



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

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AUB's 160th Opening Ceremony: Living “In the Moment” Amid Pressure and Possibility

The American University of Beirut (AUB) inaugurated its 160th academic year with its annual opening ceremony on Monday, September 1, 2025. Trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends of the university gathered in Assembly Hall to mark the start of another year of scholarship, service, and discovery.

Following the official processional, Dr. Fadlo Khuri, AUB president, delivered his Opening Day address, this year titled “In the Moment.”

“Here in Lebanon, and here at AUB,” he said, “Embracing the present is often not a choice but a necessity. And yet, by bringing awareness and purpose to that moment, we gain insight, and with insight comes the strength to build.”

Khuri noted that pressure spares no one, whether a young student working late into the night, a professor in pursuit of answers to a research problem, a parent providing for their family, a family facing a serious illness, or a nation in turmoil. “The demands that pressure places on us do not just affect our lives, but often the future of those who follow,” he said.

He drew on the institution’s origins, recalling how missionary William McClure Thomson first proposed the idea of a college in Beirut in 1862, and how Daniel Bliss, AUB’s founding president, carried that vision through years of turmoil in both the United States and the Levant to launch the Syrian Protestant College in 1866.

“Picture it,” Khuri told the audience. “No grand Assembly Hall. No sweeping green overlooking the Mediterranean. Just a simple room, 16 young men eager to learn; a handful of distinguished faculty from the United States, Europe, and the Levant; and a president determined to seize the moment he had been given.”

“Bliss knew how to handle pressure,” Khuri continued. He explained that Bliss’ writings, “show that he had remarkable appreciation and skill for navigating the moment under strain.” He noted that the five years Bliss spent fundraising and seeking accreditation were marked by turbulence

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on both sides of the Atlantic: America consumed by civil war and the Levant engulfed in sectarian conflict.

“It was into this world of instability and suffering that Bliss carried his mission to establish an institution of higher education.” Khuri noted, “Yet he persevered and he was ready, willing, and determined to launch ‘his’ college.” He portrayed Bliss’s resilience as the product of personal loss and years of study and labor.

Khuri then recalled his own experience of pressure at a similar age, during his years at Emory University, and noted how AUB’s founders, like today’s leaders and students, were called to rise in moments of strain.

Reflecting on his decade as AUB’s president, Khuri acknowledged the immense challenges Lebanon and the university have faced — from economic collapse and political instability to the struggles of students and families. Yet he stressed that pressure has also been a catalyst for change. “For all we have endured, we are today a more excellent, inclusive, diverse, and distributed university,” he said. “We have not only survived the immense challenges thrown our way, but we have emerged more unified, more mission oriented, more palpably committed to that mission than we have been for some time.”

Khuri added that this renewed focus on AUB’s mission has left the institution “far more capable and far more prepared to serve our community and the nation we reside in, as well as the regions from which we draw our students and faculty.” But pressure, he continued, “can catalyze change. And whatever its source, some of that change is undeniably positive.”

As he closed, Khuri urged the community to embrace the year ahead not just with resilience but with presence. “As we step together into this new academic year, let’s embrace our moment fully, whether quiet or chaotic, whether ordinary or extraordinary,” he said. “Let us take the opportunities before us, learn from the pressures that shape us, and build, in every small and grand way, the future we imagine. Today, this moment, is very much ours to own.”

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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