

For Immediate Release



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AUB conference addresses “Practical Solutions for the Waste Crisis” and launches Arabic version of Solid Waste Management Guide

the American University of Beirut (AUB) Nature Conservation Center (NCC), in cooperation with the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI), organized at the Institute's Auditorium this morning in AUB, a conference entitled "Practical Solutions to the Waste Crisis".

During the conference the Arabic version of the Household Solid Waste Management Guide at the Municipal Level was launched, in the presence of a number of environmental activists and experts as well as representatives of municipalities and stakeholders.

In his opening address, IFI director Dr. Tarek Mitri, said that "the waste problem is evidence of the state's incapability and failure to perform its duty in solving this crisis". He added: "The management of solid waste has uncovered the problem of rampant corruption in all state facilities". He said: "The bickering between political forces around the subject of waste has obscured it, making it more difficult to understand by ordinary citizens, and the unclear interpretations of the experts and environmental activists have confused us instead of being helpful".

Dr. Mitri explained: "The presentation prepared by the AUB task force is intended to help those who are in a position of responsibility in the municipalities to form a clearer and more informed vision of the matter".

NCC Director and AUB professor of chemistry Dr. Najat Saliba spoke next. She highlighted the hazards of random waste because of its harmful emissions. She addressed the issue of waste burning, the correct techniques for it and the required equipment maintenance as well as the need to gauge these emissions, as well as the use of appropriate filters to reduce them. She pointed out to a WHO warning that emissions from waste burning in Lebanon exceed by dozens of times the normal accepted rate, saying that particles emitted due to waste burning pile up in the air and result in diseases and sometimes death. She advised the adoption of a half-centralized solution

for waste treatment at the municipalities or district levels, due to the high cost of treatment, which, she said, may be beyond the ability of many municipalities, particularly the small ones.

Mr. Farouk Merhebi, Director of AUB's Department of Environmental Health, Safety and Risk Management (EHSRM), proposed three scenarios for waste treatment at the level of municipal groupings: small groupings (10 tons per day), medium groupings (10-30 tons per day) and large groupings (30-100 tons per day). All three scenarios included the sorting of waste preferably at the source, sorting in centers, composting organic waste, recycling what can be recycled and using the rest as hygienic landfill. He said that the processing technology varied with the quantities to be processed.

Dr. May Massoud, Associate Professor in AUB's Department of Environmental Health, explained the challenges in the management of solid waste, pointing out that "the major challenges are in the lack of legislation that provides clear-cut principles for the management of this waste". She pointed out the poor performance of authorities in this domain, the financial shortfall, the issue of recovering the cost of waste treatment, and the lack of qualified human resources and public-private partnerships to manage this issue. Finally she spoke of the lack of public awareness of the importance and methods of sorting waste at the source and the sustainability of the solid waste management system.

Finally, AUB's civil and environmental engineering department assistant professor Dr. Majdi Abu Najm described three projects funded by the British government for the treatment of solid waste in the Bekaa and in North Lebanon. He said these projects are based on the involvement of civil society in the proposed solutions and on the attempt to create jobs for the people of the localities involved".

Dr. Abu Najm pointed out that "the projects include a review of existing and planned projects in the areas concerned, taking into account their absorptive capabilities and the solid waste management plan with sound environmental tests". He said that "the project has presently launched and was planned after conducting an economic feasibility study taking into consideration the cost and the creation of employment opportunities through recycling and composting".

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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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