**Inauguration Address**

**Monday October 25, 3 pm, Bassily Auditorium**

**Thank you Dr. Salem, for your kind words/introduction.**

**Your Excellencies:**

**Minister Khaled Abd al-Ghaffar, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research**

**Minister Ali Moselhy, Minister of Supply and Internal Trade**

**Ambassador Johnathan Cohen**

**Former Presidents of AUC: Tom Bartlett, Lisa Anderson and Francis Ricciardone**

**Presidents and distinguished delegates from sister institutions**

**Members of the Board of Trustees of the American University in Cairo**

**Members of the AUC community: Alumni, faculty, Staff, and Students**

**Distinguished guests, friends of AUC**

**…**

**Good afternoon!**

**I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to each of you for honoring me by your presence today, and to those who have tuned in to watch online. It is my honor to join the caring and welcoming community of the American University in Cairo, and a humbling privilege to serve as the thirteenth president of this fine university.**

**I am grateful to the members of AUC’s Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff for their leadership and commitment and for the trust they have placed in me. And to the students of AUC who bring life to our beautiful campus and purpose to our lives. I am also thankful to former presidents of AUC for their stewardship of the University.**

**Allow me at the outset of my remarks today to recognize my family. Only my wife Dalal and daughter Kinda are in the audience, but other members of my family are watching the event online: my daughter Shezza from NY and Millal from Rome, my sisters Malake, Nada and Tamador from a struggling city, Beirut, and my brothers Kamel and Bichr from Dammam and London. On all of my life journeys, my family’s love and support have always been my anchor and ultimate home away from home. I would not be the person I am today without you.**

**Congregating in large groups like this one is no longer something we can take for granted, and I am grateful to everyone who made it possible for us to gather safely today. I would like to acknowledge the enormous efforts of so many members of the AUC community who have been working tirelessly to ensure that the university can deliver its academic mission despite the challenging conditions of the pandemic, deploying new and effective to tools to bring us safely back to campus. To name a few of those to whom we owe a debt of gratitude: the Provost’s Office, Student Life, Facilities, IT, Marketing and Communications, the Center for Teaching and Learning, The Scientific Advisory Committee, and the Covid Academic Planning Committee, and of course the medical and security teams, and numerous other committees of faculty, students and staff. That is particularly meaningful given the loss we have experienced as individuals and as a community throughout this pandemic. This month, a security guard at AUC since 2009, Abdul Hamid Mohammad El Badry, lost his life to the pandemic. On behalf of AUC, I offer his family and friends our deepest condolences. May his soul rest in peace!**

**This loss is a stark reminder of the realities of the world we live in. There are lessons to learn from the experiences of the last two years, and although we will need time and distance to tease out and fully absorb all of these lessons, some are already clear.**

**The most obvious lesson is that the world is faced with significant challenges that we can only confront and overcome together, as a global community. Pandemics, environmental degradation, ever-increasing poverty, global conflicts, human displacement, water and food scarcity, and many more global challenges know no boarders. Indeed, we are as strong as the most vulnerable among us, and we must hold and uplift one another, and work *together* towards the future we wish to see for our world—from the local to the global.**

**And a second obvious lesson is that we need to learn to operate under conditions of instability. In the first few months of the pandemic, we hunkered down, waiting for the pandemic to end on its own, but it did not. And as you know, along with institutions across the globe, we embraced our new reality, carefully but deliberately working to restore normalcy to our lives.**

**But what does this mean for us at AUC and for Higher education more broadly?**

**The simple answer, I believe, is that we need to reinvent ourselves against the backdrop of these global challenges.**

**Many of our goals and objectives remain unchanged. We push forward, resolute, in achieving the two most important pillars of education at AUC: The pursuit of truth, with all the privileges and responsibilities that come with this noble endeavor, and producing and disseminating knowledge, by supporting knowledge production and the education of our student at the highest level of quality. As a distinguished and impactful institution of higher education in both Egypt and the region; and as principal interlocuter with global institutions of higher education around the world, AUC has shaped the careers of many, some of whom are with us today, and has certainly shaped its graduates into the influential leaders they are today in multiple private and public sectors in Egypt, the region and the world**

**I have no doubt that all of these distinctive roles will persist. But in light of the global changes affecting higher education, accentuated by the dramatic developments of the last two years, we must now ask more of ourselves. We must put added emphasis on service, on serving our families, communities and societies, and indeed on striving to make the world a better place. And we will need to rethink our priorities as we embark on our second century of education and service. What distinguished AUC in its first 100 years is not just the quality of education, knowledge production, and societal impact that have been the hallmarks of the university, but its bold willingness to reinvent itself. The move to the New Cairo campus was itself but one manifestation of this willingness.**

**So, rethink we can, and rethink we will. I have already had the privilege of just a preview of our faculty’s inspiring and truly transformative work, and I am eager to learn more from the hopes and aspirations of the brilliant members of our community. Because of them, I am personally immensely hopeful about the future of our university**

**One of the hallmarks of AUC’s academic excellence over the years has been its commitment to a strong, holistic liberal arts education. But as we collectively hone our vision for the future, we will need to redefine what a liberal arts education means in the 21st century, especially after the pandemic.**

**A liberal arts education enables our students to be critical thinkers, who think outside the box and reach across disciplinary boundaries to solve real-life problems that cannot be solved in siloed disciplines. It conditions students to be life-long learners, capable of adapting to emerging demands of an ever-changing world.**

**But today, our commitment to liberal arts education gains an added urgency, not just because it transforms our students into interdisciplinary problem-solvers; but also, because liberal arts education is ethical education, imbued with the ethos of service and care. It fosters an appreciation of equity and cross-cultural understanding. It enables us to understand the world in all of its diversity and richness. And it makes us think and act with purpose and care for our communities, societies, and the world.**

**And as we commit to acting with purpose and care, we must also dedicate our next century to collective investment in educational innovation, not just in our pedagogies and delivery modalities, but in the educational programs of the future. We must explore a new generation of academic fields of study that speak to the emerging trends in higher education and to the pressing needs of our societies alike.**

**In the days ahead, we will chart our future together, and we will decide collectively on the new fields in which we can and should make meaningful contributions. To name just a few, we will build our contributions to the fields of data science and artificial intelligence; urban studies; environmental studies; the water, food and energy nexus; and the range of cultural studies in a country which has contributed so much to human civilization.**

**A focus on relevant education and knowledge will enable us to both better serve our students, by providing them with a transformative education that permits them to thrive in an ever-changing world, and to better serve our societies, by cultivating cutting edge fields of study that speak to today’s pressing social needs.**

**And there are many more ways to engage with and give back to our communities—to deploy our strengths and intellectual capacity for the benefit of our societies.**

**One obvious way is to contribute to the education of mid-career professionals, who need to reinvent themselves to serve the growing economy. The need to upskill professionals is global, requires mobilization on a grand scale, and is beyond the capacity of any single institution. To make a difference, we must explore partnerships with sister educational institutions in Egypt, regionally and globally, so we can maximize our collective impact in the service of our societies. We must also expand our partnerships with industry and the public sector to help provide solutions to real life problems.**

**And finally, I want to add to the tenets of our institution another pillar, that will define the future of our institution and its role in the region and the world. In our next century, we must strive to model institutional integrity, not just in the way we conduct our business, but also in the way we live up to our core values as a community grounded in ethics, service, and care.**

**A transformative education was the ideal of the founders of our university, and of the numerous members of this community who walked the halls of the university over the last century. In its first century, AUC has played a pioneering and transformative role in Higher education. Today, few institutions are better equipped than AUC to evolve and to transform the future of higher education in the region.**

**Inaugurations are about institutions just as much as they are about individuals, and my remarks so far have focused on our beloved institution. But allow me in closing to share a brief personal story with you.**

**When I told my 8-year-old daughter Kinda that we are moving to Cairo, she was naturally apprehensive and worried about leaving her school and friends. Two days later, she came to me and told me, with a smile on her face, that she “googled Egypt”. She discovered the pyramids, and said: “did you know that the pyramids were not built by slaves but by free workers who were paid with food.” She then proceeded to tell me about the architect who built multiple chambers on top of each other with holes in each that allowed the spirits to rise upwards in these chambers. Kinda’s research enabled her excitement.**

**I am not quoting this episode just to let you know that my family and I, including members of our family who will not reside with us in Egypt, are so excited to join your ranks and be part of the AUC community. Indeed, we are.**

**Kinda’s story reminded me of two important lessons. First, it reminded me of the power of knowledge, our most reliable friend in times of uncertainty. When Kinda was worried and anxious, she was comforted by research. We at AUC are in the business of knowledge, and this knowledge will give us strength and enable us to adapt and serve, and make the world a better place.**

**Kinda’s story also reminded me, if any reminder was needed, of the Egypt’s immaculate builders, whose contribution to human civilization is unparalleled anywhere in the world. This American University in Cairo — and of Cairo — has always served Cairo and Egypt, and has derived its strength from the endless richness of this culture. So, in the age-old tradition of this nation of civilization builders, let us continue to do our part: building a culture of excellence and a culture of care.**

**Thank you.**