

Your Excellency Minister of Culture,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Guest of Honor,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to say it is indeed a great pleasure and a privilege to welcome you here today, and to our guests who represent an array of nationalities and cultures, I warmly say, ‘Welcome to Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU).’ Thank you all for sharing with us our 10<sup>th</sup> International Film Festival (IFF) aptly and enduringly titled, ‘*The Power of Youth*’.

This year is a significant one for NDU, because not only does it mark the tenth edition of the Festival but also it is the thirty-year anniversary of our University, which continues to look to the future with a pioneering and adventurous spirit. We are certain that our community, through its commitment to making a difference, will continue to distinguish NDU as a hallmark institution that will innovatively continue to provide high-quality education characterized by a global perspective.

In celebration of these milestone events, the opportunity to accelerate change both on campus and beyond our gates poses itself again through many — dare I say — forward-thinking and ambitious initiatives; the evolution to new heights of this event is among those initiatives.

NDU’s annual tradition of hosting the Film Festival has made of it a cultural, artistic, and educational benchmark in the international film arena. The success of this University in establishing and maintaining the Festival was no mean feat, especially in a country like Lebanon, which has for years found itself trapped in political instability, economic stagnation, and social woes. Yet, Lebanon has prevailed. A few days ago, the presidential seat, which had remained vacant for two and a half years, was filled, and the future is again ripe with promise. In a couple of weeks, we celebrate Lebanon’s independence with a renewed sense of relief and pride.

On the other hand, Lebanon since antiquity has occupied a special place in the world, and it has always been deeply influenced by its long association with both the East and West, producing a unique and open culture with many beautiful facets. As a leading Lebanese University, it is our mission — nay, it is our duty — to make every effort to show this culturally-rich and breathtaking face to the world. ‘*The Power of Youth*’ is a good example. It celebrates young and emerging talents from many corners of the globe, including our students.

Tonight, our Audiovisual and Film graduates fill us with great pride as we witness what they have achieved in film-making. You see, film-making is a powerful vehicle to relate stories and capture an audience’s imagination through local or universally-held themes that project cultural truths unto the screen.

In closing, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to His Excellency Mr. Raymond Arajji for his patronage, this second time in a row. I also wish to acknowledge our students and their faculty for being exemplary models of the values instilled in them at NDU. Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge a true daughter of the soil: the multi-talented, multi-award winning, and internationally-acclaimed actress and director Nadine Labaki. We admire her for her

extraordinary artistry, for her successful effort to put back Lebanon on the map of cinematic glory, and for her ingenuity in showing the many beautiful facets of this country, her country, as a land brimming with creativity and culture. Today, it is our great privilege to honor her for her astounding achievements.

*'The Power of Youth'* endeavors to bring young people to the forefront; it draws on their energy and ground-breaking approaches to meet the challenges our societies are facing. For that, it will always merit our attention and support.

Thank you