



Remarks by Rev. Father Hady Mahfouz, USEK President

GCHERA Conference on

“Universities’ Global Challenge: Nutritional Security and Environmental sustainability for Human Health”

Kaslik, June 24, 2015

Distinguished guests,

It is heartwarming to look around and see so many people gathered here at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik for the opening of this 8th World Conference of GCHERA on **“Universities’ Global Challenge: Nutritional Security and Environmental sustainability for Human Health”**; I am deeply honored to welcome you all to what I know is going to be a great conference.

Our gathering today is far from being a mere academic activity, but rather part of a global action and endeavors, which are actually meant to meet the challenges of food security and environmental sustainability. Our gathering highlights **our** “global challenge” as educators, to raise awareness, to study, to discuss and try to find **solutions** to what we have incurred ourselves, humans, to nature and to its resources. Our gathering today sheds light on our great responsibility to preserve our earth, our **“common home”**, as nicely described in the title of the last Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis **“LAUDATO SI’ On Care for Our Common Home”** and published on May 24, 2015 (exactly one month ago). This conference also focuses on our crucial duty to create and maintain an **Intensive Care Unity** to figure out new means and elaborate new strategies that would respond to the daunting challenge of food security. I am exhilarated to see that many agricultural organizations and many universities from the various parts of the globe are proving, through this event, that they are attached to the great assets we have inherited, and are willing to exert the needed efforts to find the means of preserving them to future generations. This

conference is a solid proof of **taking the responsibility, and committing to improve the quality of life in our time, while leaving an even better one to the generations to come.** This responsibility - this obligation we have - is also reflected in the same Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Pope Francis: (I quote) “The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all” (end of quotation). (95) So, I hope this gathering and the subsequent meetings will be loaded with reflections and ideas that would serve the good of all, and would be an example par excellence of university action towards a better quality of life, the life of all human beings, without any discrimination, and the life of all the human being, in all his/her dimensions.

At this point, I would like to express my great pleasure in thanking some of the people for whom the collective good is the spearhead of their individual work, and who are particularly marking this conference and this opening ceremony. I am thinking here of Mr. John Kennelly, President of GCHERA. Thank you, Mr. Kennelly, for the well appreciated confidence you have expressed towards our University and our Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences; I hope the efforts exerted in this event would be but a first step in a long term rewarding collaboration.

Let me also thank all the Lebanese and international figures here present with us today, namely,....

I would like also to extend a word of thanks to Mr. Ragheb Alama, United Nations Environment Program Goodwill Ambassador and our guest speaker, for honoring us with your presence today; May you always be an example of good will and good action.

I cannot but thank also all the persons who spared no effort to foster an idea that stemmed four years ago and was nurtured by intensive meetings, locally and internationally, and by the hard work of a dedicated team at our Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences. Four years ago, I had a phone call from Reverend Father Joseph Wakim, who is now the Vice President for International Affairs and who was then the Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural and food Sciences. He was attending, in Beauvais (France), the 7th GCHERA world conference, with the current Dean of the Faculty, Dr. Lara Wakim who was at the time the Head of Food Science Department and the Faculty Coordinator for International Affairs. He suggested to hold the 8th GCHERA world

conference here at USEK. Four years have passed and here we are today; so, thank you Father Wakim for initiating this idea.

This event would have not been possible had it not been for the enthusiasm, motivation and dedication of the Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, Dr. Lara Wakim. I am sure the guidance you provided to your team and your relentless follow up were quite inspiring, as we can all see the results. So many thanks Dr. Lara for this great achievement.

I would like also to thank all the team who worked hard for this event without naming them individually, for, the list would be quite long!

At the end of my address, I would like to refer to the beginning of the Bible, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). So, we, human beings, with our *very goodness* that springs from the very individual or collective person, can contribute to the preservation of our planet’s *very goodness*, we (and again I am quoting the Pope) “all of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents”(14).

Thank you.

Distinguished guests,

I am honored to announce the 8th GCHERA World Conference now open...