

**Remarks by Rev. Fr. Prof. George Hobeika for the Conservation, Restoration  
of Cultural Property and Sacred Art Program Opening Ceremony**

**June 12, 2018**

Distinguished audience,

It is my great pleasure to be hosting you today at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik for the launching of this joint program on the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Property and Sacred Art with the renowned University of Urbino.

Well, I would like to start by mentioning that the first mission I undertook abroad as USEK President was to the University of Urbino! It was in October 2016. I will always cherish the warm welcome I had by Prof. Stocchi and his team and, I must say, this trip along with the signing of the joint program agreement will always mark my presidential journey! As a musician and player of oriental lute, I am permeable to the aesthetic messages sent by works of art. The paintings, the canvases, the frescoes and the statues that I had the opportunity to see in Urbino, are still intensely populating my memory. How can I forget my shivers of history while strolling the old streets of Urbino from the 16<sup>th</sup> century? I really was a trip back in the old days and I would not be exaggerating to say that I struggled to return to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**This joint program we are launching today, besides its academic value, it holds a moral, religious, cultural, and human value.**

First, its moral value is rendered by our responsibility to restore intellectual property and sacred arts, and conserve them with all their peculiarities and specificities for the generations to come.

The religious value of our program is reflected by translating the works of the great and relaying their messages, it is a way of “preaching” the good word. Preserving sacred art is by itself a “sacred” endeavor as well.

On the cultural level, (I quote) “art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time” as per Thomas Merton, American theologian, and teaching our students to preserve art and delving into it is teaching them to search for others and identify themselves. We all agree that giving our students a wide array of perceptions, a variety of art works, and a broad palette of artful colors and flavors would widen their horizons, greatly add to their knowledge, and prepare them today to be the keepers of world treasures tomorrow.

One of the most important values of this program is its human dimension. As Rachel Carson, American Author and Conservationist, once said: “The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.” And aren’t cultural properties and sacred arts

part of the wonders of the world? The more we contemplate and preserve them, the more we uphold beauty and abjure destruction.

I am so happy we are launching this joint program with the University of Urbino under the umbrella of the Italian Embassy in Lebanon and thanks to the efforts of many persons who worked hard to make this achievement possible: Dr. Paul Zgheib, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at USEK, Rev. Fr. Abdo Badwi, Head of Sacred Art, Conservation and Heritage Department, Mr. Joseph Zaarour and Prof. Laura Baratin, Coordinators of the Program and Dr. Attilio de Gasperis, Coordinator of the Relations with Italian institutions, thank you all for your dedication and commitment to make this program see the light.

Finally, I cannot but say that cultural property and art are timeless reflections of minds and spirits, and through this program we are contributing AT PRESENT to the conservation of the life of art that mirrors the past, it mirrors realities about the past, and lessons from the past. As a matter of fact, with every piece of art, regardless of its type, its time, its age and its material, a story unfolds. And through this program, many hidden and maybe untold stories will surface and come to life!

Thank you!

