

**November 3, 2017**

**LDI Conference**

**Fr. Pierre Najem, President of NDU-Louaize**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning.

The past few decades of our planet's existence can best be described as "conflict years," where peaceful relations among and within nations have proven difficult to build. It is an era rife with political conflicts rooted in many reasons: ethnic tensions, religious intolerance, struggle for the control of resources, etc. Nowhere is safe. From Baghdad to Manhattan, terrorism and bloodshed abound.

This year, 2017, witnessed one thousand and fifty terrorist attacks and six thousand five hundred and eighty casualties.

As a Catholic institution of higher education, Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU) firmly believes in its mission to serve dialogue and peace. A Catholic university should be deeply committed to dialogue between faith and culture, between faith and reason, and therefore must build bridges between people of different religions and cultures without falling into the trap of relativism and of the politically correct.

*"If there is one word that we should never tire of repeating, it is this: dialogue. We are called to promote a culture of dialogue by every possible means and thus to rebuild the fabric of society. The culture of dialogue entails a true apprenticeship and a discipline that enables us to view others as valid dialogue partners, to respect the foreigner, the immigrant and people from different cultures as worthy of being listened to. Today we urgently need to engage all the members of society in building 'a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter' and in creating 'a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society'. Peace will be lasting in the measure that we arm our children with the weapons of dialogue, that we teach them to fight the good fight of encounter and negotiation. In this way, we will bequeath to them a*

*culture capable of devising strategies of life, not death, and of inclusion, not exclusion.” (Pope Francis, May 6, 2016.)*

It is a fact that today’s society is a globalized one composed of different cultures, ethnic groups, religions, ideologies, and philosophies. If we refuse dialogue, this difference would become a threat to social cohesion or to personal and communitarian safety and security. Dialogue could become a valuable resource for those willing to transform differences into mutual enrichment.

In all of this, higher education has something to say, *“Education contains a central challenge for the future: to allow various cultural expressions to co-exist and to promote dialogue so as to foster a peaceful society.” (Cf. UNESCO, Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Paris (October 20, 2005), Art. 4.)*

*These aims are achieved in various stages:*

*(1) Discovering the multicultural nature of one’s own situation.*

*(2) Overcoming prejudices by living and working in harmony.*

*(3) Educating oneself ‘by means of the other’ to a global vision and a sense of citizenship. Fostering encounters between different people helps to create mutual understanding, although it ought not to mean a loss of one’s own identity.” (Congregation for Catholic Education, Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools, Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love, Vatican City, 2013.)*

Given the fact that NDU is aware of the importance of the mission it serves, we welcome this strategic partnership with the Lebanon Dialogue Initiative (LDI). And here, I would like to thank The Honorable William Zard Abou Jaoude for putting in all his effort to transform his vision of LDI into reality. I also thank the whole LDI team. Thank you for all the bridges you are building.

Allow me also to thank Dr. Guita Hourani, Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at NDU, and the LERC team. Thank you for your dedicated efforts throughout the years, and I look forward to many more future achievements.

Here, at NDU, we will always ensure that our curricula reflects our value scales, priorities, and choices to help transform our student body from one that is

knowledge-based to one that is wisdom-based. Our aim is to help our students go beyond knowledge and to educate them to think and to evaluate values of dialogue and diversity as well as to respect human dignity, human rights, and different cultures. By so doing, our students will become the architects of a transformed, free, just, and respectful society.

Thank you.