

President Athanasios Moulakis
Charge to the Graduates
The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani
May 30, 2103

Prime Minister, Ambassador, Minister, Chairman, distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, dear students:

With emotion I stand—for the last time—and look back on three years of work. We overcame difficulties to bring the University to a new phase of consolidation.

I am delighted to hand over to a dynamic and competent and accomplished successor. Please welcome the next president, Dr. Dawn Dekle.

I have many satisfactions. Of these by far the greatest, more than the gleaming building behind me and the excellence of programs and service it represents, is the sparkle in the eyes of the students. Not least the bright faces of the graduates we are celebrating today. Class of 2013: Congratulations. Well done, and good luck!

We are here also to recognize, to thank and applaud the parents and the families of these students, who encouraged and supported them, families who trusted us, trusted AUIS when it was little more than an idea, when we started out in a second hand building and a bunch of portable cabins.

Parents, families you have every right to be proud and fond of your sons and daughters as we will remain proud and fond of them as we return them to you to be launched upon the sea of productive and meaningful lives.

None of this would be possible but for the efforts, the devotion, the skills of your teachers. The heart of any university is its faculty. All the

wonderful people here who share with me what—next to my wife—has been the love of my life, the acquisition and imparting of learning.

In this they were supported by our excellent administrative staff, in its many branches, some in ways that I recognize and thank them for no less for not always being visible to everyone.

We would be nowhere, but for the vision, the dynamism and unfailing solicitude for AUIS of its founder, the chairman of our board. He inspired the many friends and benefactors of this house, many of whom I am delighted to see among us today.

In few places in the Middle East, and alas until things change for the better, nowhere else in Iraq, would a creation such as our university, a source of innovation and of hope, an engine of modernization and enlightenment have been possible.

It is the extraordinary achievement of the Kurdistan region, its stability, its capacity to secure peace and lay the foundations of a lasting and ever growing prosperity in the midst of a region in seemingly ceaseless turmoil, that created the essential conditions of possibility for an endeavor such as ours.

I salute the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, His Excellency Nechirvan Barzani, who honors us with his presence, and I welcome the opportunity by addressing him to express the attachment and affection I have developed for his country, the country I have served in the last several years.

I also salute the Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Ali Saeed, whose prudence guides the fortunes of higher education in this country and whose benevolence towards AUIS and care for the success of its mission we value and appreciate greatly.

Of all our achievements the one I value most is the atmosphere of openness and mutual understanding in our community of learning, across ethnic and sectarian divides, all the more precious in a region deeply wounded by war and conflict and the clash of violent passions. We are indeed a microcosm of One Iraq, as reflected in the mode of the republic of letters, of the ideal of One Mankind.

As an institution of American inspiration we know that it is not passing slogans of US policy that affect us most, but the deep values that American universities have embodied and promoted abroad, notably in the Middle East, for over a hundred years: the spirit of free enquiry, the concentration on the entire person of the student, rigor of method, diligence, and a sense of responsibility.

We warmly welcome Ambassador Silliman, our featured speaker today, and take the occasion to thank the US government through him for the material and moral support it has given our fledgling institution. I am confident that we can look forward to continued and indeed growing cooperation as our mission and the promise of our endeavor here at AUIS becomes increasingly evident.

Dear students, dear graduates: You have learned a great many things, sharpened your judgment, and acquired skills, and you go out now equipped to face the many practical challenges of life, of professional and personal engagement. But, having attended a university devoted to freedom and founded on the bedrock of the liberal arts, you have also learned that the inheritance of human achievements includes, not only the skills needed to accomplish particular ends, or even just the skills for transforming the world, but also the great effort, the great autonomous intellectual endeavor that is an end in itself, the enterprise of *understanding* ourselves and the world. And it with this, even more than any applied knowledge, that learning at a university, a university worthy

of the name, is concerned. For teaching here, as you have discovered, is not imparting information; it is holding up the mirror of thinking humanity, the supreme intellectual and indeed ethical activity of understanding the world and ourselves.

I know, that as you go out into your several pursuits you will always remember AUIS, that in a sense you will always be part of it and, whatever you do and whatever you become, that you will keep it in your hearts, as, wherever life takes me, will I.