

BASSAM Z. SHAKHASHIRI JULY 16, 2009 LAU COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

GOOD EVENING! MASSA' EL-KHEIR!

TO PRESIDENT JABBRA, AND TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, I SAY THANK YOU FOR THE GREAT HONOR BESTOWED ON ME TONIGHT.

I AM GRATIFIED AND HUMBLED TO BE SO RECOGNIZED.

I AM ESPECIALLY TOUCHED BECAUSE MY MOTHER ADMA NAKHOUL SHAKHASHIRI GRADUATED FROM THIS VERY SAME INSTITUTION IN 1936 WHEN IT WAS CALLED "THE AMERICAN JUNIOR COLLEGE FOR WOMEN."

I AM AWED AND THRILLED TO BE HONORED IN JBEIL.....ONE OF THE OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY INHABITED CITIES IN THE WORLD.

(IN ARABIC) I AM A NATIVE OF ANFE, FE QADDA' EL-KOURA. I LIVED IN LEBANON FOR 17 YEARS BEFORE GOING TO AMERICA WHERE I HAVE BEEN FOR ALMOST 52 YEARS.

I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR MY HERITAGE AND I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES I CONTINUE TO ENJOY IN AMERICA.

TO EVERY ONE IN THE CLASS OF 2009 I SAY CONGRATULATIONS!

YOU HAVE EARNED THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING A DEGREE CANDIDATE AND VERY SOON YOU WILL BE A DEGREE HOLDER!

MOST, AND PERHAPS ALL OF YOU, MIGHT PREFER THAT I END MY SPEECH NOW AND SPARE YOU HEARING ANYTHING MORE.....FOR WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO SAY..... BEYOND CONGRATULATIONS ON EARNING YOUR ACADEMIC DEGREE!

AND MAYBE THAT IS WHAT I SHOULD DO!

I AM NOW AN ALUMNUS OF LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY 73 YEARS AFTER MY MOTHER EARNED HER 2-YEAR DIPLOMA. JUST AHEAD OF YOU BY A FEW MINUTES.....I ASK FOR YOUR COURTESY IN ALLOWING ME TO SAY JUST A FEW MORE WORDS.....

YOUR ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE THE RESULTS OF THREE THINGS:

THE GENES YOU INHERITED FROM YOUR PARENTS,
YOUR UPBRINGING AND THE ENVIRONMENT YOU ARE IN,
AND YOUR OWN PERSONAL INITIATIVE.

THAT IS WHY I ASK EACH DEGREE CANDIDATE TO FIRST, EXPRESS YOURSELF LOUDLY AND CLEARLY IN THANKING YOUR PARENTS AND YOUR FAMILY FOR WHO THEY ARE..... AND FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE FOR YOU. (BIG ROUND OF APPLAUSE)

ALSO, I ASK YOU TO EXPRESS YOURSELF IN THANKING YOUR PROFESSORS AND THE STAFF OF LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY FOR THEIR GUIDANCE, INSPIRATION , AND WISDOM. (APPLAUSE)

AND NOW IT IS YOUR TURN TO SIT UP STRAIGHT-- WITH PRIDE AND JOY, AND TO QUIETLY REFLECT ON ALL THAT YOU HAVE DONE TO ARRIVE HERE TODAY. AND, YES GO AHEAD AND APPLAUD EACH OTHER.

YOUR DEGREE GIVES YOU MORE FREEDOM TO BE A PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY. FREEDOM EMPOWERS YOU TO DO GOOD FOR YOURSELFAND FOR OTHERS.

ALONG WITH FREEDOM COMES CHOICES-- PERSONAL CHOICES WHICH YOU MUST EXERCISE WITH THOUGHTFULNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN WELL- BEING AND FOR THE WELL- BEING OF OTHERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

I HOPE YOUR CHOICES WILL INCLUDE THE ELEMENT OF RESPECT AND THE ELEMENT OF CARE. BOTH ARE IMPORTANT IN A CIVILIZED SOCIETY.

OF COURSE, IN ORDER TO RESPECT OTHERS, ONE MUST FIRST HAVE SELF-RESPECT.

YOU AND I, AND EVERYONE IN THIS AUDIENCE, HAVE A SACRED RESPONSIBILITY TO BE HUMANE IN EVERYTHING WE DO..... AND ALSO TO BE HUMANITARIAN IN OUR PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR.

WE MUST CONSCIOUSLY COMMIT OURSELVES TO THIS RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING HUMANE AND HUMANITARIAN.

I URGE EVERYONE IN THE AUDIENCE TO FIND TIME IN THE NEXT THREE TO FOUR DAYS TO READ THE DOCUMENT CALLED "THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS."

IT IS A MAGNIFICENT STATEMENT THAT CAN WELL GUIDE THE POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF NATIONS, GROUPS, AND INDIVIDUALS--- ESPECIALLY NOW. AMONG THOSE WHO WROTE IT AND SIGNED IT IN 1948 IS A NATIVE OF LEBANON: DR. CHARLES HABIB MALIK.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN LIFE IS EDUCATION.

IT IS THROUGH EDUCATION THAT WE COMBAT IGNORANCE.

IT IS THROUGH EDUCATION THAT WE BECOME ENLIGHTENED.....

ENLIGHTENMENT IS BETTER THAN IGNORANCE!

AND IT IS THROUGH TRAINING THAT WE BECOME SKILLED AS PROFESSIONALS.

BUT, PROFICIENCY OR TECHNICAL SKILL IN ANY PROFESSION DOES NOT ENSURE RESPONSIBILITY NOR DOES IT ENSURE STEWARDSHIP OF WHAT WE VALUE IN SOCIETY.

TRAINING IS NECESSARY, BUT IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE WELL-BEING OF SOCIETY.

EDUCATION IS MUCH MORE THAN TRAINING. EDUCATION DEVELOPS OUR CHARACTER, OPENS OUR MINDS AND OUR HEARTS, AND CAN MAKE US RESPONSIBLE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.

I AM AN ADVOCATE OF THE TRADITIONAL LIBERAL ARTS IN EDUCATION. AND I DO INCLUDE SCIENCE AS ONE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS.

YES, WE NEED TO TRAIN STUDENTS FOR CAREERS AS SKILLED PROFESSIONALS IN SPECIALTIES. BUT, WE MUST ALSO EDUCATE THEM FOR LIFE-LONG LEARNING AND FOR RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP.

TRAINING IN SCIENCE, IN ENGINEERING, AND IN BUSINESS FIELDS MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A RICH CURRICULUM REQUIRING STUDY IN THE ARTS AND IN THE HUMANITIES.

FOR THOSE WHO SPECIALIZE IN THE ARTS AND IN THE HUMANITIES OFFERINGS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MUST ALSO BE REQUIRED.

STUDENTS AND FACULTY ALIKE-- SHOULD NOT ONLY DEVELOP TECHNICAL SKILLS IN THEIR FIELDS, BUT SHOULD BE ABLE TO APPRECIATE CULTURE... AND LEARN ABOUT THE RICHNESS OF OTHER DISCIPLINES.

THAT IS WHAT EXCELLENT UNIVERSITIES SUCH AS LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, DO AND THAT IS WHAT DIFFERENTIATES THEM FROM TECHNICAL INSTITUTES.

I AM A SCIENTIST BY TRAINING, A TEACHER AND PUBLIC SERVANT BY TRADE, AN ADVOCATE BY CONVICTION, AND AN OPTIMIST BY NATURE.

OVER THE YEARS, IN AMERICA AND ELSEWHERE AROUND THE WORLD, I HAVE

ADVOCATED INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE ROLE THAT SCIENCE PLAYS IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

WE LIVE IN THE MOST ADVANCED SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY IN HISTORY.

NEW DISCOVERIES HAVE LED TO PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL ENLIGHTENMENT, TO IMPROVEMENTS AND BENEFITS IN OUR DAILY LIVES, BUT ALSO TO NEW SOCIETAL PROBLEMS.

BASIC RESEARCH IN SCIENCE HAS GREATLY INCREASED OUR UNDERSTANDING OF NATURE, EXPANDED FRONTIERS OF INQUIRY, SHOWN US HOW LITTLE WE KNOW, TRIGGERED CREATIVE WAVES OF INVENTION AND INNOVATION, AND PROMPTED TECHNOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGHS THAT WERE INCONCEIVABLE JUST A FEW SHORT DECADES AGO.

EVERYTHING WE ENJOY AND BENEFIT FROM IN OUR DAILY LIVES WHETHER IT IS IN HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATIONS, AGRICULTURE, MEDICINE AND HEALTH CARE, PHARMACEUTICALS, FOOD AND NUTRITION, BUSINESS AND FINANCE, AND JUST ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE YOU CARE ADD TO THIS LIST IS THE RESULT OF ADVANCES IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.

YET, MANY PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD ARE STILL INSULATED FROM MOST OF THE MODERN ADVANCES..... AND ARE THUS DEPRIVED OF THEIR BENEFITS.

THE WIDE GAP BETWEEN THOSE WHO FLOURISH BECAUSE OF ADVANCES IN SCIENCE AND IN TECHNOLOGY..... AND THOSE WHO DO NOT.... IS DEEPLY DISTURBING.

IT IS ASTONISHING THAT 1.1 BILLION PEOPLE IN THE WORLD LIVE ON LESS THAN \$1 A DAY, AS REPORTED BY THE WORLD BANK.

STARVATION, UNAVAILABILITY OF CLEAN WATER, THE SPREAD OF DISEASE, POVERTY, AND DEADLY VIOLENCE ARE BUT A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE CAUSES OF SUFFERING AND DEATH OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE EVERY YEAR.

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY HAS GIVEN US MANY WONDERFUL THINGS,

BUT IT HAS ALSO GIVEN US DEADLIER WEAPONS AND GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE DUE MOSTLY TO THE BURNING OF FOSSIL FUELS.

WORSE, THE NATURE OF OUR INTERACTIONS AND DEALINGS WITH EACH OTHER AS HUMAN BEINGS AND AS NATIONS HAS BEEN LITTLE CHANGED BY OUR PROGRESS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EXCEPT IN WARFARE.

INDEED IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT ONE MAJOR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MODERN SOCIETY AND THE STONE AGE IS THE SOPHISTICATION OF OUR WEAPONS.

IT IS UNCONSCIONABLE THAT WE, AS ENLIGHTENED PEOPLE, APPROVE AND TOLERATE THE USE OF NAPALM, CLUSTER MUNITIONS, PHOSPHORUS BOMBS, LAND MINES, AND NUCLEAR BOMBS ON FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS.

MORAL QUESTIONS SUCH AS THESE EMPHASIZE THE FACT THAT THE WORLD IS INCREASINGLY DEPENDENT ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.

I HAVE A DEEP CONVICTION THAT WE MUST ALWAYS BE HUMANE AND HUMANITARIAN IN EVERYTHING WE DO AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A SOCIETY.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE NOW BECAUSE OUR INVENTIONS CAN HELP US A GREAT DEAL AND YET THEY CAN ALSO HARM US IF WE ARE NOT WISE IN USING THEM.

NOWADAYS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ARE THE ENGINES THAT DRIVE THE ECONOMY AND LEAD TO PROGRESS AND PROSPERITY.

WHEN WE DISCUSS WHAT SCIENCE IS CAPABLE OF ACHIEVING AND WHAT IT CANNOT ACCOMPLISH IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC COMPETENCE OR SCIENTIFIC EXPERTISE....AND SCIENCE LITERACY.

BY SCIENCE LITERACY I MEAN AN APPRECIATION OF SCIENCE, AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE BENEFITS OF TECHNOLOGY, AND THE POTENTIAL RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ADVANCES IN BOTH.

THIS IS WHY I SAY: IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT ALL CITIZENS GAIN SCIENCE LITERACY. SCIENCE LITERACY IS FOR EVERYONE: SCIENTISTS, POETS, ARTISTS, WRITERS, HUMANISTS, ALL PROFESSIONALS, THE GENERAL PUBLIC, YOUTH AND ADULTS ALIKE.

THE LEVEL OF SCIENCE LITERACY IN ANY SOCIETY IS A MEASURE OF ITS VALUES.

SCIENCE LITERACY CAN IMPROVE OUR DAILY LIVES IN MANY WAYS.

PERHAPS CULTURAL ADDICTIONS TO HIGH-FAT FOOD, TOBACCO, AND ALCOHOL WILL CHANGE IF WE ACCEPT SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS ABOUT OBESITY, SMOKING, AND ALCOHOLISM.

WHAT WE LEARN AND WHAT WE INVENT MUST BE USED FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE HUMAN CONDITION AND FOR THE BETTERMENT OF

SOCIETY.

BUT WE NEED HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION IN ALL AREAS, NOT JUST IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.

IN A DEMOCRACY, EDUCATED PEOPLE CAN MAKE INTELLIGENT AND WISE DECISIONS.

IN OUR DAILY LIVES WE MUST ALWAYS ACT WITH INTEGRITY AND BE RESPECTFUL OF EACH OTHER AS HUMAN BEINGS REGARDLESS OF DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AND BELIEF.

OUR LIVES WILL BE ENRICHED IF OUR INTERACTIONS ARE BASED ON RESPECT, ADHERENCE TO THE RULE OF LAW, MUTUAL TRUST, AND CONFIDENCE IN THE VALUES OF OUR SOCIETAL INSTITUTIONS.

SOCIETY WILL BENEFIT.... IF ALL OF US TAKE PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR ACTIONS AND FOR THEIR CONSEQUENCES.

LET US BE HONEST AND RESPONSIBLE IN ALL OUR PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL, AND SOCIAL DEALINGS.

IN A FREE AND CIVIL SOCIETY, PEOPLE SHOULD BE VIRTUOUS AS WELL AS SKILLED. WE MUST NOT ONLY LEARN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG, BUT WE MUST BEHAVE ACCORDINGLY.

THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY REQUIRES STRONG SELF CONFIDENCE AND RENEWED TRUST IN OUR INSTITUTIONS.

WE SHOULD ALWAYS EXERCISE GOOD JUDGMENT. WE SHOULD BE WISE IN THE DECISIONS WE MAKE .

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS ARE FIXABLE. ON THIS, MY FAITH IN OUR ABILITY IS UNWAVERING; IT IS OUR WILL TO ACT WISELY, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, THAT IS IN DOUBT.

EDUCATION MUST BE AMONG THE HIGHEST PRIORITIES FOR ALL NATIONS.

LEARNING IS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF EDUCATION, BUT ACTING ON WHAT WE LEARN IS JUST AS IMPORTANT.

EDUCATION OCCURS AT HOME, IN SCHOOL, IN THE WORK PLACE, IN RECREATION AREAS, AND EVERYWHERE IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

ALL CITIZENS AND GROUPS MUST WORK TOGETHER--- THOUGHTFULLY AND

WITH CONVICTION IN OUR ABILITY TO TRANSFORM OURSELVES AND OUR COUNTRIES TO BE PRODUCTIVE AND PROSPEROUS, HEALTHY AND HAPPY, FAIR AND RESPONSIBLE, HONEST AND TRUSTWORTHY, AND TO SERVE THE COMMON GOOD.

IN ORDER TO ENSURE PROGRESS TOWARD REACHING OUR GOALS, OUR STRATEGIES SHOULD BE COHERENT AND HARMONIOUS, BUT WE MUST ALWAYS ALLOW FOR DISSONANCE.

WE SHOULD BE ACCOUNTABLEAND WE SHOULD ALSO DEVELOP INDICATORS OF PROGRESS TO HELP IMPROVE THE NEXT STEPS, AS GOALS AND STRATEGIES ARE DYNAMIC AND WILL CHANGE OVER TIME.

TONIGHT, I SPEAK TO YOU AS A NATIVE OF LEBANON, AS A NATURALIZED CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND AS A HUMAN BEING WHO CARES ABOUT THE QUALITY OF LIFE ON OUR PLANET.

TONIGHT..... CONVENED HERE ON THE BEAUTIFUL SHORES OF LEBANON--- WHICH I REMEMBER FROM MY YOUTH AS..... PRISTINE,

FROM HERE WHERE OUR ANCESTORS INVENTED THE ALPHABET,

FROM HERE WHERE THEY DISCOVERED AND COMMERCIALIZED THE TYRIAN BLUE DYE,

FROM HERE WHERE THEY SET SAIL AS TRADERS,

AND FROM HERE--THE PLACE KNOWN AROUND THE WORLD AS THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION,

TONIGHT, LET US BEGIN A NEW TRADITION...LET US ALL COMMENCE.....TO SERVE LEBANON.

LET US BREAK THE CHAINS OF FACTIONALISM THAT CRIPPLE US,

LET US REMOVE THE BLINDFOLDS OF IGNORANCE,

LET US OPEN OUR EARS AND NOT ONLY HEAR, BUT LISTEN TO THE DRUMBEAT OF PROGRESS.

LET US LIFT UP OUR HEARTS AND WORK TOGETHER AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IN HARMONY, BUT ALWAYS ALLOWING FOR DISSONANCE.

AS WE CELEBRATE THE RICHNESS OF OUR HERITAGE AND AS WE PLAN FOR A BETTER FUTURE,

LET US BE SHARPLY FOCUSED ON THE ROAD AHEAD AND ONLY OCCASIONALLY
GLANCE IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR.

LET US COMMIT OUR INTELLECT AND OUR EMOTIONS SO LIFE IN LEBANON IS.....
PEACEFUL AND FULFILLING.

LET US ASPIRE FOR A SECURE-- MODERN- AND --PROSPEROUS LEBANON WITH
GREAT VITALITY AND A ROBUST ECONOMY BEFITTING ITS PEOPLE.

LET US COMMIT OURSELVES TO USE MODERN TECHNOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT FOR THE BENEFIT OF LEBANON AND THE REGION..... AND LET US
BE STEWARDS OF OUR BEAUTIFUL ENVIRONMENT.

LET US DEVELOP THE WILL TO USE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE
THE QUALITY OF LIFE BY ELIMINATING ELECTRIC POWER BLACKOUTS,
BY REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION,
BY CONTROLLING OBESITY AND OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH MATTERS

WHERE SCIENCE CLEARLY TELLS US WHAT WE MUST DO TO LIVE HEALTHIER--
HAPPIER- AND LONGER LIVES.

AS WE COMMENCE WITH A FRESH AND PROMISING ATTITUDE, LET US EACH
RECOGNIZE THAT WHAT MATTERS MOST TO CHANGE BOTH PERSONAL HABITS
AND SOCIETAL BARRIERS FOR THE BETTER, IS OUR OWN MOTIVATION AND OUR
OWN WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE.

AND ABOVE ALL, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
LET US ALWAYS ASSURE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF LEBANON.

GOD BLESS LEBANON, GOD BLESS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND GOD
BLESS YOU.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.