

President's Club Reception

November 23, 2016

President Fadlo R. Khuri, MD Remarks

Good evening. I forgot my speech upstairs, and even when I have my speeches, Mrs. Khalaf, Dr. Khalaf is a very tough act to follow, so I learned that over the course of this year. But I like very much the emphasis on excellence, on liberal education, and on citizenship as a guide to how the year has gone. This was one of the first significant speeches I had the opportunity to give last year, and I made a mistake of not taking notes, and I left out our prime minister who is a good friend by not having notes to remember what it is I had said. So today, I am going better, try to remember what I am saying. So I want to bring those last 15 months down to those three categories, and I will talk to you about some of the things that we've done.

So, from the perspective of excellence, there are many ways to measure excellence, but excellence is one of those things that you instinctively recognize when you see it. And we have had a very good year from that perspective, from the appointment of AUB's oldest college, which is the Faculty of Arts and Sciences' first female dean, Dr. Nadia El Cheikh, a world-renown historian (Applause) who has already energized the Faculty of Arts and Sciences with her vision, to the substantial improvement that you will all recognize in the world rankings of universities. No other university in the top 250 or 300 improved as much as we did. And more meaningfully, I will let you in on some embargoed information if you can just keep it quiet for the next 24 hours, on Thanksgiving Day, QS will announce that I believe we're the only Arab university in that prospective employers rank in the top 100 universities in the world (Applause). So, the most important mark of our excellence is the quality of our graduates. So let me talk a little bit about those graduates' excellence. From participating in the sports tournament that the President's Club so nicely sponsored and showing sportsmanship and athleticism, and I want to thank LAU for knocking out the super athletically gifted kids from AUC or we wouldn't have won the football final, which for me those are the most meaningful finals, to demonstrating grace under pressure in helping build new schools for Syrian refugees and continuing to teach at both, the Palestinian and Syrian refugee campus, teaching all over Lebanon, and helping build new portable schools in the Beqa'a that can be transported to Syria when peace finally comes to Syria. I think our students have shown both, their excellence and their citizenship.

I want to talk about excellence in another kind, and excellence in citizenship. So all of you know that last year, about four weeks after we met here, our students had the first free and fair student elections in a period when other campuses had some paralysis. And shortly after that, those same students, despite their political disagreements, got together and developed new guidelines for student elections. Those new guidelines were implemented this year, and this year we had student elections based on proportionality, which meant that the students were running based on their ideas and their principles, as opposed to individual popularity. I think it is very impressive for me when young people can run based on political issues, can debate one another, and at the end of the day, not one person raises their hand or even their finger to another in violence. That is the kind of excellence, the kind of citizenship that we aspire to as a society, and I want to say, I was especially impressed that after the Lebanese elections and then the US elections, people here took the elections in stride. It's very impressive to meet one of my most senior leaders; EVP Sayegh brought me the announcements from Harvard, and I've seen the announcements from Emery and from other institutions in which they reached out to their student body and said "let's talk about the elections, let's figure out how we digest it". We didn't have to send that type of announcement because our

students understand instinctively that democracy has unpredictable results. So our students in that are showing excellence and maturity of a real kind.

I also want to talk about excellence in scholarship. This year, at the Centre National Pour Recherches Scientifiques, forgive my terrible French accent, we will have three of our scholars recognized for scientific excellence: Dr. Najat Saliba who is amply named, because she is Al Najat for Scientific Research that is intended to give the major policy makers an ability to study the effects of harmful pollutants to the environment; Dr. Ali Taher who has along with First Lady Mona Hrawi championed the cause of patients with thalassemia who are among the least fortunate members of our society; and Dima Jamali who has been a champion of corporate social responsibility. All will be recognized by the government as extraordinary scholars and servant leaders. And that goes to our next aspect which is citizenship.

At its core, AUB is an institution that seeks to instill the values of servant leadership, of citizenship, of concern for those less fortunate. You see that in the actions of our faculty and our students and our staff every day, and we see that in the commitment of the President's Club to make meaningful impact that helps those less fortunate. Our goal, as we've said, is nothing less, and I am sure we won't achieve it during my tenure, than to become a truly need-blind institution. The greatest institutions in the world are genuinely need-blind, so that means that our students who apply shouldn't be worried about whether or not they or their parents can pay; they should simply worry about: Are they outstanding students? Are we a good fit for them? And, will they leave this institution determined to make the world a better place? That ethos is typified by many of the leaders who've taken positions from AUB in the Arab world, in Asia, in Europe, and have gone on to show this a form of servant leadership. That's what we aspire to. We are not just a school that teaches kids to go out and do a good job. We are a school whose goal is to produce outstanding leaders.

So, as part of that excellence, this was the first year where we had a major gift to name our first department, and I am very grateful for the Bassatne Family who named the Department of Chemical Engineering, Chemical Petroleum Engineering, a department that will be able to study other means of generating energy and produce leaders for tomorrow among the faculties and among the students. For AUB, that's a first. So, that's something that shows leadership, that shows citizenship. And I am hoping in the next few months, it will be able to announce other tremendous partnerships because I am coming back from a meeting with the Board of Trustees and our senior leadership that culminated in a wonderful retreat, and there I want to talk about the value of liberal education in emboldening and empowering future generations. At that meeting, we posited that our Board, which is as distinguished and accomplished a board as I've ever seen, including the leadership of the finest universities of the world, needed to transform their thinking from being donors to partners. Partners in something greater than education, but partners in building an enterprise that could develop the citizenry, the leaders of the future, not just for Lebanon, but for all of the Arab world because this is what one of the less peaceful advocates of common citizenry once said; Che Guevara once said that we are one people, and he was speaking about the entire scope of Latin America. I believe that all we Arabs are one people. We are one people with common aspirations, and this is the leading university, not just in Lebanon, but in the Arab world to teach citizenry, to teach the fact that it should not be a gift of charity to look out and see that the Syrian refugees are in an extraordinarily difficult situation, or the people in the South of Lebanon, or the extreme North East have far less opportunity than we do in Beirut. But we should realize that this is both a moral obligation and an economic opportunity. A moral obligation because those of us who have more

should always be concerned about those who have less, which I think is the pretty model of the President's Club, and an economic opportunity because many of us in this family, that is the University, this is a university that is closer to a family than any other institution of higher learning I know, understand that this institution has transformed our lives and it has given us opportunity, so we should in turn long to take that opportunity to transform the lives of others.

These are the things that led the Board, as our partners, not just of the administration, but of the faculty, to agree to restore tenure. These are the principles that have led our great faculty leadership agree to work to build a better tomorrow, not just for those of us within the walls, but those outside the walls. AUB at its greatest was an institution that impacted not only its students and faculty and staff and Ras Beirut and Lebanon, but all of the Arab world. And that is our goal. Our goal is to be a university that, with all of your help, can help change the discourse on citizenship, on knowledge, on responsibility, and on research and our society. Anything less than that, and I am going to admit failure. And if I have one quality, the medical students ask me what quality do you have, it's sometimes hard to remember if you have any good qualities, which if not for Mohamad El-Hout whose MEA planes I've been on probably as much as I've been in Marquand House this year, I might not remember, but fortunately that was a comfortable ride, and I think the quality that I have, that this University has, that all of you have, is resilience. It is remarkable what people who decide to pursue something, not for their personal advantage, but because they genuinely believe that it is important, can do. This University has really moved more than mountains, it has move an entire world. Three hundred and seventy million Arabs are our responsibility, but our responsibility is beyond the Arab world. Our responsibility is also on the discourse of different cultures.

Last year, almost exactly this day, I was asked in New York if we were concerned that we will graduate students who will be leaders of ISIS or other extreme organizations. And what I said is that, while we graduate people who are communist or Arabist or capitalist or Lebanonist or any or all of the above, what we do better than any institution in the world is graduating people who do not have fear of the other, who understand what it is like to reach across the aisle, to work with people that they initially thought looked different than they were. So this year, I think the belief in our role as a great accultural institution, an institution that acculturates people, that socializes individuals so they lose their fear of the other, was reinforced with the largest grant in our history from MasterCard for about \$27M, with the enormous commitment from the Al Ghorayr Foundation which focuses on STEM education for Arabs, got us 50 brand new students starting in beginning of the year, with gift after gift from partners, and that's the way I think of the President's Club. I think of you like I think of my deans; I think of you as our partners. This is a grand enterprise that you're undertaking. We cannot tell today if we shall succeed. It is possible we will be widely successful and this speech will seem silly and inflated, or we will fail, and this will seem like more feathering of ambitions. I don't believe that latter as possible, I believe that we can together, as partners, transform this city, this country, and this world. I can promise you nothing other than our faculty, staff, and students sweat equity. If we fail, it won't be for lack of effort, and I know the same is absolutely true of the members of the President's Club.

So thank you not just for all the great work that you've done: the sports tournament, the refurbishing of the Library, the great work at AREC, the wonderful exhibit on the Other, which I thought was perfect, showing that this remains one of the most diverse institutions in the world, but for all the tremendous work and the sweat equity that you will give us in the years to come.

Thank you very much!