

For Immediate Release



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AUB Issam Fares Institute Building receives Aga Khan Award for Architecture

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) building on the American University of Beirut (AUB) Green Oval, designed by the late Dame Zaha Hadid, has been awarded a prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA) for 2016.

The dramatic modernist design was one of 348 nominated projects, and among 19 shortlisted for the award, which is given out every three years for projects setting new standards of excellence in architecture, planning practices, historic preservation and landscape architecture.

Through its efforts, the AKAA seeks to identify and encourage building concepts that successfully address the needs and aspirations of societies across the world, in which Muslims have a significant presence.

The awards ceremony will be held in the Al-Jahili Fort in Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates, in November. Dr. Tarek Mitri, Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, will be present to receive the award on behalf of AUB and the Institute.

The citation for the IFI building—one of six winners, including two from Bangladesh, and one each from China, Denmark, Iran and Lebanon—described it as a “new building, radical in composition but respectful of its traditional context”.

It was inaugurated in May 2014, in the presence of Dame Zaha, who declared in her inauguration speech that “the design establishes the institute as a crossroads; a three-dimensional intersection and space for the University’s students, faculty, researchers and visitors to meet, connect and engage with each other and the wider community.”

“The Institute’s work looks to the future and challenges us all, enriching our understanding of the Arab world by expanding research and broadening debate,” she said.

Heavy, transparent presence

Dame Zaha's design significantly reduced the building's footprint by "floating" a reading room, a conference room and research spaces above the entrance courtyard in the form of a 21-meter-long cantilever in order to preserve the existing flora and landscape.

“It was conceived as to be a very heavy, very present building on the outside, but on the inside the whole thing is transparent which reflects the idea of a think-tank; think tanks are always transparent, full of ideas and exchange,” said architect Saleem Jalil who was supervisor of the project.

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs was found in 2006, with the goal of enhancing and broadening public policy-related debate and knowledge production in the Arab world.

AUB held an invited competition for the design of IFI's campus home, which was won by Dame Zaha, a former student of AUB as well as the recipient of an honorary degree in 2006. She died after a short illness in March 2016, aged 65, and her loss was mourned worldwide for the huge impact she had had on late 20th and 21st century architecture.

The institute provides as space for interaction among scholars, officials and civil society actors, while disseminating knowledge that is accessible to policy-makers, media, research communities and the general public.

Its policy research areas include refugee research, international affairs, climate change and environment, social justice and development, education and youth, and many more.

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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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