

American University of Beirut

Founders' Day 2007

December 3, 2007

by

President John Waterbury

Here we are again, 141 years since the official founding of the Syrian Protestant College. I do not know how you feel, but it is reassuring to me, indeed a source of pride, that despite the past few years of war, political stalemate and economic stagnation, the university has been able to carry on its mission and to honor the great responsibilities the founders passed on to us. I am sure that the struggles going on outside our walls are reflected inside our walls-in the ranks of our faculty, staff, and students. But so far all members of the AUB family have demonstrated remarkable maturity and not allowed their feelings to interfere with their duties and their work. Daniel Bliss would be proud.

For the past several years on the occasion of Founders' Day we have organized an essay contest for undergraduates on themes related to AUB's fundamental values as established by the founders. This year the essay theme is:

Do AUB's politically active students share the institution's values or do they share the values of their political mentors off campus? Is there a difference?

The senior academic administration of AUB chose this theme, perhaps out of frustration with Lebanon's seemingly dysfunctional political leadership. I hope you will forgive our frustration.

The jury that reviewed all essay submissions and selected the winner was chaired by Patrick McGreevey and consisted of Patrick, Mona Harb from the Department of Architecture, and Richard Dean from the Department of Philosophy.

This year the winner is Randa Adra, majoring in Economics. Please welcome Randa Adra to the podium.

It has often struck me that one of the great attributes of AUB could not have been fully foreseen by the founders. The founders of the 19th century could not have foreseen that beginning in the final decades of that century and spanning all of the 20th century, AUB would come to rely on a number of what I call 'AUB families', drawn from the people of Lebanon and the region, and who attend and serve the university generation after generation. These families have been a crucial factor in carrying forward the mission of the university as originally defined by the founders. These families are in important ways the guardians of the flame. What is reassuring to me is that with time the number of these families grows. A hundred years from now a president of AUB will stand, I hope in Assembly Hall, and celebrate families whose names we do not yet

know.

But today, in the person of Dr. Samir Makdisi, we celebrate one of those great families, one of the guardians of the flame. And through his wife, Jean, we solidify the links of a great Palestinian family, the Saids, to AUB. Anis Khoury Makdisi, Samir Makdisi's father, was a dominant figure in the life of AUB and in Arabic studies. Samir's brother, Nadim, also an AUB graduate recently passed away, and although residing in the US, never forgot his alma mater. Now Anis Khoury Makdisi's grandson, and Samir Makdisi's son, Karim is teaching in the PSPA department. I would like AUB to go for what is known in ice hockey as a hat trick, three goals- and bring Samir's two other sons, Saree and Osama, to AUB's faculty. I guess that won't happen while I am president, but in this instance I think I could safely defend nepotism on the basis of overwhelming merit.

Samir Makdisi was Deputy President of AUB from 1993 to 1998 and welcomed me to campus in January 1998 when I became president. During his tenure as Deputy President he oversaw the first major steps toward renewal and revival of AUB after the long years of the civil war. He guided me during my initial weeks and then graciously stepped aside to return to his real love, the Institute of Money and Banking, which he founded, and which is today the Institute of Financial Economics. Like many great AUBites, he has played a role as a public official in the service of Lebanon. He was Minister of National Economy in 1992. He has been active in his profession of economics, serving as chair of the Dept. of Economics here and Director of the Institute of Financial Economics, and as chair of the board of the Economic Research Forum for the Arab Countries, Turkey and Iran. He is a member of the Governing Board of the Global Development Network.

Most impressive for me-younger faculty please take note-Samir Makdisi has continued to be an active and productive research scholar. In 2004, he published the important book, *The Lessons of Lebanon: the Economics of War and Development*. He is currently involved in large comparative studies on failed states and states emerging from civil strife, as well as in a comparative study of the correlates of democratic performance. Samir Makdisi is a monument to life-long learning and teaching, and I am proud to introduce him as our speaker at today's Founders' Day celebration.