

**Address of Father Professor Georges Hobeika
President
Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK)**

**Catholic Higher Education in Lebanon and the Middle East:
Advancing Mission and Leading Innovation**

September 18, 2018

His Beatitude and Eminence Bechara Boutros Cardinal Rai, Patriarch of Antioch
and all the East

Most Reverend Father Abbot Neamtallah Hachem, Superior General of the
Lebanese Maronite Order and chancellor of our university, represented by Revd.
Father Professor Karam Rizk, vicar general,

His Excellency Mgr. Ivan Santos, chargé d'affaires at the Apostolic Nunciature in
Lebanon,

Excellencies, Ministers, Deputies and representatives of high cultural, educational,
military and religious institutions,

Mr. Michael Galligan-Stierle, President and CEO of the Association of Catholic
Colleges and Universities-USA,

Mr. Nabil Ayoub, President of the American University of Madaba

Rev. Fr. Michael Scheuer, Vice President of Saint Joseph University

Rev. Fr. Michel Jalakh, President of the Antonine University

Rev. Fr. Pierre Najem, President of Notre Dame University

Rev. Fr. Khalil Chalfoun, President of La Sagesse University

Rev. Sr. Hilda Chelela, President of Holy Family University

Reverend Fathers vice-presidents, USEK Provost, USEK members of the University Council,

Dear Deans and Professors,

Dear Friends, Colleagues,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Students,

On this very special occasion, it gives me great pleasure to extend my warmest thanks to his Beatitude and Eminence Bechara Boutros Rai, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, for his presence, here today, in the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) and the solicitude with which he surrounds the Lebanese catholic Universities. Eminence, your presence is a blessing for our conference and an act of confidence in our educational action for human being in this broken and distraught Orient. Beatitude, you are a remarkable shepherd, wise, patient, clear-sighted, determined and always full of optimistic dynamism. And the herd on which you watch tirelessly, is constantly besieged by terrible and frightening ontological challenges. But nothing discourages you, because you lean on the Lord of time and history, to whom the last word comes exclusively.

My warmest regards go to Dr. Michael Galligan-Stierle, President of the ACCU, he spares no efforts to support catholic higher education. His stewardship is echoed all around the world.

Today, we are gathered in the University of the “Holy Spirit”, the Holy Spirit represented by “tongues of fire”, giving the disciples the Truth, and the possibility to share this Truth to all communities, by allowing them to speak many and different languages.

Carried by the mission and the will to pass on the message of the Truth, the disciples established the principles of Catholic mission in education, and especially in Higher Education as mentioned in the Epistle of Saint Paul, 1 Corinthians 12:28:

“And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues”.

The disciples had also to pass on the Truth to all communities, regardless of their differences. This led the Catholic Higher Education to be committed to a faith-based educational development of its students whereby spiritual values and ethics as well as respect for cultural and religious pluralism are promoted.

The Catholic mission of our universities was also highlighted by the testimonial of Saint John-Paul II in the introduction of the Apostolic constitution of the supreme Pontifical on Catholic Universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesia*, BORN FROM THE HEART of the Church:

“For many years I myself was deeply enriched by the beneficial experience of university life: the ardent search for truth and its unselfish transmission to youth and to all those learning to think rigorously, so as to act rightly and to serve humanity better”. And the pope to continue in another paragraph:

“It is the honor and responsibility of a Catholic University to consecrate itself without reserve to the cause of truth. This is its way of serving at one and the same time both the dignity of man and the good of the Church, which has "an intimate conviction that truth is (its) real ally ... and that knowledge and reason are sure ministers to faith". Without in any way neglecting the acquisition of useful knowledge, a Catholic University is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about nature, man and God. The present age is in urgent need of this kind of

disinterested service, namely of proclaiming the meaning of truth, that fundamental value without which freedom, justice and human dignity are extinguished.”

We are called to produce diverse thinkers and faithful leaders able to responsibly respond to the needs of knowledge and society. The Catholic university has a unique purpose in its connection with the Church by affirming faith and reason as fundamentals to a university education.

Because knowledge is meant to serve the human person, our role as catholic higher education institutions has always been transformational, especially in Lebanon and in the Middle East where the societies always have to face uncertainties affecting the citizens' life and their wellbeing. Our mission appears increasingly necessary with the development and changes in the Middle East and the complexity of the Lebanese social, economic and political situations. We are commonly committed to prepare graduates, whose values will positively impact their involvement in the society.

Throughout the years, USEK established a tradition of excellence rooted by the Lebanese Maronite Order educational mission, which has led down the path to success on different levels. USEK seeks to contribute to the development of all its students through quality educational and research programs in various fields of study. By providing a high quality American-style education to its students, USEK intends to prepare future leaders for innovation, professional growth and life-long learning, in Lebanon, within the Middle East and throughout the world. USEK is committed to a faith-based educational development of its Deans, faculty and staff dedicated themselves to provide our students an excellent education and academic experience through international accreditation, through promoting active learning and the use of technology and through supporting research and innovation in research. All this believing that the way we teach leads to the transformational goal

of our distinct Catholic pedagogy. Our pedagogy is to give our students the confidence in their faith and values to be able to innovate and respond positively and responsibly to the global change.

While acting with faith, hope and optimism, our institutional challenges are tremendous. Assuring affordability, access and support while providing a high quality education. Assuring a campus life that promotes inclusiveness, pluralism, democracy and a model for sustainability. We optimize the use of our human capital, resources and the goodwill of our partners to provide students from different backgrounds a life changing learning experience.

In Lebanon, mission driven institutions have also the challenge to fight business-oriented institutions promoting consumerism and a market of diplomas and degrees as labeled products without values and substance.

Therefore, I would like to highlight the unavoidable need to work together, all catholic universities, not only in Lebanon, but also in all other countries, and I am positive that if we work together, hands in hands, our efforts will eventually be an acme of success! Our students will be inspired by the way we deal with each other's as Catholic Higher education Institutions, as the example of love, solidarity and social cohesion.

We must be, the example of this openness to the other similar and with whom we share the same values, in order to be able open up and accept the other different, while preserving our identity that singles each one of us.

More than ever we have to be agile to respond very actively to every change or challenge. In order to keep the path, we have to continuously evaluate our practices according to the changing needs, but also and more than ever Higher education must

lead the march back to the fundamentals of human relationships, to the old discovery that is ever new, that man does not live by bread alone.

Thank you your Beatitude and Eminence Bechara Boutros Cardinal Rai, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, for being the patron of this event, thank you Michael for being with us even the hurricane and the weather conditions couldn't discourage your long trip to Lebanon for the support of catholic higher education. Thank you for all the university presidents who will enrich the outcomes of this conference.

Thank you all for being here, and I wish you a very fruitful conference today,

Thanks a lot for your listening.