

**JOSEPH G. JABBRA, Ph.D.**

**EIGHTH PRESIDENT OF THE  
LEBANESE AMERICAN  
UNIVERSITY**

**Inauguration Speech**

**January 14, 2005**

**Biel, The Pavillon Royal**

**At 7:00pm**

## A. Welcome and Gratitude.

Thank you, Mr. Ayoub, for the honor you have bestowed upon me, on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Board of International Advisors. I will treasure this seal of the University, with all its symbolism, for the rest of my life.

فخامة رئيس الجمهورية العماد اميل لحود، يمثله معالي وزير الثقافة الاستاذ ناجي البستاني،

دولة رئيس مجلس النواب الاستاذ نبيه بري، يمثله حضرة النائب ناصر قنديل،

دولة رئيس مجلس الوزراء السيد عمر كرامي، يمثله معالي وزير الدولة لشؤون التنمية الادارية الاستاذ ابراهيم الضاهر،

دولة الرئيس رفيق الحريري، يمثله معالي الوزير فؤاد السنيورة،

دولة نائب رئيس مجلس الوزراء الاستاذ عصام فارس، يمثله الدكتور بول سالم مدير عام مؤسسة فارس،

معالي الوزراء،

ممثل قائد الجيش العماد ميشال سليمان العميد الركن بسام يحيى،

حضرات النواب،

سعادة السفراء والقناصل،

حضرات القضاة،

زملائي رؤساء الجامعات،

حضرات رؤساء البلديات والمخاتير،

حضرات القسس الأجلاء،

Current and former members of LAU Board of Trustees and Board of International Advisors, members of the Presbyterian church of the United States of America, members of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, and Friends of the Lebanese

American University. I am moved by a deep sense of gratitude toward all of you. By your presence here today, not only do you honor me, but you also honor the Lebanese American University, where commitment to mission, love of learning, dreams, aspirations, and hard work are sources of inspiration and pride for all of us.

I'm grateful for the presence of all the LAU constituencies: the faculty, which is the heart of the academic enterprise; the staff, without whose remarkable talents the faculty would find it difficult to achieve excellence; administrators and supervisors, whose wisdom and talents help guide LAU in fulfilling its mission; and the students who, in the final analysis, are the *raison d'être* of our institution. In all of you, I see the unity, the commitment, the hard work, and the common purpose that have always made LAU the success story that it is today.

I thank God that both of my parents are still alive and in good health, and are present here today to witness the inauguration of their son as the eighth President of LAU. I salute my brothers, sisters, cousins, and their spouses, and the formidable contingent representing my native village, Ferzol, which always followed and took pride in my successes.

Finally, I'd like to pay tribute to my wife, Dr. Nancy Jabbra, whose support continues to inspire me, our Son, Michael, and our Daughter, Mary, who encouraged me to accept the offer to become President of LAU and who love and take pride in Lebanon, their Dad's native country. I salute you all, for being here tonight, to share with me on this wonderful occasion. I thank all those who worked hard to organize this marvelous event, and in particular, the members of the Inauguration Committee, whose commitment and dedication insured the success of my inauguration.

B. A privilege to be part of LAU.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed a privilege to be part of LAU. This privilege brings an exhilarating sense of responsibility because of the wonderful challenges that lie ahead. Chief among them is causing change to happen and managing it well, so that we build a bright future for the University, upon its successful past. Change is inevitable for any institution that aspires to new heights of excellence. Being static is risky and dangerous. I feel very fortunate that LAU is agile, nimble, and ready to adopt constructive change. As an institution of higher education, we understand the importance of change, we welcome it, and we manage it well.

LAU has a glorious past. Under a strong and visionary leadership, it has grown from a small college to a full-size university. The civil war in Lebanon did not hinder its growth. It has become a major educational force with two thriving campuses in Beirut and Byblos. We are over 6,000 students strong, our enrollment is solid, our finances are healthy, and our endowment is gaining new strength. We spend over \$10 million annually in financial aid, to help those students who cannot afford LAU's full tuition. Because of our healthy enrollment, stable financial condition, and lack of debt, we have positioned ourselves to become more selective in admissions, student centered in teaching, competitive in research, and international in our reach.

Yes, we have been exceptionally successful, but we are at a crossroads. If we are to continue our successes, we must always be dynamic, always climbing toward new heights of excellence, and never satisfied with past glories.

### C. My Dream for LAU.

I have a vision, a dream for our beloved LAU that I would like to share with you. My dream is to meticulously consolidate our past and current gains, strengthen any weak

programs we might have, and only selectively and strategically add new ones. My dream is to revisit carefully who we are, what we want to be, and how we want to reach our goals.

My dream is to make sure that all of our academic programs, current and future, are the product of a culture of excellence sustained by a culture of evidence, with the goal of being academically second to none in Lebanon, in this region, and in the world.

My dream for LAU is not only to provide our students with excellent academic programs, excellent faculty and staff, and superb support services. It is to provide our students as well with every chance of hope in a world where many young people see no hope, to instill in them self-confidence in a world where self-confidence has become a rare commodity, to teach them altruism in a world where altruism is sacrificed every day on the altar of crass individualism, to point to them the importance of a profound, caring, and well-meaning spirituality in a world where spirituality has become so meaningless for so many, to ask them to dream about a promising career in a world where decent and honorable careers have become difficult to realize, and to make sure that they are not overwhelmed by a world of illusions and cynicism, but by a world that makes them brighter, wiser, happier, and better human beings.

My dream is for LAU to be a place where our students will reject the compartmentalization of their academic, intellectual, and extra-curricular activities. Upon graduation, our students will have a university experience, based on the education of the whole person, bringing together their professional, family, and public lives, and becoming better people for their own benefit and for the benefit of society as a whole. To paraphrase Derek Bok, former President of Harvard University, we will make sure that the university

experience of our students will strengthen their character and produce an educated class committed to a principled life in the service of society.

I dream of our university as an institution of higher education always governed by the highest ethical standards, transparency, accountability, and integrity. LAU was given to us as a trust and we must not betray those who gave it to us. It is the responsibility of the LAU community always to make sure that the precious gift that is LAU continues to shine through its ethical and moral deeds. As role models, we will offer inspiration to our students and society. We will emphasize to both the important values of freedom, integrity, hard work, commitment to excellence, and concern for our fellow human beings, no matter how difficult the times or challenging the circumstances.

#### D. Plan of Action.

That, Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen, constitutes my vision, my dream for LAU. But without action, dreams, however lofty and beautiful, will remain just dreams. I am happy to inform you that the LAU community has already embarked on a plan of action.

First, we profoundly believe in the value of the peer review process. We certainly offer excellent academic programs. This is not enough. We need our peers to address both our academic strengths and weaknesses, using academic performance indicators and the results of data analysis to foster our strengths and eliminate our failings. To that end, we will seek accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. In October of 2004, we sent a delegation of faculty and administrators to participate in accreditation workshops sponsored by the Commission in Boston, and in December of 2004, the Deputy Director of the Commission, Dr. Barbara Brittingham, visited both LAU campuses, gave a series of workshops, met with staff, faculty, and students, and spoke about the Commission's

accreditation standards and how to prepare a self-study report for the purpose of accreditation. With the commitment and hard work of the faculty and the entire LAU community, we intend to become worthy of and add a level of American higher education accreditation to the Lebanese one that already graces our University and its academic programs. We are proud that our School of Pharmacy is the only accredited school outside of the United States and that our graduates are finding jobs and doing very well. Parallel to our efforts to seek American accreditation, we have begun to pave the way for the accreditation of our professional programs in Business, and in Engineering and Architecture.

Second, LAU emerged from the Lebanese Civil War unscathed and a major force to reckon with. However, we need a new sense of direction, a strategic plan, a living plan. Therefore, after careful thought, we determined the areas where we need to take new strategic initiatives to strengthen our university. They are:

Academic Excellence. We will strengthen the quality of our academic programs by reviewing them regularly and measuring them up to high quality and demanding academic standards. We will recruit and retain top notch faculty and staff with competitive salaries and benefits. And we will provide excellent support services and an environment conducive to excellence, an environment where faculty have the opportunity to develop professionally and bring together teaching and scholarship.

Essential to faculty recruitment and retention is the provision of research and publication support, so that faculty stay alive intellectually. To that purpose, we will create a climate that brings faculty together across disciplinary lines. We will attract international as well as Lebanese faculty so that LAU continues its tradition as a place where educated men

and women come together for the betterment of society, and where new ideas blossom for the advancement of knowledge.

Also essential to academic excellence is revisiting the curriculum, particularly the requirements shared by all students. How can this curriculum be updated to meet students' and Lebanon's needs? Our students need to graduate not only knowing a particular field of study, but also understanding the world, its civilizations, and the achievements of its peoples. They need to be able to think critically and communicate well in both English and Arabic. In articulating and implementing our strategic initiatives, we will make sure that these needs are fully met.

Enrollment Management. This bit of jargon from higher education administration literature simply refers to student recruitment, retention, and graduation. What kind of students do we want, and how do we attract them? In this regard, we intend to determine the optimum number of our student body, and strengthen the quality of our admission standards. Moreover, we will pay close attention to student retention, and graduate students who will become worthy alumni.

Governance. The challenge of any leader is to make sure that, through the institutionalization of governing policies, processes, and procedures, the institution ceases to depend on the whims of its people and the personal cult of the leader. To that end, we have already begun revisiting our policies, rules, processes, and procedures for the purpose of institutionalizing them, and we have begun in earnest to examine how best faculty, staff, and students can participate effectively in the governance of the University.

Development. Although we are not a profit-making institution, we insist that healthy financial reserves are essential to realizing our academic aspirations. Excellence is expensive



and academic excellence is even more expensive. We need money for improving the quality of everything we do. We need money to improve the quality of our academic programs, attract competent faculty and staff, pay for capital projects, provide excellent and fully equipped classrooms, laboratories, and offices, and to offer more scholarships and financial aid. The University cannot continue to depend heavily on tuition. We must enlarge our donor base to help us alleviate the tuition burden on our students and their parents.

We will always honor, and cultivate our alumni as valued members of the LAU extended family. Through technology and effective communication, we will provide them with the opportunity to network with each other. We will urge them to support each other, no matter where they are, no matter what they do. We will ask them to provide our students with internships and our graduates with employment. Our alumni are important to the development of LAU because through their generosity, caring, and sustained giving, our University will soar to new heights of excellence.

Finance and Administration. Careful financial planning is key to our continued success. It enables the University to get the most out of its resources. Both donors and parents will know that their contributions and tuition are spent wisely. Planning will drive budgeting, and expenditures will be based upon priorities derived from the University's overall strategic plan. We will require that responsible financial management always involves responsible auditing of our resources, that both transparency and careful control mark each step in spending, and that regular reassessment of our financial decision-making processes and procedures is institutionalized.

In our pursuit of excellence, effective administration of support services will be paramount, maintenance and growth of our physical facilities will be coordinated and enhanced, and public safety on both of our campuses will be a priority.

Information Technology. Technology has revolutionized the world and the way we do things. Certainly it has become an integral part of higher education. No university can afford to ignore the importance of technology in the pursuit of academic and scholarly excellence. But technology is seductive and expensive; it tends to become the end rather than remaining the means. However, through careful strategic planning and analysis of our needs, we will not allow it to drive the learning process, nor to control us. We will make sure that it remains an important means to achieving excellence in everything we do.

On the positive side, we have embraced information technology through the efforts of our most excellent staff. Recently, we inaugurated a wireless multimedia network, with IP telephony and video-on-demand capability, that is among the first of its kind on university campuses in the Middle East.

Public Relations. This is an area of weakness at LAU today. Our excellent academic programs, the excellent support services that our staff provide, the hard work of our administrators, our strong relationship with the community, the successes of our alumni, and the achievements of our faculty and students are not well publicized. As we proceed with our strategic plan, we are looking into the measures we need to take to publicize our successes and promote the excellent education that we offer our students; in short, to tell our success story to the world most effectively.

The Medical School. The Board of Trustees has already decided in principle to establish a medical school at LAU. As part of the strategic planning process, the following steps have

already been taken: we have asked Universal Hospital Services to prepare a clear and thorough feasibility study on cost of construction for the medical school and for the teaching hospital, plus a seven-year forecast for operating costs; we have explored the possibility of affiliation with an American institution providing high quality medical programs; and we have investigated recruiting a champion who could shepherd the project and provide the academic curriculum and depth that would be needed.

We are now conducting a thorough assessment of the pros and cons of establishing a medical school, and we will make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees at its meeting in September, 2005.

أيها الحفل الكريم

هذه هي احلامنا ورؤيتنا لمستقبل الجامعة اللبنانية الاميركية.

احلامٌ حيّكت من ماضٍ عريق تتلألاً فيه انجازات مؤسسينا المشيخيين واسلافنا جواهر ساطعة النور في تاج هذه المؤسسة الكريمة.

ورؤية نادرة المثيل انبثقت من ايمان عميقٍ ومتمين في قدرتنا وعزمنا على تذليل كل الصعوبات في سبيل تحقيق امانينا وامنياتنا لجامعتنا السخية المعطاء.

لقد اؤتمنا على هذه الجامعة كوديعة مقدسة. وقدسية هذه الامانة تحتم علينا بالأ نستخدمها اداة لتحقيق مكاسبنا وطموحاتنا الشخصية العمياء، بل لما فيه خير مجتمعنا وخير الانسانية جمعاء.

لقد بُنيت الجامعة اللبنانية الاميركية لتكون روضة غنية غثاءة لرواد الفكر والقلم. لقد أُسست لكي تكون سموألاً - اي صرحاً منيعاً في غاية الحسن والكمال - مشرّع الابواب لطلاب العلم والمعرفة، بغض النظر عن انتماءاتهم الدينية والسياسية، وبغض النظر ايضاً عن الطبقات الاجتماعية التي ينتمون اليها.

ولقد أنشأت جامعتنا لكي تشارك كخميرة صالحة مشاركة فعالة في بناء واصلاح المجتمع الذي اوجدت فيه.

هكذا كانت رسالة مؤسسيها ومسانديها المشيخيين وهكذا ستبقى مهما تقلبت الظروف ومهما تغيرت الايام.

E. Conclusion. So we have our dreams, we have our vision of LAU, and we are in the process of putting in place a strategic plan of action to make our dreams a reality. Our dreams give us hope for a bright future. A plan of action gives us the means to realize our hopes.

Excellencies and friends, we inherited this trust that is LAU, not to use for our personal benefit, but for the benefit of all; not to abuse for the pursuit of blind personal ambition, but to nurture so that many can realize their aspirations. LAU is meant to be a place of learning, a place where all, regardless of social class or religious, ethnic, or political affiliation, can find an opportunity for education.

We have been entrusted with two potent forces in society: youth and ideas; caring for the former is a privilege, developing the latter is a joy. We cannot afford to betray this trust. In fact, our only choice is to participate vigorously in the excitement of forming youth and in the joy of shaping ideas.

In conclusion we, the LAU community, welcome change and commit to pursuing excellence in everything we do, promoting the quality of learning, always doing better what we do, redefining ourselves, and perfecting our academic programs. We will give our students hope and self confidence. We will be governed by the canons of transparency and accountability, and we will be guided by the highest of ethical standards.

Our challenge to move our institution to the next level of excellence has already begun. Action is on the way to earn international accreditation, to be followed by the accreditation of all our professional programs. Our strategic planning has already begun and initiatives will be established in the areas of academic and intellectual excellence, governance, enrollment management, development, finance, information technology, and

public relations. In our effort to become a better institution, we will rely on ourselves and collaborate effectively with each other. We will extend our hands to our sister institutions to collaborate in areas beneficial to students, society in Lebanon, and beyond. By working together, not only will we become a formidable educational force in this region, we will also advance with self-assuredness and pride toward a brighter future.

Excellencies, colleagues and friends, I invite you all to recommit to LAU, to the privilege of hard work and sacrifice, but most importantly to the joy of participating in the honorable task of taking LAU to new heights of academic and intellectual excellence. As a university, LAU is a place where future leaders are grown and where society does its thinking; it is a place of hope for those who may not have hope. I am honored to pledge the rest of my professional life to excellence in higher education at LAU. With your help and together, we shall realize our dreams for LAU and for higher education in Lebanon and beyond. May God bless all of you and bless LAU.

Thank you.