

For Immediate Release



Beirut: 13-12-2016

Political thinker Dr. Ali Fakhro lectures on economics, democracy, and the Arab World at AUB

As part of the American University of Beirut (AUB) 150th anniversary Distinguished Lecture Series, Dr. Ali Fakhro, politician and thinker from Bahrain, gave a lecture in Arabic under the title of “Rethinking the Times and the Response of Education,” at the Maamari Auditorium at AUB Olayan School of Business.

Dr. Fakhro is an AUB alumnus who graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in 1958, to become Bahrain’s first qualified medical doctor. He also contributed to putting together the Bahraini constitution, was Minister of Health in the first Bahraini government, and then served as Minister of Education. He also was ambassador to both France and Belgium.

Dr. Fakhro writes and lectures on political, economic, and intellectual issues related to the Arab region and the world. Among the most prominent issues he's concerned with are: education in the Gulf countries, the need for comprehensive strategic thinking, and what he sees as the harmful adherence to globalized neoliberalism.

AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri introduced Dr. Fakhro in his opening speech, saying that he is one of AUB’s most notable and distinguished alumni. President Khuri emphasized the importance of education in light of recent events in the region.

“Over the ages education played a key role in the formation and development of societies, and that is not only through professions such as medicine and engineering, but through the humanities that teaches our students work ethics and humanitarian qualities,” said President Khuri.

In his lecture, Dr. Fakhro started by saying that AUB’s success is self-made and self-owned, through the efforts of the faculty and staff throughout the years.

“AUB has a great place in my past and plays a huge role in my achievements,” he said, “I am grateful for AUB for helping Bahrain to stand on its feet after gaining its independence from Britain, by educating the most prominent figures of that time.”

Dr. Fakhro argued that economics is not a science, but rather a collection of theories that tries to predict what will happen in the field. The most prominent example of this is the 2008 economic crisis, which the so-called science of economics could not predict.

Dr. Fakhro invited the world to review the concept of neoliberalism, which resulted in having one percent of the world’s population owning fifty percent of the global wealth. Dr. Fakhro considers that the shift from classical capitalism to neoliberalism has led to a poorer middle class and a richer super power.

According to him, “the market cannot moderate itself; we need the interference of the government when it comes to organizing the resources.” Dr. Fakhro proceeded to raise various points opposing Neoliberalism. One of them was the recent Silicon Valley take over, where digital and online companies are taking over the market as a whole.

“Bookshops have closed because of Amazon, pirating will kill traditional media, millions of jobs in TV and Cinema will be lost,” said Dr. Fakhro protesting the fact that online companies are now worth hundreds of billions of Dollars.

Fakhro criticized the current democratic systems, and invited people to differentiate between political democracy and economic democracy. “Having the right to vote does not mean your government shouldn’t interfere in the economy,” said Dr. Fakhro, calling for a fair and just distribution of wealth and resources in places such as the US.

Dr. Fakhro then turned his attention to the region, and saying that democracy was a new concept introduced to the Arab World during the Arab Spring.

“If you asked an Arab a few decades ago about Democracy, he’d tell you it was a bourgeois term coined by the West, and we have nothing to do with it, but now, democracy is the most used word in media outlets and among each other when we discuss politics.”

Dr. Fakhro is optimistic about the future of the Arab world, for he believes that with proper education and policy implementation the Arab region will reach democracy in its own way. According to him, Arabs will reach a phase where there is “Arab unity, democracy, national independence, sustainable development, human rights, and cultural renewing.”

Dr. Fakhro insists that education plays a huge role in shaping the future by preparing students to face the real world, and not only providing them with tools to use in the professional fields they major in.

“Faculty members should undergo training before teaching classes in order to know how to shape the future human, and should have a huge load of general information about the world,” Dr. Fakhro said.

The floor was then opened for questions from the audience, where Dr. Fakhro answered and discussed his views on economics, education, and the Arab World.

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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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