

LAU - MEPI
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"Women in the Arab World: Double Jeopardy"





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About Us

The Tomorrow's Leaders Program is a collaboration between the U.S. Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the Lebanese American University (LAU). The program, which is coordinated by LAU's University Enterprise Office, was launched in 2008. It provides higher education opportunities to youth from around the Arab world who demonstrate outstanding leadership potential but who may otherwise not have the chance to study in an American educational system. The mission of the program is to prepare future Arab leaders for the complexities of the 21st century. Through high quality academic support, leadership development activities, and civic engagement opportunities, the program fosters professionalism, ethical conduct, and tolerance in order to enable students to become globally competitive leaders and agents of change in their respective societies.

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Despite their sheer abundance, their oftentimes overuse, and their inherent ambiguity, words have power. A kind of power which transcends the functional and communicative use, impacting the human level, delving into the barely treaded personal level...ultimately effecting their audience.

The influence of words on human behavior and thought is beyond comprehensible; at times they may promote rationality, or inspire ambition, or call for action. Other times, they may represent fear, or bring comfort and serenity. Their ability to evoke is immeasurably significant. I personally believe in the power of words not because I am the Editor in Chief of this newsletter, nor because I am a journalist, but because of the tremendous impact words I have read have had on my life.

Words can indeed change the world and this newsletter is a prime example of that - written by LAU-MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders whose lives have changed since joining this program, acceptance to which was influenced by the words they chose in the process of applying.

Tomorrow's Leaders are committed to doing all they can to raise awareness and end this "gender slavery"

which is unfortunately the prevailing status in many countries in our region and the world. Not because we have mothers, sisters, aunties and so on, but because we are human. Within the following pages are words, words that are testimony to this generation's sheer determination and soaring will to change the shameful reality engulfing us. It is also in and between these words that Tomorrow's Leaders convey the message that being bystanders, doing nothing more than calmly and subtly condemning or denying the brutal and inhumane marginalization of women, is a thing of the past.

In our modern world, diversity is considered one of the most prominent qualities of life. Competency and ability are no longer solely based on qualifications and facts or figures; it has transcended to include the human element, skills that derive from recognizing, acknowledging and giving due diligence to that which is different, that which is learned through human interaction and acceptance. These few pages tell the stories of more than 50 people from different cultural backgrounds who came together as part of the LAU-MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders program. This newsletter represents a unified status of cultural integration in today's world.



BY NATHIR HAIMOUN
Editor In Chief

Women's Empowerment - Seriously?

"Treat people the way you want to be treated. Talk to people the way you want to be talked to. Respect is earned, not given." Hussein Nishah



BY DANA MUDARA

I am not a writer. I do not usually bury myself under my blanket with some hot chocolate (perhaps a marshmallow or two) to write down my thoughts, but I had the urge to write about this matter because of the unspeakable events and misunderstandings that have been going on around us. Food for thought? Perhaps. But what events? When did all of this happen? Well, no one really pays much attention to these things, that's how normal it's become. But is it really normal? Not at all.

EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, THAT WE NEED MORE WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT AND MORE WOMEN AS CEOS. WHILE THIS MAY BE TRUE, WHAT WE REALLY NEED IS TO PROTECT OUR WOMEN AND UNDERSTAND THEM. EMPOWERING WOMEN IS THE WRONG TERM; WOMEN ALREADY HAVE POWER, POWER THAT IS DERIVED FROM WITHIN US. WHAT VARIES IS WHERE, HOW, AND IF WE CHOOSE TO USE IT.

Power is knowing your self-worth, respecting your mind, body and soul, basing your walk and talk on confidence. Power is strength and strength is key.

Power is not a means of intimidation, but rather preservation from all those with ill intent, be it to degrade you or undermine your abilities. Women are powerful in the many roles they assume in their lives, balancing and maintaining their strength, desires, ambitions, and obligations be it as a mother, daughter, sister, wife, friend... and this is precisely the innate beauty and contagious power of all females.

Female Empowerment



BY EMIL KASTON

We are born into different societies, with different abilities, and with different opportunities to access resources that can support us in our journey, and, as such, we are somehow unequal. And for some reason, the world takes this circumstantial inequality to a whole other level if you are a woman. Although the feminist movement demanding the emancipation of women started in the 1960s, we are still struggling with the very same disaster in present day. Why do I call it a "disaster"? Because we are depriving humanity from enjoying the results and reaping the benefits that intelligent and focused women can provide.

I was always shocked by the strange concepts of our Arabic society, the concepts which depict a total acceptance of subjection of women. I consider it somewhat provocative how some men can so easily lay out a set of rules that women should follow, rules that these very same men are not obliged to follow. But what's even more disappointing is that some women, by their own actions, which are unfortunately nothing more than a reflection of their own beliefs, are further tipping the scales of equality and further suppressing their rights.

An impressionable young girl's greatest role model is her own mother, and when that mother teaches her that it is not acceptable, forbidden even, for a female to do certain things (a long list of things in fact) because they are expected to be done by men, she is raising a woman to believe that inequality and subordination are the norm.

A mother's uttering of words such as: "You are not allowed to do *this* or *that*. You are a girl" is creating, molding, and shaping those very shackles that are drawing our society into a dark place.

Restricting and hindering a woman's potential to be productive, to contribute to her society, to better her community, should not be accepted anymore, nor should a society that is run only by men with the sole intention of serving men.

I consider myself lucky to have been raised by my mother, a teacher, who was strong enough to work and succeed in making our house a perfect place to call home. The passing of my father required her to be unbeatable, and indeed she was! She showed me the fierce strength of a woman, the intense determination of a woman, and the indisputable courage of a woman.

The empowerment of women starts with a "thank you" to our mothers, sisters, female relatives, and friends. "Thank you" for being the source of life, for having grace, for being both strong and compassionate at the same time. Only then, after a simple yet significant acknowledgement of both the presence and power of women, can we begin working together, hand in hand, to give equal opportunity to every person who has something to give for the betterment of our society and for the benefit of humanity.

The Ruler Of My Reality!



BY GHUFRAN HAIDER

Coming from a country where only men have the right to travel and enjoy life while women are restricted within the four walls of their home, I was bothered – and rightly so!

I wasn't given the chance to choose my gender, so why am I expected to silently suffer because of it? I kept asking this question and searching for an answer, but I never found one! Obviously, it isn't an issue that concerns my country only, as I initially presumed, but rather it is a universal issue that many cultures are dealing with. And my ever-present, always-bothering question is one that women across the globe are undoubtedly asking themselves too.

Nevertheless, growing up in a family with two educated parents, both of whom were working, helped me realize that I have the power to choose: do I want to follow these traditions or do I want to create my own? It took a while to understand and recognize my inherent power and ability. In fact, it prompted me to start researching women who were leaders of change as a means of inspiration and, in doing so, I learnt about one woman who touched my heart in a way no other did: Queen Sheba, one of the queens who governed part of Yemen thousands of years ago. It's amazing how the story of

this woman who existed so many years ago is still told today. In fact, as many of you may already know, she is a legend among legends.

Certainly, Queen Sheba was not the only queen in the ancient world. Egypt, Assyria, and England all had women who ruled and managed to initiate positive change in their own way. However, what is special about this particular queen – Queen Sheba – is that she demanded equality between women and men in religion, in duties, and in rights. Her story, with all its struggles and triumphs, somehow managed to obliterate my feelings of fear, sadness, self-pity, and loneliness and indeed I found an answer to my question: I don't need to suffer silently any more. I have the ability to choose who I am; who we are surpasses gender and stretches far beyond the superficial exterior of any individual.

AND WHILE I WILL NEVER STOP HOPING THAT ONE DAY THIS TRAGEDY OF GENDER INEQUALITY IS RESOLVED, I KNOW THAT JUST AS IT IS MY CHOICE TO BE GOOD OR BAD, IT IS ALSO MY CHOICE TO FORGET THE UNFORTUNATE REALITY THAT SURROUNDS ME AND MAKE MY OWN WORLD, LIVE MY OWN REALITY- BECAUSE I HAVE THE WILL AND DETERMINATION TO DO THAT.

Of all that Queen Sheba's story teaches us, there is one idea that resonated with me, as I hope it will with you: You are not your past and this is not your story! You are much more; discover who you are and treat yourself the way you deserve to be treated. Write your own history because it's your life.

My Mother Is Enough



BY HALA ALSADI

In a society like the one I come from, females are disadvantaged on many levels under the pretext of shame and religion. Customs and religion rule, pushing all human rights aside. "Yemen is One of the Worst Places to Live as a Woman" was the title of one of the many articles I have come across lately which discuss the unfortunate position of Yemeni women. Limited education, early marriage, absence of personal freedom, and a long list of human rights violation are but some of what we are exposed to. However, the real concern isn't what females are experiencing on a day-to-day basis, but that females themselves consider this the "right" way of life – how life should be. Not only do they believe that being disadvantaged is in their favour, but that standing against females who are fighting for their equality is the right thing to do.

I vividly recall the anger I felt when I went to apply for a passport. The officer rejected my request claiming that I needed to have a guardian present with me, despite the fact that I was already 18 and my mother - a holder of a

Master Degree in Engineering- was present with me. It wasn't enough. Why? Because females have incomplete minds, they are not mentally equal to men, they said. This unfortunate and disabling logic is everywhere, encountered on a daily basis, almost as though we should, by now, feel comfortable with the idea of being patchy. And why aren't we? After all, in school we were taught that males are in charge because they are physically and mentally competent, whereas females were born only to take care of certain tasks from birth to death, reproduction on the top of the list. Believe it or not, our society is so backward to the point that if a man wants to refer to his wife, he won't say her name, not even call her by her title as "wife", but rather she is known by the family name, or sometimes the house itself! How tough it is to live every day defending what you wear, explaining your rights and needs, saying no to things you don't want to do, turning your back to words that belittle you and thoughts that undervalue your existence as a human being... every single day!

Always Forward, Never Backward



BY MARWA BENKHALIFA

Over the last few decades, the subject of women's empowerment has been a burning topic all over the world, including Tunisia. In fact, many reports published by the United Nations have emphasized that gender equality should be given topmost priority. Nowadays, it is widely considered that inequalities between men and women are a major cause of countries' under-development. With reference to the Tunisian case, since independence, Tunisia has realized specific goals that aid in the advancement of women's rights. Much of the progress in the mentality of the Tunisian people regarding the status of women in society can be accredited to Habib Bourguiba's politics, which is predominantly focused on and geared toward gender equality. Years ago, Tunisian women were expected to stay home, imprisoned within the four walls of their household: a woman's main role was to take care of her children and her husband – but that is no more. Since independence in 1956, the country's constitution, legislation, and policies have endeavored to encourage the principles of gender equality and eradicate gender - based discrimination on all levels – be it in access to health services, education opportunities, employment conditions, or political representation. In 1957, women obtained the right to vote and in 1973, the right to have an abortion without the need for the husband's

consent. Concerning Family Law, Tunisia's Code of Personal Status made far-reaching reforms and guaranteed women total protection by the Tunisian government such that they have equal rights in marriage and divorce. It also abolished polygamy and the practice of immediate divorce by men, and granted children born to Tunisian mothers and foreign fathers the right to Tunisian citizenship. The 1990s also witnessed the effects of the women's freedom movement on the country's progress. Women were given the right to free education, employment, inheritance, marriage, and, as of late, the right to be politically active. Despite the limited democratic space, the number of women in the Tunisian government grew significantly and women's organizations started to play a key role in elaborating social and political transformation. Tunisia's progress in women's empowerment provides useful lessons, especially for Muslim countries, on how women can obtain access to new resources and the way in which politics and power can be used to change gender discrimination and social misconceptions. Today, in the Arab and Muslim world, Tunisia is considered a forerunner in women's rights – setting an example to follow. Tunisia also signed international commitments aimed at promoting women's rights, including the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2008. These reforms have had a substantial impact on women's position in the country and have paved the way for further advancements. Today, the role of Tunisian women is no longer restricted to that within the home; they are found in every sector of the economy from architecture and engineering to banking and medicine. Compared to neighboring countries, such a resilient dedication to improving social policy in favor of women has resulted in important advances in health, labor, education and in legal rights that shape gender equality.

A Fight For Our Rights



BY NURAN BENMUSA

She was an unstoppable force, a bright Libyan star in the political and human rights arena, but unfortunately she shun a little too brightly, spoke a little too loudly, echoed a little too far... and they couldn't bear her call for equality and freedom. Salwa Bughaighi was assassinated on the grounds of her house by extremists simply because she peacefully demanded her rights as a woman and encouraged other women to do the same. Social change in a state of peace is far less complicated and complex than in a state of severe instability, and the escalating conflict in Libya indeed heralded it as belonging to the latter.

In a male-dominant society such as the Libyan, women face obstacles every day in their enduring struggle for equality and change to their current status. There are the known and obvious challenges that women from any society would face in their battle for equality, and then there are those less obvious challenges that emerge with war, when the security and justice of a nation are clearly diminishing. The greatest hurdles Libyan women must confront are the unstable political situation and the dwindling security state which serve only to make their goal all the more harder to reach, and their purpose all the more harder

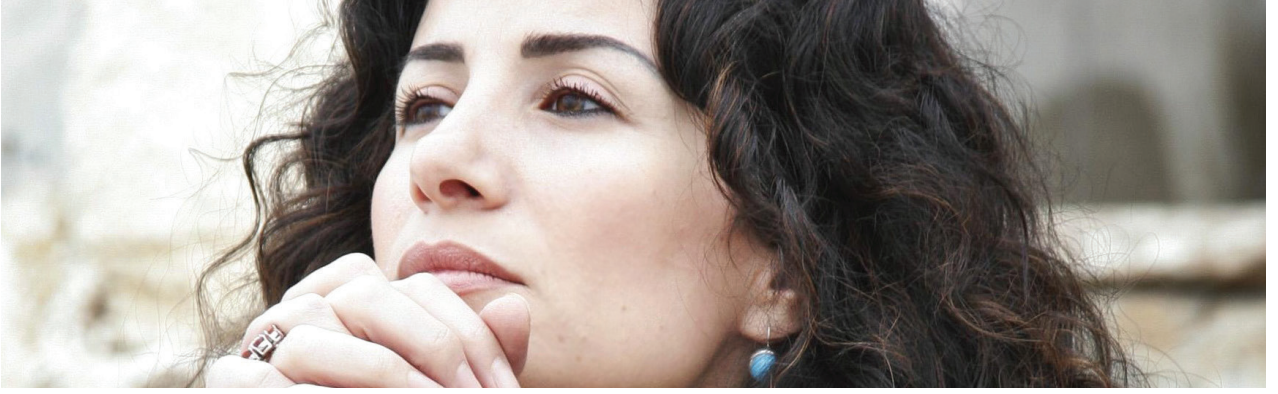
to fulfill. The last three years have seen a record number of kidnaps and torture of female activists. Assassinations are not uncommon, including Salwa Bughaighi and many others whose message was silenced by extremists; those fearful of activists' peaceful and rightful demands. Conflicts of any nature are commonly associated with both a physical and psychological impact, and women in Libya are no exception.

Unsurprisingly, the lack of women's rights is felt on both a social and cultural level.

For example, unlike their male counterparts, Libyan women do not hold leadership positions as they are limited to certain areas of employment. If there is one thing that is to be learnt from the history of women's struggle for equality it is that no matter how daunting the fight, how formidable the opposition, or how threatening the process, if united, women can improve their standing and position in society; transforming excuses into solutions is the road less travelled, the road the Libyan women are ready to tread. Constituting more than half of the population, Libyan females must present a united front and demand their equal rights as citizens. Indeed blood will be shed and voices will be silenced, but spirits will not be broken, beliefs will not be killed, and rights will not be discounted. The time has come for women to empower each other, to work in solidarity to improve their condition, to look to neighboring countries and learn from women's experiences.

I can only hope that gender equality in Libya is something that I am lucky enough to witness in my generation, and if not, I know that the efforts of these women and the merciless death of the many Salwa Bughaighis will not go in vain as no doubt the women of the next generation will surely, and proudly, carry the torch.

صرخة ألم من قلب المعاناة | نظير هيمون



قالوا لي أن قيادة السيارة تفقد حواء العذرية
إن كان هذا صحيحاً
فماذا أفقدتكم قيادة امرأة إسرائيلية
لطائرة يا أصحاب اللحي و الرجولية
أنا هنا في الشرق أعاني الاحتضار
و الرجل بكل مواقفه يعلن علي الانتصار
أنتظر الشرقي كي يأتي
بحقوقي ليتشدد و يقامر و
تبا لمجتمعي تبا لثقافتي
تبا لوجود لا يعرف المرأة كيف تنجز و تغامر
ينادييني بالحرمة
و أنا أردد : لست بحرمة و لكن حماقة عقلك
الجنسي جعل مني في ألفاظ لسانك حرمة
لست بحرمة
أنا حملتك في بطني تسع شهور
و رضعت حليب حناني في صبح ليل و عصور
بالله قل و أخبرني هل علي الاستياء
من قلة الوفاء
أم أن علي الحزن و البكاء
أم أن علي أن أبصق في وجهك من شدة الازدراء !
هل بالفعل لديك حياة
أم أنك أصمٌ لا تسمع النداء
ما هو تعريفك للحياة
أم أنك لا تستحيي عندما تأمرني بالانطواء
عهدا على نفسي و الكبرياء
أن أبقى حرة و أعمل على تحرير النساء
هلموا أخواتي لدرب مملوءة بالحرية فقد مضى
زمن الجاهلية النكراء
مضى و لن يعود إلا إن عادت عقول و أفئدة
تعفنت و ملأها خراب و اهتراء

سارة قد أغلقت الأبواب
في دار من دور الأعراب
فهو اليوم وحيدة من دون الأصحاب
حبيسة في منزل- بلا ذهاب و لا إياب
أريد حياة ليس فيها عذاب
ليس فيها قهر للجنس المستضعف الجذاب
ما بال العروبة أم ما بال الأعراب
هل للمرأة وطن في ديارنا أم نحسبها من الأعراب
لا لا هذا ليس بعقاب
بل وجود امرأة بحد ذاتها عقاب و عتاب
عذرا فمجتمعي ذكوري و الذكر نذل يأكل الحقوق
كالغراب هم
عني ضلّع قاصر
قالوا عني جنسٌ خاسر
وقالوا لسماء قد رفعت
أن المرأة ليست أمر
قالوا لطفولة أفئدة
أن الرجل هو الحق و هو الرأي العامر
قالوا لأنامل أطفال هي امرأة و المرأة ضعف و ذل
و عار كامل
خدشوا حياة الإنسانية المنسية
و غدوا على سلب الحقوق بلا دفاع عن قضية
رموا أزهارًا بالشوك و قالوا هي بنت و البنت مآلها
بيت الزوجية
أي علم أو حرية أو فكر فهنا عيب و العيب عندنا
الأولوية
استعبدوا النساء و قالوا ديننا هو دين الوسطية
أرجوكم صحيح أن عقلي صغيرٌ لكنني لست غيباً
لأصدق هذه المسرحية
دفاعي عن المرأة هو دفاع عن أختي و أمي و كل
مجتمع به المرأة تعاني ظروف عصية

Stress Managment

On October 29, 2015, in the midst of the academic semester, with all the midterms, papers and other sources of stress LAU-MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders Academic Coordinator Ms. Loulwa Kaloyeros aptly gave a workshop entitled "Stress Management".



The three-hour workshop tackled stress and its causes, especially for university students. First, the students were given a survey to identify the events that might be overwhelming or stressful, because, after all, stress starts way before one realizes it. Subsequently, an open discussion identifying ineffective or harmful coping mechanisms and the extent to which they may in fact be adding salt to the wound ensued. We were reminded that common and often subconscious reactions to stress such as over or under eating, abusive usage of drugs and alcohol, escalating risk-seeking behaviors are counter-productive. Ms. Kaloyeros highlighted that the first step should be self-awareness and reflection. Shortly after, another survey was distributed measuring inclination towards stress in order to assess ourselves and discover more about the stressors we may encounter and face. The open discussion was resumed but this time focus was on identifying healthy and useful mechanisms to deal with and conquer stress. Ms. Kaloyeros stressed on the fact that

self-perseverance and self-awareness are essential components in overcoming stressful situations. She recommended certain concrete strategies such as breathing exercises, and, if we really want to indulge, a luxury massage every now and then as a self-reward.

Many questions were asked during the workshop about real life challenges faced by the students and how these challenges fit into this model of healthy stress strategies. For instance, Farah Mastoura, Cohort 7, asked how one can actually halt an action that knowingly causes stress when it's not always easy to take action or taking action to end the stressful situation may itself cause stress. Ms. Kaloyeros answered saying that it's normal to feel or think this way; however, one should prioritize his/her actions and think about the end results and the long term consequences of the behaviors one chooses to follow or not to follow.



All in all, the workshop was enriching, necessary, and interactive. The outcomes of the open discussion were definitely fruitful! We walked away feeling less stressed, more relaxed, and more in touch with our stress indicators; we were ready to look stress in the face and give it a run for its money. May your days and years be free of destructive stress and its symptoms!

The Sleeping Tree: A Wake-Up Call

On Tuesday the first of December, as a part of the events of the LAU-MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders Cultural Cinema Club, the Bahraini movie *The Sleeping Tree* was screened. Directed by Mr. Muhamed Bouali, *The Sleeping Tree* has been receiving much-deserved regional recognition and acclaim, as well as being honored with the prestigious Jury Award at the Cairo International Film Festival.



The storyline tackles the very common stages and aspects of life such as birth, death, and all that is in between through the story of Jasim and Nora whose lives seemingly came to a halt after the birth of their daughter Amina, who is diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Although alive, it is apparent that this young couple are closer to death than life as they try to come to terms with their reality. Their struggle between beginning and end, black and white, is triumphed by life after Jasim's journey to the tree of life, which stands strongly and vividly in the middle of the lifeless desert, in stark contrast to himself and his wife, who stand on the verge of death in the midst of their youth and marriage. The reactions of the students varied from admiration and delight to shock and confusion. Shams Shamsan, a student from Yemen, stated that: "The movie depicted the depression and the hollowness of Jasim and his wife's life in a raw and realistic way and in a manner that made us, the audience, experience the same emotions."

Zobida Tadj, an Algerian psychology student, appreciated and admired the various elements of symbolism from the name of the movie and its shooting style, to the cadres and the colors chosen: "Watching this movie, you can't help but feel mesmerized." The intent of such initiatives such as the screening of this film is to expose students to different cultures by enabling them, for the duration of the movie, to live and be absorbed by a new culture and what window to culture is more honest than that of cinematography. As Abdelrahman Ghalab, a computer science student from Egypt, so accurately noted: "Sometimes we never get the chance to know about each other. This was my first time watching a Bahraini movie and I absolutely loved it for two reasons: first, it is artistically well-done; and second, it took me on a journey to a culture that I don't know much about, despite it actually being very close to my heart."



And that, after all, is one of the essential roles of art." It seems that *The Sleeping Tree* gave us an unexpected wake-up call; one that served to remind us not only of the existence of differences in our cultures, but more importantly of the human elements and emotions that are common to all cultures and nationalities, those that define us as humans, as belonging to the same race, that of humanity.

Gender - Based Violence

It is the 4th of November. As LAU-MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders scholars, we are invited to be part of a workshop on gender - based violence in emergency settings: conflict, post-conflict, and natural disaster. It is 6 p.m. It is already dark and most of us are complaining about our long week of exams and the assignments we procrastinated for the past few days. We finally meet Dr. Lina Abirafeh whom we had heard so much about from Dr. Touma, the director of the TL program. I am somewhat surprised by her appearance. I imagined her to be older with grey hair and a traditional, old-school outfit. Despite her many years of experience on the ground, she looked young rocking a short haircut and a progressive sense of fashion. The workshop kicks off in complete darkness. The lights are out and our eyes are closed. Dr. Abirafeh created an atmosphere surreal enough to put us in the shoes of a 15 year-old girl from the Central African Republic held captive by an armed group, for whom she cooks, cleans, and provides sexual services. This exercise of empathy was a wake-up call for most of us and we finally realize the solemnity of our talk today. Dr. Abirafeh, the new director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, goes on to explain terms such as sex, gender, and feminism and then shares with us a glimpse of her experience on the ground with women and girls in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Lebanon, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Haiti in conflict, post-conflict and natural

Around half an hour later, the dynamics of the room shifts. Suddenly, we are intrigued. Our minds are bombarded with horrifying facts and our keenness becomes tangible. We start asking questions ranging from personal ones such as: "What made you care so strongly about this issue?" to more inquisitive questions like: "How did the Scandinavian countries get where they are today in terms of gender equality?" Opinions are enthusiastically exchanged. For some, they portray indignation, anger, and distress while for others, they depict indifference or even denial. So much more than a discussion, this workshop is predominantly a call for action. Dr. Abirafeh emphasizes the fact that complacency in the region is the primordial reason why gender equality is still a distant goal. She ended by fast-forwarding our program's status to Today's Leaders because why wait until tomorrow! "And be ready for a long, long fight", concluded Dr. Khachan, the student life coordinator, reminding us that great change never happens overnight.



IT'S JUST THE BEGINNING ...

My name is **Joud Zaumot**. As a cohort 3 TL alumna, I graduated in 2014 with emphasis in International Business and Banking and Finance. Shortly afterward, I received the Swedish Institute Scholarship for Global Leaders to pursue my Master's in Corporate and Financial Management at Lund University, Sweden. I graduated this summer. I have recently been accepted in a four-month program called Pioneer of Arab Bank - Arab Bank PLC, which consists of lectures, on-the-job training, and challenging cases. The LAU-MEPI TL program gave me an exquisite opportunity not only in terms of educational purposes, but also on the personal front. All the experiences I encountered and all the obstacles I faced made me the person I am today, and for that I am grateful. No words can sufficiently signify or express the impact such a program has had on me as an individual, as no doubt it did for all TLRs, but if I were to choose one word, I would say "life-changing".



My name is **Layla Al Bizri**. I am currently a fourth year medical student. And by that I mean I am one step closer to getting that MD degree! Trust me when I say it has been a long path. And as cheesy as it may sound, big dreams don't come easy and when you aim high, your work is never over. That said, I still have a long way to go! I am currently undertaking a two-month training program in the US and I couldn't be more thankful to the LAU-MEPI TL program. You may ask why? and the answer is simple. Let me put it to you in a way that relates to me directly: We can all agree that the language of health management is universal. All doctors know what appendicitis is, how it presents itself, its symptoms etc., however, knowing how to interact with the patient is the hard part - the part that you won't find the answer to in a textbook. Such skills of communication and interrelation with people of different cultures, backgrounds and nationalities, which the LAU-MEPI program contributed in developing within me, have been core to my shaping. I feel at ease when interacting with new patients from different backgrounds and that's something I gained through interacting with the different nationalities and personalities of my fellow LAU-MEPI TL colleagues. In the end, if a person has ambition, s/he needs to be wise enough to grasp the skills and tools needed for success.



My name is **Melissa Abdallah**. I was a LAU-MEPI TL scholar from 2012 till 2015. My experience as a TLR was thrilling, to say the least. It provided me with the opportunity to receive a first-class education and benefit from extracurricular activities and professional experiences. All the internships, activities, and workshops have proven to be very beneficial in my post-LAU days indeed. Above all, as a TLR, I not only met a great group of people, I found a new family, an international family, whom I will cherish forever. My plan was to do my master's after graduation, and I was lucky enough to receive a full scholarship in International Affairs at Penn State University, USA. I can say with no hesitation that the LAU-MEPI TL program has made me a better and more skilled person. Make the best out of it and dream big.



My name is **Leen Aghabi**. It seems like just yesterday that I arrived in Lebanon for the first time, not knowing what to expect as an incoming LAU-MEPI TL scholar. Four years later, I graduated from the London School of Economics (LSE) with a Master's in International Relations. Saying that the LAU-MEPI TL program changed my life would be an understatement! The most important lesson I learnt is that you are your only obstacle; there is no limit to your success and to what you can achieve. So far, I am satisfied with my choices and firmly believe that I am on the right track. Of course this is not the end of my academic journey; I will always aim for more, not just to get where I want to be, but to be in a position to give back.



My name is **Soukayna Bahnini**. I graduated from LAU in 2015, and I am currently doing an internship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco with the United Nations Department. As I work toward my goal of gaining more professional experience, I am also in the process of applying for several scholarships for a master's degree. I faced some challenges when I came back to my home country; perhaps this shouldn't have come as such a surprise given that the girl that returned four years later was not the same as the one that left back in 2011. Thanks to the LAU-MEPI TL program, I can say that many aspects of my personality have changed for the better, including my perception of different issues and how I choose to handle them. Today, I am more vocal concerning my opinions; I have no difficulty saying 'no', and remaining silent when something wrong is being done is a thing of the past for me. For some people back home, I came across as too strong, rebellious even; some considered me as ungrateful, a girl who forgot her roots. But I don't see it that way. I see myself as someone who wants to implement change and help society and her country move forward, not backwards. I have never forgotten where I come from and one of my goals for the future is to give back to my home country. The skills of compromise and diplomacy which I learnt while I was a LAU-MEPI TL scholar helped me overcome this challenge of trying to have people accept the new me. Fighting was not a solution; it drained me both physically and emotionally. Compromising, listening, talking, and starting with baby steps are the only way to move forward and to find results. If you want to make a change, you have to start from the inside, from the heart of the system, in order for it to expand and spread like a ripple to the outside. This logic, this mindset of tomorrow's leaders, is what is influencing my decisions and preferences today. My four years as a TLer shaped my personality, made me stronger, more aware and more hopeful for the best.



My name is **Wafaa Sweidan**. Currently, I am pursuing my PhD in Translational Neuroscience at Wayne State University, MI, USA. I have achieved my goals successfully, one step at a time and have had the most wonderful experiences along the way. After my BS at LAU, I did my MS in Neuroscience at AUB. Although I faced my share of failures, disappointments, and financial burdens, I had the persistence and will to overcome them and eventually succeed. The LAU-MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders program definitely left its mark on me! It inspired within me the courage to keep walking and the confidence to step up and try new things. My proudest achievement thus far is having an article about the work I did as part of my master's published in a very prestigious journal.

