

*Commencement 2007
Haigazian University
Beirut
June 29, 2007*

President's Word of Welcome

As the 52nd academic year of Haigazian University culminates today, we are filled with a special sense of fulfillment. It has been a fruitful year. Fruitful years are not always easy years or joyful years. But when you end up with good fruits, you know that you/they had the ability to stand firm against the winds and storms, hail and heat of the surrounding environment. Surely, our 142 graduates are the fruits we celebrate this day.

A major part of the mission of a liberal arts, non-profit, American style, and faith based university is to help the world become a better place; a better place through preparing **persons** who are enabled to make it that better place.

The fact that the number of universities in the world is always on the increase, however, has probably not led to a better world; maybe especially seen from a Lebanese lens, or has it become a better place in certain respects? So, should educators lose hope?

Well, we have to make a choice. We cannot always reflect on the situation of the world in its totality and arrive at easy conclusions. If we are responsible for the part of the world and part of the people we are with, and we are given the chance to educate, then let us focus on them. Haigazian University is in this particular location. It has to shine in this location with and for these people who are with us. True, we should care about the whole world, but let us see: what did we give Khaled and Garineh, Zainab, Dikran and Tamar? Our way of influencing the situations of the world is to help the ones with us and around us live with the values that give life, a better life.

A university has a message. Our university has a message of hope especially in the current conditions. It is not a simple hope for better days, or for better circumstances, not simplistic hope in strategic friendships with people of influence, not narrow identities, and not hope in luck or coincidence. Our hope is rooted in our faith in God's grace and immanence, which then becomes real in the fruits of the whole educational and experience, in human interaction and creativity.

For those who have hope, there is no time to despair. There is work and service, vision to help and change, and commitment to enjoy forgiveness and renewal.

Allow me, dear graduates, to end my word with a motto of three parts (and no, I don't mean Truth, Freedom and Service!): What do we hope to communicate to our society? Through your educational journey at Haigazian, we wanted to share with you, in subtle or direct ways, that for a better life, a better society, a better Lebanon, and a better world we critically need:

- For the soul, gentleness.
- For the mind, openness,
- For the body, dignity.

Gentleness of the soul so that we may enjoy the depth of God's creation in us and in others...; openness of the mind so that we may humbly continue to grow and change with every piece of new knowledge...; and dignity of the body so that we may accept ourselves, and care for the others.

May you all make a real difference! Do not be afraid to choose ethics over self-interest, faith over despair, friendship over isolation, service over favoritism.

We cannot count on the unknowns of this world. We will count on you!

*Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian
President
Haigazian University*