

Inauguration of AUC's 12th President, Francis J.
Ricciardone
Chairman Bartlett's Welcome Remarks

Welcome. We are honored to have with us today His Excellency Ashraf El-Sheihy, minister of higher education and scientific research, who is representing the prime minister. Distinguished ministers, ambassadors, presidents of Egyptian and international Universities, AUC faculty, administrators, students and friends. Thank you all for joining us today for the inauguration of Francis J Ricciardone as the 12th President of the American University in Cairo.

I'd especially like to acknowledge Frank's wife, Dr. Marie Ricciardone as well as the former Presidents of AUC who are here today, Presidents Lisa Anderson, David Arnold, and Thomas Bartlett, as well as trustee Tom Thomason who served as interim President during the search for Frank. And finally, I would like to thank the trustees and the three faculty members, Nathan Bowditch, Laila El-Baradei and Adham Ramadan who served with great dedication on the presidential search committee that recommended Frank's appointment.

An inauguration is a time for celebration--an occasion to eulogize past chapters in the University's history, and to anticipate with enthusiasm the chapter we are about to enter. AUC's history is cause for gratitude, pride, and optimism. It's interesting to ponder how our founders might have imagined today as they embarked on a most improbable journey almost a century ago. The ambitious little school they created in the aftermath of WWI really wasn't a University at all. With 142 students in its first class in 1919, its academics were really a combination of the last two years of high school and the first two years of college and the significance of its diplomas was rather muddled. The institution awarded undergraduate bachelors of Arts degrees for the first time in 1928 to three students, but its intrepid early leaders could not have anticipated the financial depression that would soon hit, a second world war, internal revolutions, regional conflicts, threats of nationalization and other challenges that ensuing generations would confront. But they would be proud of the grit, determination and success that bring us together on this beautiful campus to inaugurate a new leader for this distinguished institution.

Our founders would be especially gratified by Egyptian society's broad embrace of AUC. They realized that their new institution might be met with understandable

skepticism, but they hoped that their complete commitment to serving Egypt would overcome this skepticism. Today's audience would certainly reassure them that their hopes have been realized. When I first visited AUC as a child in the 1960s, the University's student body was as few as 450 students; it has grown to 7,000 students today; its budget has grown from less than a million dollars in the early 1960s, to over 170 million today. With students pursuing degrees at the undergraduate, masters and Ph.D. level, AUC has become a true jewel in the crown of higher education in Egypt and the region, and an intellectual bridge between Egypt and the world.

AUC's early leaders would also be gratified that the University's educational philosophy today would seem so familiar to them. The importance of a broad course of study, exposure to the humanities, critical reasoning, civil debate, and the intellectual magic that happens when different cultures come together—all of those hallmarks of an AUC education--would readily resonate with our founders and with AUC students of every generation. Those principles have been central from the beginning and continue to inspire the lives of purpose that our faculty and students pursue today.

Most importantly, our Founders would be pleased that these principles resonate with the president we are inaugurating today. Although Frank came to our attention through his success as a diplomat, his career began as a teacher. A summa cum laude graduate of Dartmouth, Frank received a Fulbright scholarship to teach in Italy. He went on to teach in Iran for two years before joining the foreign service. During 36 distinguished years as a diplomat, he served throughout the Middle East and Asia. He held important posts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and eventually at the ambassadorial level in the Philippines and Palau, Turkey, and of course in Egypt. Along the way he learned to speak Arabic, Italian, Turkish and some Farsi. In his various posts, Frank saw, time and again, the transformative impact of the American style of liberal arts education, and its capacity to inspire individual achievement and to energize social progress. Frank's conviction in the power of education was central to the search committee's unanimous recommendation of Frank to become our next President.

But Frank's other trait that is clear to all who know him is that this is a man who loves Cairo and Egypt, or as he would likely refer to her "Omm el-Donia" "the mother of the Universe." Many AUC presidents have come to Cairo to lead a University and then fallen in love with Egypt, but

for Frank it is the other way around. He first sipped from the river Nile in 1977, when he and Marie came as tourists coincidentally just at the historic moment when Prime Minister Begin came to Egypt to return President Sadat's earth-shaking visit to Jerusalem. They returned again in 1986, when Frank served as political officer at the embassy and then later as chief civilian observer of the multinational force in the Sinai. Egyptian society and culture captivated him, and he quickly engaged with all of it--from booksellers, to garbage collectors, to college professors, businessmen, judges and government officials. In 1989, the State Department honored Frank with its worldwide award for political reporting for his ability to understand and explain Egyptian society to his fellow Americans. He and Marie raised their two daughters in Maadi and educated them at Cairo American College, while Marie, who is a molecular biologist, conducted research on Bilharzia at the Naval Medical Research Unit in Cairo.

They left Egypt in 1993, but having drunk from the river Nile, as they say, he was destined to return to Egypt, which he did as ambassador in 2005. These were complicated times in the Egyptian-American relations, and Frank demonstrated his ability to develop trust between people approaching complicated problems from very

different perspectives. His daughter Francesca also returned to earn her master's degree at AUC, where she met her husband, who is also an AUC alumnus. So Frank will soon become the first AUC president who comes to that role as a parent and a father-in-law of AUC alumnae.

Interestingly, Frank won't be the first person to have served as both President of AUC and as US Ambassador to Egypt. That honor actually goes to AUC's second president, John Badeau, whose success at AUC led him later to be appointed as ambassador. And Frank's path from diplomat to AUC president is also not new.

Presidents Tom Bartlett, Chris Thoron, and Richard Pedersen were all foreign service officers before they led the University. It turns out that a diplomat's ability to build bridges between cultures has proven to be a useful skill in adapting American educational philosophies to an Egyptian context.

But while Frank's commitment to education and to Egypt impressed the search committee, the trustees ultimately picked Frank for his leadership. His career provides a demonstrated skill in developing strategy and building consensus to move people to common purpose. We inaugurate him today confident in the knowledge that his

devotion to our mission is absolute, his character impeccable, and his commitment to excellence is deep.

And so let me close with a plea. Our past is testimony to our community's resilience and the strength of its purpose. Our future is filled with new challenges but even greater promise. Daunting as those challenges may seem, they wither when we unite behind the nobility of our shared goals. Frank will be a leading character in AUC's next chapter, but let us pledge that we will write it together.

I am now pleased to welcome His Excellency, Dr. Ashraf El-Sheihy, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research.