and participatory governance in Northern Lebanon; and empowering youth in Tripoli, Saida, and the Beqaa.

ENDS

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Note to Editors

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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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