

Address of the Professor Salim Daccache s.j., Rector of Saint-Joseph University of Beirut, at the signing of the “Memorandum of Understanding” between the American University of Beirut and Saint-Joseph University of Beirut on Tuesday the 16th of January 2018 at 6:30 p.m. at Marquand House on the AUB campus.

His Excellency the President of the Republic, represented by the Minister of Education and Higher Education, His Excellency Marwan Hamadeh,
Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the American University of Beirut,
and the members of this Board,
President of the American University of Beirut,
Members of the Strategic Council of Saint-Joseph University of Beirut,
Distinguished Vice-Rectors, Deans, Directors, Professors,
Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

During the First World War, one hundred years ago, the founder and first president of the American University of Beirut said, “Who would have dreamed for a moment that this group of Jesuit fathers, particularly the French, would live in ‘Post House’?” He asked that in reference to the forced displacement of the Jesuit university community at the time, they who found shelter on the AUB campus after long years ridden with conflict between Catholics and Evangelicals. Today, I echo that question, though somewhat differently: today I ask, who would have dreamed that we would all meet here at AUB, in Marquand House itself, the house of the president of the university, to sign this ‘Memorandum of Understanding’? Knowing that it is much more rigorous than a mere memorandum, and knowing that it paves the way for great work between the American University of Beirut

and the Jesuit university that belongs to Beirut in both its history and location?

Friends,

Not a week passes without USJ concluding diverse types of agreements. We are proud of our track record, that we have signed agreements with other universities, that our institution holds a unique international dimension that introduces what we like to call the globalization of higher education. This provides an ability to receive students and professors from far and wide, and it ensures that diplomas are of quality and of high international value, qualifying holders to see the world as their oyster, working anywhere, unhindered. This Memorandum, however, whose contents and limited space President Fadlo spoke of, enjoys its own particular taste, courtesy of its commendable delicateness and privacy.

This treaty, though it has been a long time coming, stems from a long history that we shouldered together, even if we did not make it together under a specific partnership. Reality shows that graduates of our two universities, those graduates who honed their skills and competencies throughout their education, those were the graduates who worked to develop this country, and others, imbued with a feeling of giving and dedication, surmounting difficulties and obstacles as they came. I do not wish to view this long history as a struggle between two institutions or two educational approaches adopting different methods, techniques, and languages. Rather, I would like for us to see in it somewhat of a complementarity that benefited the two institutions as well as Lebanese, Arab, and Eastern societies, for the good that came of these two universities far surpassed the limits of Beirut and

reached various parts of the East, in turn surpassing the latter's borders as well. This very history, now marked by the 150th anniversary of AUB and the 143rd anniversary of USJ, this very history is what calls upon us today, with all its achievements, perhaps with all its failures too, to raise awareness regarding our responsibilities towards generalized university education in Lebanon so that the country may carry a message of quality and education that is comprehensive and promotes humanitarianism, citizenship, and professionalism. In that sense, this education will continue to improve the capital of Lebanon and the Arab World, and the most important capital at that: that of competent human resources capable of developing the knowledge industry and the knowledge economy, thus utilizing this knowledge to help peoples and societies develop.

The particular taste that comes along with concluding this agreement, with the agreement itself, comes from none other but you, President Fadlo Khuri, a brother and a friend. You wished to strengthen the ties between the two universities, not out of a specific feeling or current interest, but within a comprehensive view of which we spoke at length during our meetings. We cannot, to echo what you said, be prisoners of a new reality in which the establishment of universities in Lebanon is subject to the logic of the liberal economic system. It is necessary for university institutions that have accumulated past experience and a valuable educational message to have the courage to take the initiative to work together, so as to keep a spirit of solidarity, agreement, and alliance alive. This preserves the face of university education in Lebanon, the face of non-profit university educational institutions, the face of an institution that focuses on the success of its students, concerned only with issuing degrees known for their quality

and excellence, degrees whose sole purpose is to form students' and citizens' personalities so that they may be open to and tolerant of their peers, no matter their religion, culture, or race.

They are the institutions that solely aim to promote basic and practical scientific research that is essential to education. Lebanon and our university institutions play the leading role in strengthening the world of knowledge and knowledge economy. I would also like to add that the spirit of this alliance does not stop short at our two universities, rather it is open to those who would like to contribute to strengthening the body of university education by having it be based on the principles of giving, seriousness, and respect of the integrity of the Lebanese curriculum which makes a clear distinction between working and striving for what is right, for the truth, and blasphemy and barbarism in one's perception of the Other. In this regard, we must work to create a balance between scientific research in the medical, biological, and technological fields on one hand, and scientific research in the field of arts and humanities on the other. This was and remains a major part of the mission of our universities. It is especially important to foster such research at a time where we are asking ourselves what kind of people we want to be and raise, what kind of society we want to form, at a time where we are wondering where all this violence in our communities comes from, a time where our nerves and anxieties have become much more dangerous than illiteracy. These nerves and anxieties we witness ravage everything in their path, closing off open and tolerant identities and multicultural countries. These are issues whose doors we must not be afraid to knock on, so that perhaps in opening them we will set eyes on new

horizons that could help provide answers to these questions that threaten our reality and destiny.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When all is said and done and the time comes to sign a treaty, in particular this Memorandum that brings our two institutions together, it is no surprise to hear the fluttering of hearts before this event that carries major significance. We are grateful to those who have worked hard at reviewing the text, scrutinizing its details to have it reach the optimal version of itself that we need it to be. I would like to thank AUB Professors Mohamed Harajli and Hala Muhtasib and USJ Professor Dolla Sarkis, as well as Professor Lara Karam Boustany for her legal review of the text. My thanks also go out to the hidden army of people who worked hard to prepare this celebration and gather all these members of administration and the media in one room. We are grateful to the President of the Republic to have entrusted His Excellency Minister Marwan Hamadeh with representing him, the Minister being an old friend of both universities, even if he is an USJ Law School Alumnus.

In conclusion, I would like to read with you and to you the following word of Father Jean Ducruet, who laid the foundations of the modern administration of our university in 1975: What formed the foundations for the university's academic work and success in this matter is the freedom that has characterized it ever since its inception. It must be preserved in the face of incoming storms, be they sectarian, nationalistic, or capitalistic. Daniel Bliss echoed these sentiments when the American University of Beirut was founded in 1880. This very freedom remains crucial to our work to this day,

and all we hold in our hands of power, resources, relations, and even this treaty today, all of this leads us in the direction of educating generations on the freedom of thought and speech. The creativity of the new world in Lebanon and the Arab region has been entrusted to us, and it lies at the very heart of our mission. The Memorandum has become a reality, and the ball is now in the hands of the professors and researchers of our two universities, so that we may turn intentions into deeds and accumulate knowledge, love, and trust that will pave the way for a new history that will join an older one of days past. Let us together build this history and give a new spark to our service and mission.