



**AMERICAN
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OF BEIRUT**

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AUB Graduate Commencement 2024: An inspiration of hope and justice

And the Honorary Doctorate Degree Awarded to Abu-Sittah, Roy, and Walker

The American University of Beirut held its 155th commencement ceremony on June 7, 2024, for 697 graduate students. The traditional ceremony took place on the AUB Green Field among proud smiles, cheers, and well wishes by students, mentors, parents, and AUB administration.

"The failure of peoples, of nation states, of fairness and opportunity for all marks our paths historically," said AUB President Fadlo Khuri in his opening speech. "It is a failure of men, of leaders, of grand visions and their woeful implementations. But in the seeds of these failures, we can glean the well-disguised kernels that will one day sprout, lighting the path toward equitable progress."

Dr. Khuri called for following the path of "success earned the hard way, ultimate communal success all the more rewarding for having failed at it time and again." He added, "Fail with all your spirit, and learn from those failures, that your successes will one day carry your communities, societies and nations forward to better, more sustainable and inclusive futures."

Graduate student speakers for this year were Alaa Abou Chakra, a first lieutenant in the Internal Security Forces who maintained his full-time job while studying for his MA in public policy and international affairs from AUB and a BA in Law from the Lebanese University; and Lynn Kobeissi, who received her degree of Doctor of Medicine after her BS from AUB in biology and received multiple awards for her altruistic initiatives.

"Today, we are leaving a place where we always felt comfortable and safe," said Alaa Abou Chakra who spoke about the unexpected opportunities and challenges that led him to an unexpected AUB education. "I mean that sense of intangible moral security felt in this healthy environment of freedom and respect. Over the years, this environment has shown itself to be a place where not only free minds flourish, but also where future leaders are made."

Leen Kobeissy described AUB as an island that remains safe and functional in the face of challenges, yet one that is not isolated from the rest of the world and its concerns. "Amidst the ongoing fight for freedom of speech around the world, I am proud to be part of one of the few institutions in the Middle East that truly fosters this freedom," she said. "This freedom is the

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foundation of our growth both academically and personally, helping us not only become better students but also better citizens of the world, voices of change and advocates for justice.”

President Khuri then bestowed the university’s honorary doctorate degrees to this year’s honorands who represent the values and mission of AUB: Renowned plastic and reconstructive surgeon Ghassan Abu-Sittah, who for decades treated injured patients in war zones across the region; celebrated author, architect, actress, and activist Arundhati Roy, who has championed the pursuit of equitable societies in India and worldwide; and President of the Ford Foundation Darren Walker, who has had a transformative impact in the fields of global social justice and philanthropy.

As commencement keynote speaker, Arundhati Roy questioned how concepts such as capitalism, western liberal democracies, and the “true barometer of brilliance or human worth” have materialized today, drawing parallels between the choices faced by the people in Gaza, India, and the US in the face of a loss of a “moral compass.”

“We live in difficult times,” said Roy who discussed issues such as apartheid, genocide, and injustice seen around the world, from her native India to the current war on Gaza. “However hypocritical western democracies have been in upholding their own values, those values in and of themselves are important.”

“Since I am speaking to an audience of students in a country that has risked a lot to stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Gaza, let’s express our solidarity with people who have marched, as well as students and faculty on college campuses, in the US and Europe who have defied their governments and come out in their thousands to protest,” Roy added, inspiring a new cohort of AUB alumni ready to lead in service. “Looks like the lot of us—students, writers, fighters, workers, human beings—have plenty of work to do.”

ENDS

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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 750 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 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 365-bed hospital.

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