

Founder's Day  
December 4, 2006

I have the feeling that Daniel Bliss, Cornelius Van Dycke, George Post, and so many other founders are having a quiet laugh as they look down on us today. Even 140 years of surviving, growing, and prospering cannot assure that on one's birthday the stars will be aligned totally in one's favor.

The founders knew that, we know that, and while we may have wished for a more promising atmosphere in which to celebrate this, our 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary, celebrate it we shall.

There is the old adage, if it doesn't kill you, it will make you strong, and that has been true of AUB. Every generation has faced its crises, every generation has had its doubts. Yet, it seems to me, the university has always grown in strength and grown in respect. I was struck a few ago when I read the following passage by our former faculty member, John Munro, in his book, A Mutual Concern: the Story of the American University of Beirut. Here is what he wrote:

"In 1965, therefore, the AUB was already showing signs of the inherent weaknesses of its position. The more thoughtful of its friends were becoming less inclined to look back over its proud history for confirmation of its unique status, than to speculate just how much longer it could continue to uphold its integrity as an academic institution, and fulfill its role as a pace setter. The AUB was an anomaly, and its future was far from certain."

Forty-one years later I would venture that our future is certain and promising, but the path forward will never be easy. We have always struggled as an institution to shape our future and maintain the respect we and previous generations have painfully earned.

So whatever doubts these last painful months may have inspired in us, let us not lose sight of the big picture, of the full 140 years of achievement, of the solid foundations that have been laid for future greatness. There are thousands of people who believe in us, indeed who count on us to set the standards for higher education in this part of the world. Many of those believers have helped us reach a year early our target of a \$140 million in support of our programs and physical infrastructure. This success is unprecedented for AUB and perhaps for the region as a whole.

Thus there is much for which to be thankful, much that inspires hope for the future. Doubts may pour down upon us like rain, but AUB like the earth itself absorbs them and produces new fruit.

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So, on this Founders' Day it is appropriate to recall the faith of first founder, Daniel Bliss. In 1874 he wrote his wife Abby that he was going to England to raise funds and that he might miss the first Commencement on the new campus. "But, he wrote, "I will do it if it is needed to advance the good of this College, which will yet shape by its power all the Orient."

Each year in connection with Founders' Day we hold an essay contest for undergraduate students around a theme that reflects our core values. This year the theme is "AUB in National and Regional Crises".

Each year a faculty jury selects the winner of the essay contest. This year the jury consisted of Professors Patrick Mc Greevey, director of the Center for American Studies and Research, Dr. Thurayya Arayssi of the Faculty of Medicine, and Professor Salma Talhouk of the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences. I want to thank the members of the jury for carefully considering the twenty-two essays submitted in the contest and for selecting the winner.

The winner is Sara Mourad, a senior in the dept. of Political Studies and Public Administration. Sara please come forward to present the winning essay.

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It is a great pleasure, a great privilege, and a great honor for me to welcome back to AUB Dr. Marwan Muasher.

So much of what Marwan Muasher has so far done in his life—and he is only beginning—is important to AUB and its students. He himself was a student at AUB between 1972 and 1975, but as the situation deteriorated here, he finished his undergraduate studies elsewhere. Nonetheless I don't think he will mind us considering him an alumnus.

For the students here today, and our faculty, indeed anyone curious about our insistence on general education and the liberal arts curriculum, note this. If you check Google you will find that Dr. Muasher's first publication is entitled:

"Multistage Classification of Multispectral Earth Observational Data"

Dr. Muasher's PhD is in electrical engineering, from Purdue University in 1981. Clearly, despite this auspicious beginning, fate had other plans for Dr. Muasher, plans that lead him to an entirely new career so that his last book (so far) which will be published by Yale University Press is about his role in peace negotiations between Jordan and Israel. It sounds like a long way from Multispectral Earth Observational Data, and it is.. At AUB, through our liberal arts curriculum we hope to educate students who can, and probably will, regularly make such dramatic career changes.

After completing his doctorate, Dr. Muasher directed the computing center at the Jordan Electric Power Company, and then went on to head the Socio-Economic Information Center of the Ministry of Planning. After being posted to the Jordanian Embassy in Washington DC, he joined the peace negotiations between Jordan and Israel. In 1994, he became Jordan's first ambassador to Israel, and in 1997 he returned to Washington DC as Jordan's ambassador to the United States. In 2002 he became Jordan's Foreign Minister, and then in 2004 Deputy Prime Minister.

Please join me in welcoming Marwan Muasher to the podium and back to AUB.