

For Immediate Release



## **AUB celebrates its historic Main Gate as it approaches its 150th anniversary**

Beirut, Lebanon - 20/10/2015 - Pride, mixed with nostalgia, was the dominant sentiment at AUB's celebration of its iconic Main Gate as the university approaches its 150th year of its foundation. In a special ceremony marking the renovation of Main Gate followed by the opening of an exhibition entitled "AUB's Main Gate" on Monday, AUB marked the completion of the first of a series of preservation and campus beautification initiatives.

The principal entrance to AUB, known as the Main Gate, was recently renovated and restored through a generous gift made by an AUB alumnus, Consul Karam G. Tannous Doumet (BBA 1978, MBA 1980) to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the university in 2016. Mr. Doumet served as a founding member of the Worldwide Alumni Association of AUB (WAAAUB)'s Board of Directors and Executive Committee and is a long-standing member of the Mount Lebanon Chapter's Board of Directors and the Honorary Consul for Ecuador to Lebanon.

Alongside the gate, other works were completed such as the reconditioning of the Plaza Garden and the addition of new stone benches and electrical fixtures that further allow the space to serve as the first meet and relax outdoor hub upon entering through the gate.

Established in 1901, the Main Gate has served as a passage and facade looking onto the rush of Bliss Street on the outside while witnessing the lush campus and generations of students on the inside. The main entrance to AUB is in fact a building that was designed by a world renowned American designer and architect, Edward Pearce Casey (1864-1940), noted for his work in Washington, D.C. and New York City and responsible for the design and interior decoration of the oldest building of the famous Library of Congress, the Jefferson Building, among other projects.

In his remarks in front of the newly renovated Main Gate and in the presence of several dignitaries, members of the board and diplomats, AUB President Fadlo R. Khuri illustrated "It is so important that our monumental opening remains in shape to welcome generations of AUB students, alumni, faculty, and staff, long after all of us gather here today; this institution was not designed specifically for the era of the 1860s or the 1900s when famine struck Lebanon and this was often the only refuge for generations of people where they can be treated fairly and well, irrespective of their race, creed, or national origin, or even at the civil war when again this campus was really an oasis of normality, peace, justice, and progress in the whole region, but it will remain so in the next 150 years and beyond because of what it and this university stand for: an icon of liberal progressive thought from the intellectual, spiritual, economic and the socially transformative perspective." "So just as Main Gate, and in greater sense AUB, has transformed so many lives because of its openness,

we need to keep that openness and that entry in a constant state of welcome for generations to come.”

Considered a key symbol of AUB, alongside College Hall and its clock tower, the Main Gate has changed functions over time. It was first known as the Gate House since it housed the President's Office as well as a reception room for visitors, perhaps indicating the readiness and willingness of the University to engage with its surroundings and its community.

Speaking of his donation for this cause, Consul Karam Doumet said in his remarks, “I had the opportunity to do something for AUB and I took it, not because I felt that I have to give anything back to my Alma Mater - AUB never asked for anything from us and what AUB has given me is for life, and is invaluable - but simply because what I did gave me a sense of satisfaction. I advise and encourage all to try it. Approach AUB and ask what you can do for your university and believe me you won't regret it. It will make you feel proud regardless of how important or how modest that action may be.”

The crowd then proceeded to AUB West Hall for the opening of a four-day exhibition at the Mahmoud Malhas Common Room. “The exhibit includes some incredible collections of documents, letters, photographs, diaries, as well oral history interviews and other types of material from the University Libraries that recount the history of the Gate and reveal the impact it had and continues to have on the members of the University and the society at large,” said Dr. Lokman Meho, director of the AUB University Libraries. “Over the years, hundreds of Lebanese, Arab, Middle Eastern, and world leaders, pioneers, scientists, CEOs, and very well-known engineers, doctors, and scholars went through this Gate or gathered or sat at its stairs during their years at AUB. In short, it was and continues to be a cultural, social, historical, and political, landmark in Beirut, Lebanon, and the region as a whole.”

The exhibit outlines the following titles: Gates and their significance (a historical and architectural overview of gates, triumphal arches, and city gates); 1901-1902: Main Gate Building: Planning, Architecture, and Function (a look into the planning, funding, choice of architect, location of the building, and more); A Gate that has seen it All! A Witness to AUB's times! (an overview of some key events that the Main Gate has witnessed since 1902 until the present); and Main Gate in their Own Words (a collection of essays about the Main Gate written by the students and members of the AUB community).

“Let's enjoy our gate, let's preserve it, and let's try to take heed from this Gate as a sobering presence, as an antidote to any attempt to forget the richness, complexity, dynamism of the very community this Gate has helped create and nurture, within the intra-mural campus as well as the extra-mural space of the neighborhood and the city,” said Dr. Kaoukab Chebaro, Assistant Professor and Associate University Librarian for Archives and Special Collections, in her remarks at the ceremony.

The job has been done. The Main Gate has been preserved with the look and presence it was originally founded on and - except for 10 days when the gate had to close for health concerns as it was sandblasted - the gate that stood strong for over 114 years continued to welcome AUB's students, academics, staff, and visitors during its renovation which ended well ahead of schedule. “It was a delicate and difficult task,” commented Consul Doumet, “AUB has many other gates but closing this one even temporarily was not an option.” When asked informally

“Why Main Gate?” Mr. Doumet spoke from the heart and of the heart, “The answer is simple. AUB is so close to the heart, and the shortest way to it is its gate. Main Gate.”

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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 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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