Ministers, distinguished guests, trustees, faculty, staff, students, and friends of AUB – I would like to welcome all of you to this historic occasion – the inauguration of Dr. Peter F. Dorman as the 15th president of the American University of Beirut.

This event is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the mission of this truly remarkable institution. Although the founders of the University were clearly aware that they were embarking on a very special venture when they set out to establish a college “for all conditions and classes of men, without regard to color, nationality, race or religion”, I think even they would be inspired – and very proud – if they were with us today.

I would like to begin these proceedings by reading to you from the Annual Report that AUB’s first president Dr. Daniel Bliss submitted to the Board of Managers of the Syrian Protestant College, as we were known then.

The year is 1901. The topic is “Towards a Liberal Education,” which was – incidentally – one of the topics that was addressed during the Faculty Symposium that took place yesterday on “Academic Freedom and Innovation in the Middle East: AUB and the Expansion of Higher Education in the Region.”

“Forty years ago, when those missionaries who first thought of establishing the College published the statements that the College would extend its influence from India to North Africa, and would prepare men not only in literature and philosophy but also in medicine, commerce, law, engineering and other
professions, it might well have been called a dream. But to-day we see our way clear to make this early vision a reality. We stand at the threshold of as great an opportunity as can confront any educational institution. Our range of influence is rapidly, and by no process of forcing, extending over wide areas, ranging from Greece, Persia and Arabia far into Upper Egypt. There is a steady impulse toward liberal, and especially toward technical education. We would fail in our grasp of the situation if we did not note especially this tendency toward the technical professions. The same spirit which stimulates so many American college students to enter the fields of journalism, law, agriculture, business, etc., is beginning to operate in the Levant and in Egypt, and this constitutes one of our opportunities.”

I believe that AUB today too stands “at the threshold of as great an opportunity as can confront any educational institution.” It is an opportunity that we celebrate and embrace together.