

**Address of Father Walid Moussa  
President of Notre Dame University**

**“University and Human Development”**

**NDU Founding Day**

**May 8, 2008**

Dear Friends,

For the third year in a row, I stand before you on the occasion of NDU's Founding Day after being appointed president of NDU in summer 2005 by the noble Order to which I belong.

The first time I stood before you in May 2006, the country's situation seemed better, yet overcast with sadness, grief and an uncertain future. However, armed with hopeful and spiritual expectation, I concluded my address by saying: "It is my hope that on the next anniversary, we will have made a positive development in terms of our patriotic behavior and the mentality of our political leaders."

All of you remember that the university's anniversary in May 2007 coincided with even more painful and gloomy circumstances. The entire country was paralyzed by widespread and deeper divisions, coupled with an alarming security situation. Once again, I resorted to hope to conclude my remarks when I said: "The university's role should transcend education towards creating a new generation armed with political education, one that resorts to dialogue and uses the power of words rather than that of the violence."

This year too, the third anniversary coincides with more corruption, division and fear. In the absence of a president, a competent government and an efficient parliament, the state institutions are weakening; the country's economy is slowly sliding into recession and hunger. Continued strikes and protests still paralyze the country, and the brain drain is on the rise with no light looming at the end of the tunnel. What is there left to say?

My friends, for three years now, we have witnessed serious contradictions that I can summarize in three questions when it comes to university education:

- Can educators work on development and growth under a deteriorating political, economic and security situation? In other words, can we separate educational action from patriotic action?
- Can a university like ours isolate itself from society; concentrate its efforts on education and culture, with no regard for the country's difficult situation?
- How can universities stand up to the challenges facing the country and play their leading, natural role in guiding society towards prosperity and peace, while political leaders are struggling in endless conflicts, leading the country to dissension, division, and hunger?

My friends, rest assured. I have been pondering about these questions for a long time now, ever since I realized that our role as a university should rise above education to tackle patriotic action. His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the importance of these questions when he

said in his address at the La Sapienza University on January 17, 2008: "The objective of a university is the human being who wants to seek and find out the truth." Are we working in this direction to help unveil the facts? Or are we ignoring the truths and burying our heads in the sand? Are we afraid of asking the alarming questions and find the suitable answers? His Holiness concluded his speech by saying: "It is our duty to provoke the mind to search for the truth, for good, for God."

To face up to the bitter reality in which we live today, I searched with some fellow colleagues, scholars and intellectuals in the University and outside, for a ray of hope to which the University can contribute. I could only find hope in the human being. The human being alone is capable of coming to the rescue. How can we improve the individual's capabilities, whether an instructor, a staff member or a student, so that the required change takes place? I was encouraged in this endeavor by the slogan that was put forward last April 13, in memory of the breakout of war in Lebanon, to which different civil society institutions, including the media, agreed to advocate:

*All Lebanon rejects another April 13 and holds on to its own unity in a republic that maintains peace, protects human rights and the freedom of its citizens.*

Whereas this slogan reflects a strong commitment to civil peace, most politicians are still in a round of vehement verbal disputes, leveling accusations of treachery against one another, making Lebanon look like a mere group of mercenaries that live in the margins of history and serve the interest of foreign powers. Hearing their exchange of insults, someone said: "They are all right." Late Mahatma Ghandi always said that honesty is the best policy. Where do we stand on this?

Indeed, my dear friends, our only salvation lies in human interaction, in instilling change into civil society so that we accomplish the required change in Lebanon. How do we go about that?

The answer is to concentrate our efforts on the individual at the University through interaction between instructors, staff and students. The answer is to speak the truth, to use the words as a divine power rather than a tool to hide the truth and delude the public. Here, I cite John's Revelation (verse 15): "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

My dear friends, how can we contribute to the development of our civil society, in the University and outside? How can we work for the development of the individuals whether they are faculty members, staff or students? How can we confront the evil forces of sectarianism, subordination and violence? Some politicians have succumbed and drowned themselves in the mud, dragging along the entire country. Should we then give up ourselves and surrender the role assigned to us?

The answer to that lies in creating a good instructor and a good staff member so that they create a good student. This does not mean that instructors should lose their traditional educational role, but that they must rise above it to initiate a creative interaction with their students. It is impressive for instructors to carry impressive titles. Yet, a title can never honor its holder unless the holder himself honors that same title. How can an instructor be a **teacher** rather than a mere vehicle of information? The word “teacher” – Jesus is a teacher – carries the meaning of all the values needed for Lebanon today with all its plurality and diversity.

Let us build the human being on these values, and we shall then prevail.

**1 – Fight extremism and fundamentalism:** The role of a real educator is to differentiate between authenticity and fundamentalism, moderation and extremism. A real teacher must plant such seeds in the minds of the students. This can only be achieved, thanks to the culture that a student acquires under the supervision of the teacher, through research, reading and dialogue. When cultures become deeply rooted in human nature, in the student’s personality, the student shall cease to be a slave of his own instincts. Culture instills in the student the noble principle of “Love your enemies and forgive your persecutors.”

**2 – Adopt dialogue:** The teacher’s role is to organize dialogue so that it grants students a sense of critique. Therefore, an educator must be competent enough to be a leader, and leadership is synonymous with humility, service and love. Are university teachers humble, loving and serviceable? Only with such assets can a teacher create a dialogue between students of different orientations. Only dialogue can erase the unthinking slogans advocated by fake leaders.

**3 – Promote freedom and respect of others:** Eliminating or neglecting the other results in distorting freedom. Charles Malek once said: “Freedom is responsible before itself, before history, before God. Freedom refrains from lies, forgery and injustice. Freedom rejoices in love and rises above hatred.” Do we, university leaders, comprehend this? Do instructors direct their students towards such a concept of freedom? Does difference of opinion mean annihilating the other? Socrates said: “Difference of opinion must not lead to enmity, otherwise my wife and I would be the fiercest of enemies.”

**4 – Encourage constructive criticism:** For a long time now, it has been agreed that the instructor’s mission is to transfer information, criticize information and produce information. This being said, can an instructor lead students to a critical practice by which they relinquish all restrictions and instincts to condemn some of the speeches and unethical approaches of political leaders, in all honesty and courage? A nation’s sovereignty begins with sovereignty over oneself. A nation’s sovereignty cannot be achieved by blindly following this leader or that.

**5 – Promote art clubs and creativity:** In this regard, the letter of his Holiness Pope John Paul II to artists (in 1999) comes to my mind. In it, His Holiness reckoned that the Church is in need of art. He said: “This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart .” We need to encourage art in the hearts of our

students so that the joy it brings may compensate the tragedies of death and sadness they see around them. This issue touches on a new topic which is adapting modern technology to beautiful arts.

**6 - Adapt modern technology to fine arts:** As much as we admire modern technology and use it in all its forms, we are in fear of becoming its slaves as technology controls our habits and behaviors. We should, as teachers and students, turn to beautiful arts such as painting, poetry, sculpture, music, dancing and theater. Only then can we create a balance between the soul and mind, and give a soul to our university action, away from the widespread culture of market and consumption.

**7 - Differentiate between faith, religion and sectarianism:** Needless to say, religion forms the backbone of human civilizations. How can we prevent the religious factor from becoming a source of threat and violence? How can we eliminate the image of the "beast" God and revive the image of a loving and compassionate God? Is religion at the service of politics, or vice versa? Our sin shall be great if we, educational and religious leaders, allow the political and economic problems to suffocate the soul which alone grants life to the University and the nation.

**8 - Build good citizenship:** Ever since the establishment of the State of Lebanon, we have been unable to create a sense of citizenship based on the belief that the nation is stronger than family, confession, and political parties. Lebanon is a country of diversity. Yet, it has been unable to become a country of unity, a country with a mission as was proclaimed by his Holiness Pope John Paul II. Lebanon is a group of communities rather than a group of citizens. This is particularly why we always slide into crisis, dissension and war. Our role as educators is to promote patriotism in our students; otherwise we shall be accused of preparing our young generations for death or emigration. The brotherhood in citizenship is stronger than any other bond. Citizenship must be the recognition, not the elimination of the other. 200 years ago, Voltaire said: "I do not approve everything you say, but I am willing to fight so that you have the freedom to say what you say." I ask you, have we taught our students these principles?

It is only through these basic principles that we can make the required change in Lebanon. A university's basic role is to advance society. This can only be achieved through the university faculty members, staff and students.

Lebanon's political unrest has exhausted us: Protests, confrontations, assassinations, violence and bloodshed... How can we turn our University into a powerful tool to face the fervent reactions taking place in the street that may sometimes lure our students and drag them into chaotic behaviors?

We shall not give up the role assigned to us by God and by the parents. We shall not run away from our sacred educational mission. We are all called upon, faculty members, staff and students, to embark on a new mission that will form the very basis of our work during the upcoming year under the title: **Human Development**. Our previous slogan was: From

**Affiliation to Belonging.** Today, I say: **From Belonging to Development.** Our University is qualified to play such a role. The University is the solid ground upon which we build the renewed country of which we dream; a country of peace, joy and civilization.

Long live NDU

Long live Lebanon