

For Immediate Release



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## **Forum at AUB discusses global health challenges** **in low- and middle-income countries**

Aiming to explore innovative approaches to global health challenges in low- and middle-income countries, most of which are geographically located in the Global South, the Global Health Institute (GHI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) collaborated with the Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) to organize the first biennial Global Health Forum.

According to GHI, the past decades have witnessed significant strides in global health, yet around two-thirds of total deaths worldwide are attributed to preventable and treatable diseases, with the highest burden found in low- and middle income countries (LMICs) and among women and children. Innovative approaches and technologies play a vital role in saving lives, improving overall health outcomes around the world, and achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations.

AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri spoke at the forum's opening ceremony saying, "I grew up believing that the people of this country and the region were no less capable than any other region, but there is a glaring gap in health professionals, not in number... there are too many MDs, but there aren't enough high quality health professionals for this region." He continued, "The region is struggling to understand what public health folks do. They are struggling to understand what anyone other than a doctor or a nurse does, and health is beyond that. Health is not just healing the sick, health is keeping populations healthy."

Policymakers, global health professionals, academics, professionals from the private sector, and stakeholders from various disciplines attended the Global Health Forum, which was an open platform for them to evaluate and anticipate global health challenges pertaining to LMICs. It also allowed them to exhibit innovative ideas and practical cases of innovations in global health either originating in or applicable to the LMIC context. Participants at the forum also discussed

initiatives and approaches addressing six of the 17 SDGs, including good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, industry innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, and partnerships for the goals.

United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon Philippe Lazzarini spoke at the event saying, “While the world has made remarkable progress on several fronts in health, many challenges remain. Among them is addressing disparities between people’s health in stable countries and the health of people living in fragile and vulnerable settings, and health disparities within countries.”

Lazzarini also talked about SDG 3, to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages,” which contains thirteen targets including the goal of universal health. He added that achieving SDGs in low- and middle-income countries “will require bold leadership from states and the engagement of development partners, civil society, academia and the private sector.” He continued, “We must therefore recalibrate and amplify our efforts, or we will not even come close to reaching many of the health-related targets by 2030.”

In his comment about the event and collaborating with AUB’s GHI, Founding Executive Director at CUGH Keith Martin said, “This is an incredible moment in time for Lebanon to take a leadership role in the MENA region to address some of the big challenges affecting not only this region, but the world, and particularly building effective and stable health systems to address non-communicable diseases, environmental health, and other challenges. This is an incredible collection of people from over 20 countries around the world, that have come together to deal with these challenges in a pragmatic way.”

In his remark, Dr. Shadi Saleh, GHI founding director and associate vice president for health affairs said, “The frequency, severity and significance of global health challenges underscored the necessity for an action plan. The Global Health Forum joining international experts will be held biennially and will constitute a platform to raise global health issues and craft collective recommendations and effective strategies.”

“We at CUGH are delighted that AUB is a partner member institution,” said Martin. He added that Dr. Saleh is the first representative from the MENA region on CUGH’s board and said, “we are honored that that is the case, and we look forward to working with AUB and the Global Health Institute into the future to deal with challenges that not only affect Lebanon and the MENA region, but the world.”

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Text by Sally Abou Melhem  
Writer  
Office of Communications  
American University of Beirut

**For more information please contact:**

Simon Kachar  
Director of News and Media Relations  
Mobile: (+961) 3-427-024  
Office: (+961) 1-374-374 ext: 2676  
Email: [sk158@aub.edu.lb](mailto:sk158@aub.edu.lb)

**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 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 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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