

AUB alumni pay tribute to graduates from 1920s

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A poignant ceremony honoring more than 120 senior alumni of the American University of Beirut on Friday was highlighted by the presence of four graduates from the 1920s.

The four Lebanese men, who attended AUB between 1923 and 1929, received a standing

ovation as they struggled to walk to the podium at Assembly Hall to receive medals.

Jawdat Haidar, who enrolled as a freshman in 1923, repeatedly raised his arms in response to the applause. The louder it got, the more enthusiastic he became, lifting two arms, then finally one when he was too tired.

It was the third time the AUB Alumni Association has held an

ceremony honoring senior alumni. This year's ceremony included graduates from 1975, 1950, and the 1920s.

As Fawaz Merhebi, the head of the association's Relations and Welfare Committee, put it: "I feel it's everybody's dream to be born in one century and graduate in another."

Another figure who stood out at the ceremony was Suheila Hitti De Dunia, the first woman to graduate with a BBA from AUB. De Dunia, who graduated in 1950, came all the way from Venezuela for the ceremony.

Apart from the guests of honor, their families and alumni, the hall was also filled with dignitaries such as former President Elias Hrawi, Health Minister Karam Karam, who represented Premier Salim Hoss, and former Minister of state for Finance Fouad Seniora, representing former Premier Rafik Hariri.

Speeches made during the ceremony focused mainly on

the need to strengthen the link between alumni and the university, with AUB president John Waterbury, Alumni Association president Mohammed Mashnoug, and Merhebi stressing that AUB needed the support of its alumni.

"The university is in a transition stage at the moment and needs all the support it can get," Merhebi said, recounting his experience when he first applied for a job in the United States and was immediately accepted because he was an AUB graduate.

"I thank AUB for that from all my heart," he added. "AUB taught us that it isn't what we learn but how we're taught."

Waterbury called on the honored graduates and all alumni to "think of future generations of the AUB graduates."

"These future alumni need your support," he said. "When you attended AUB, you benefited from the generosity of generations of alumni and

friends who went before you. It's now your turn to help us build for the future."

Hrawi's speech had a more urgent tone, calling for the organization of a comprehensive workshop by the alumni "that would reconsider all the bases and goals of our university education and curricula."

He said that such a workshop "would also study the demands and needs of the labor market as a first step to finding a list of priorities of the specializations sensitive to the needs of the market."

Instead of letting graduates stray toward specializations without good job prospects, Hrawi said they should be guided according to priorities set through such a workshop.

"I urge the alumni to effectively contribute to restructuring," he concluded, "and help their newly graduated colleagues to adopt a new strategy to chose productive and suitable specializations."



Honored: Haidar, Halim Najjar, Salah Itani, and Abdullah Adra