



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Beirut, October 16, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The American University of Beirut Honors Dr. Ismail Sukkarieh in Recognition of Distinguished Service

A ceremony was organized by the American University of Beirut (AUB) and its Faculty of Medicine to honor Dr. Ismail Sukkarieh for his distinguished service at the university and his advocacy for health as a human right. Numerous former students and patients, colleagues, and collaborators from various academic, professional, and geographic areas came to AUB's Issam Fares Hall to join in recognizing Dr. Sukkarieh's contributions to advance medical service, equality, and the general well-being of communities around Lebanon.

Dr. Ismail Sukkarieh is a physician specializing in digestive system diseases and endoscopy, and was a politician and former member of the Lebanese Parliament for Baalbeck and Hermel in the Bekaa for the 1996 and 2005 sessions. In 1997, he established the National Health Authority and its academic health association signatory program, "Health as Right and Dignity." He served as vice president of the Lebanese Physicians Syndicate between 1992 and 1994 and was a member of several boards. He is also the author of three books and the recipient of many awards, including the Arab Physicians Union's appreciation award and the shield of the Lebanese Order of Physicians.

"Our honoring of Ismail Sukkarieh reaches far beyond the medical track, into the realm of human rights, social justice, and citizenship," said Dr. Fadlo Khuri, AUB president, in a recorded message. "For three decades and beyond, inside and outside of parliament, Dr. Sukkarieh has fought purposely for the right of every individual to access health and dignity."

After receiving his bachelor's in medicine and surgery from Cairo University in 1974, Sukkarieh pursued further studies at AUB, King's College, and Columbia University to specialize in gastroenterology and endoscopy. Throughout his work that followed, from medical and academic to political and social, he was keen to bridge medical practice and research with the health needs of people in Lebanon and the region, as he continued to offer free medical treatment for more than 30 years.

Several colleagues from AUB and other universities spoke about the academic and professional career of Dr. Sukkarieh and the impact he has left on AUB and Lebanon.

Dr. Raymond Sawaya, the Raja N. Khuri Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and vice president for medical affairs at AUB, commended Dr. Sukkarieh's humanitarian work and excellence. "Today we honor Dr. Sukkarieh for his distinguished advocacy for health as a human right and for

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linking medicine to social justice in Lebanon. He is a role model who never misses an opportunity to remind us that health is a right and dignity.”

Dr. Kassem Barada, professor of medicine and head of the Division of Gastroenterology at AUBMC, spoke about Dr. Sukkarieh’s leadership over the years, championing AUB during difficult times. He also referred to Dr. Sukkarieh’s contribution as the first specialist in gastroenterology at AUB as well as his role in advancing endoscopy, adding that even as his interests expanded beyond the medical center, the foundations of his scientific presence have persisted and will continue to do so.

Dr. Samir Atweh, professor and former chairperson of the Department of Neurology at AUB, spoke about how their educational and career paths crossed until they both joined AUB in 1982. He also highlighted the humanitarian work that Dr. Sukkarieh insisted to maintain, defying various difficulties, saying, “Thank you, Ismail, for being the conscience and the voice of the people and for advocating the right to health. Thank you also for helping at the Department of Internal Medicine, when help was most needed.”

Dr. Iman Nuwayhid, professor of public health and environmental and occupational health and former dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at AUB, spoke about how Dr. Sukkarieh shouldered the responsibility to start initiatives without delay and that his unique approach to medicine exhibited a sincere and humanitarian purpose to serve. He added that Dr. Sukkarieh boldly used his access to policy making to make positive change, even if he was opposed by some. He utilized his knowledge in medicine to defend the human right to health and was always determined to show that progress in community health cannot be achieved without a solid and functional political system.

Dr. Christiane Saliba, professor at the Faculty of Public Health of the Lebanese University, spoke as a representative of the National Health Authority, which Dr. Sukkarieh heads. She noted that this event was an opportunity to express appreciation for Dr. Sukkarieh. She added that he was instrumental in showing that advocacy can take several forms and that the people’s worries should be everyone’s concern. In his work, she said, he demonstrated how a nation can only be sustainable when the right to health is safely accessed, without interference caused by personal or political interests.

Partners from outside AUB, students, peers, and patients gave their testimonials within a video about the initiatives Sukkarieh founded, and his powerful message that prioritized human dignity and equality in the right to health, inspiring generations of students in medicine, pharmacy, and public health.

“The only way to build a state of ‘homeland and citizen’ is to cultivate and revive a culture of citizenship that prioritizes rights—particularly health rights—and protects them with transparency, accountability, and responsibility,” said Dr. Ismail Sukkarieh before he explained the role of universities in graduating leaders of citizenship, referring to AUB President Khuri’s commitment to social justice and science in the service of all of Lebanon.

“No matter how often we raise the banner of health as a right and matter of dignity, all slogans fall in the face of someone who is in pain and has no access to treatment,” added Sukkarieh, who thanked all who believe in his message and supported his journey, and spoke about his lifelong commitment to the right to health and called for separating it from political considerations. “For a more accurate measure of our slogan’s credibility—no matter how noble—would be the action we take when faced with human need.”

With over 50 years of service, Dr. Ismail Sukkarieh is a staunch believer in equality of access to health and has advocated a culture of citizenship for a better future for the region and its people.

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 790 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 9000 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 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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