

Hazmieh, November 20, 2020

Statement Issued by the Universities Association of Lebanon

In its meeting on November 18, 2020, the *Universities Association of Lebanon* discussed the current situation in the country and specifically the crisis in the higher education sector. Members of the Association emphasized that the existence of a diverse range of not-for-profit universities is an essential and distinctive component of Lebanese society, enabling the country to make significant contributions to the sum of human knowledge and to educate generations of women and men who have made their mark, not just in Lebanon, but throughout the world.

The *Universities Association of Lebanon* regrets that Lebanon's seventy-seventh Independence Day has arrived while the nation is in suffering, and all segments of its population are afflicted with hardships.

At the end of the meeting, the *Universities Association of Lebanon* issued the following statement:

First: Lebanon has been hit by unprecedented crises that are having a disastrous effect on all sectors of the economy, including the not-for-profit higher education sector. Factors such as the collapse of the local currency, the political gridlock, the coronavirus pandemic, and most recently the August 4 explosion have all had a very serious impact that has increased the suffering of the Lebanese people. Universities have been compelled to deliver distance education, while simultaneously having to upgrade their IT infrastructure, increase their resources, and repair their facilities.

Despite the worsening economic situation, the not-for-profit universities did not hesitate to continue performing their obligations, serving their students, enabling them to pursue their education while they remained in their country, and thus safeguarding their future. This is what universities are entrusted with and the mission that they are committed to accomplish.

The worsening economic situation has also imposed additional burdens on students and their families, who have had to secure the equipment and technology necessary for distance education.

Second: The *Universities Association of Lebanon* stresses the importance and necessity of supporting the higher education sector in Lebanon to remain resilient and maintain its reputation and capabilities during these difficult times. Therefore, the Association commends its members for their continued support of students and their families during this academic term, since, despite increased economic and financial pressures and owing to a strong sense of responsibility for what Lebanon is going through, these universities did not increase their tuition, and they maintained or increased benefits, financial aid, and scholarships to their students.

Third: The *Universities Association of Lebanon* respects the autonomy and independence of each of its members to make the necessary decisions that ensure the viability of the institutions of higher education, which are vital to the future of the country and its people, while doing everything possible to ensure enrolled students can reach graduation.

The *Universities Association of Lebanon* is also aware that protecting all constituents of the higher education sector, whether students, faculty members, researchers, administrators or staff, will require careful study of competing options in the coming period, to ensure the survival of the sector as a whole.

Fourth: The *Universities Association of Lebanon* underscores the need to retain the distinguished faculty members who play a pivotal and pioneering role in ensuring the delivery of quality education in Lebanon and a promising future for its citizens.

Fifth: The *Universities Association of Lebanon* emphasizes that student diversity is the lifeblood of every university and the future of a sustainable and vibrant Lebanon.