Telecom Minister to AUB students: Digital economy Lebanon's last chance to revive national economy

Beirut, Lebanon- 28/01/2013 – Telecommunications Minister Nicolas Sehnaoui delivered a motivational speech to AUB students in which he characterized the digital revolution as the tool to eliminate social differences and to revive the struggling Lebanese economy.

He also announced that his ministry is working to devise a law that will legalize voice over internet protocol (VoIP) or internet telephony, which will reduce the price of international calls. Moreover, the minister announced two competitions that are being launched by his ministry: One is dubbed "Be the minister," and tests contestants on their knowledge of the ministry's accomplishments and the other is a competition to encourage young Lebanese bloggers. The winner of the blogging competition will accompany the minister on his trip to Silicon Valley.

"In my virtual world they are no more blacks or brown, white or yellows, no more Shia, Sunni, Maronites or Hindus," Sehnaoui told students at the Olayan School of Business, following a tour of the American University of Beirut campus on January 28, 2013. "In my digital world you will only be judged by others for your character, your behavior...In my virtual world, there are no media corporations, no political sponsors, no foreign powers to teach you to hate the other guy, to capture your brain put it on a leash and feed you false information. In my virtual world you are not bonded by borders and frontiers, nor by the limited size of your country, nor by your wealth or the lack of it."

The special meeting with students attracted a full house at the OSB Maamari Auditorium. In addition to students, faculty members, senior administrators, and trustees also attended the event which was inaugurated by Rita Toubia-Khayat, vice-president for internet technology at AUB.

In his speech, Sehnaoui argued that Lebanon has the ideal conditions to succeed in developing digital technology as it possesses some of the most creative and innovative minds in the Middle East and has the highest ratio of engineers in the world. He noted that with the right infrastructure, which his ministry is working to set up, Lebanon can become competitive in software development and become a digital hub in the region.

"Digital economy is our unique chance – maybe the last – that can provide employment to our graduates and correct our dysfunctional economic model," said Sehnaoui. "It can put us at the center of the world's economy ... The Lebanese are one of the most creative and innovative people on the planet; but previously they had to leave the country –sometimes never to return – to perform. Now I argue that we can do it from here as efficiently. Instead

of leaving Lebanon we can sell our ideas and unleash our minds from right here, virtually and online."

In his concluding remarks, Sehnaoui told students that his generation counts on them to "dazzle the world" with high-tech solutions to many global problems. "Embrace the digital revolution. Make me right and make us proud," he said.

A special reception for Minister Sehnaoui was held at Marquand House, AUB President Peter Dorman's residence, following the minister's meeting with students.

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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 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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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