



Fitch Upgrades Tunis
Re's National IFS
Rating to 'AA(tun)'



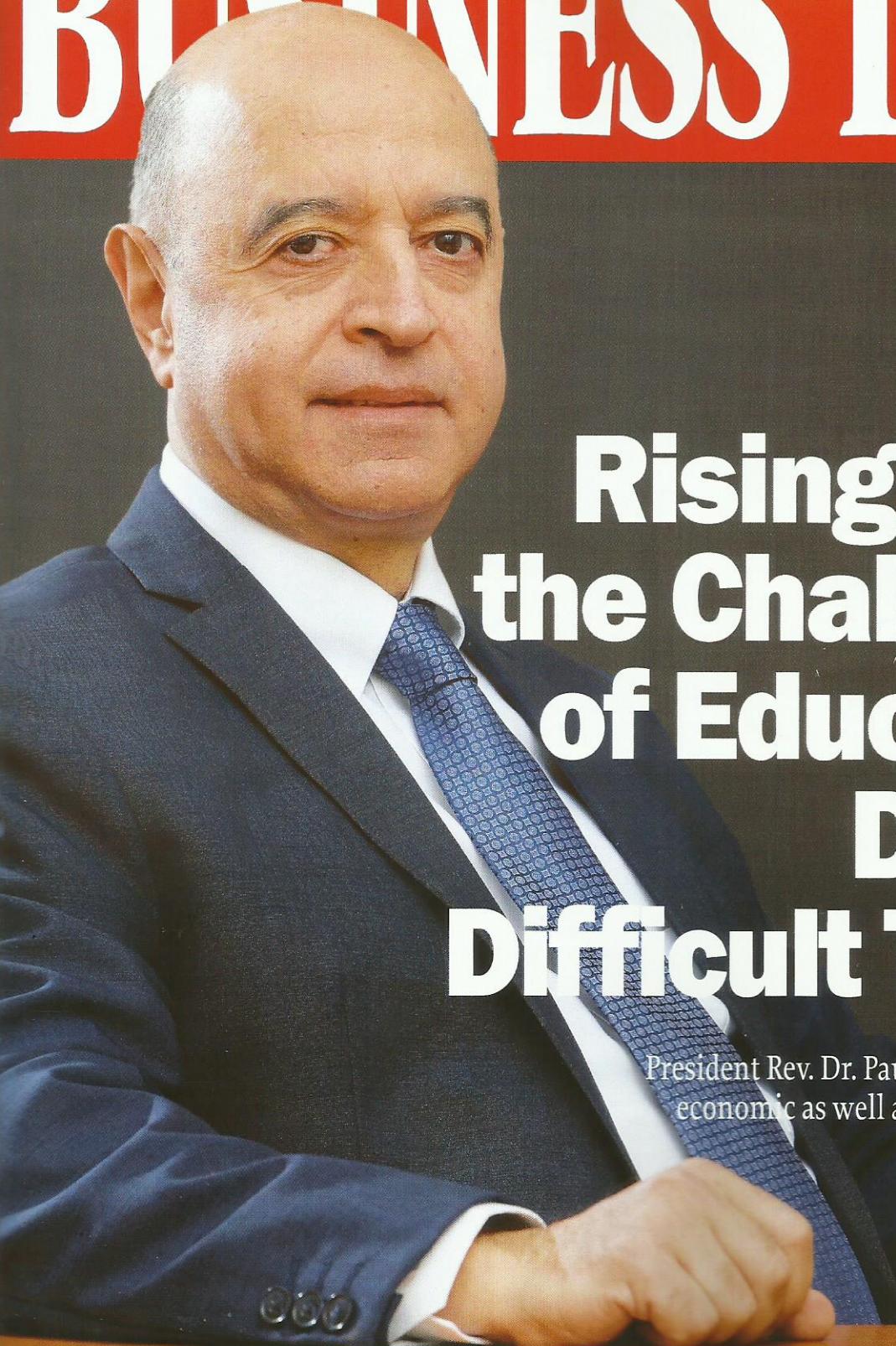
IsDB Group Private
Sector Action
Response to COVID-19



Hassan Ahmed
AlEfrangi, New
CEO Ahli Bank

BUSINESS LIFE

August 2020



Rising Up to the Challenge of Education During Difficult Times

President Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian addresses
economic as well as academic challenges



Lebanon.....LBP5,000
Saudi Arabia.....SR12
Kuwait.....KD1

U.A.E.....Drhm12
Bahrain.....BD1
Qatar.....QR12

Jordan.....JD2
Oman.....OR1
Cyprus.....C£1

Egypt.....EP5
Europe.....Euro4
U.S. & Canada.....\$4

Algeria.....DZD200
Libya.....LD4
Morocco.....MAD33

Tunisia.....TND4
Yemen.....YR10
Syria.....SYP150

Rising Up to the Challenge of Education During Difficult Times

(Excerpted and edited from an August 8, 2020, *Business Life* interview with Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian)

BUSINESS LIFE exclusive interview with President Rev. Dr. Haidostian gives an insight into higher education outside of the United States and life within Lebanon all within the context of the Armenian Diaspora. Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian, the president of Lebanon's 65-year-old Haigazian University, talks about Haigazian's role in the first-ever launch of rockets in the Middle East, in the early 1960s. Haigazian University will continue to thrive and grow with Dr. Haidostian at the helm for many years to come.

BL: President Haidostian, how was Haigazian University established? What is its mission?

PRESIDENT REV. DR. PAUL HAIDOSTIAN: Haigazian University formally started its instruction as a college in October 1955, even though about seven years prior to the formal founding of Haigazian, there were a number of teacher training programs in the Ras Beirut and Achrafieh neighborhoods belonging to the Armenian Evangelical Churches of Beirut, teacher training programs for Armenian schools. As these training programs succeeded, it was felt that a leadership and teacher training college had to be established, especially that in the forties, dozens of the Armenian schools needed new teachers to be prepared. The old generation had passed, and teacher training for the new generation needed an actual college. Thus, Haigazian was started as a college with a permit they had obtained in 1939. The founding was realized with the twinning of two forces together: one was a local church, the Armenian Evangelical Church in the Middle East, which was the party that needed the institution; but the vision was shared with the Armenian Missionary Association of America in New York which provided the funding. A beautiful partnership was established between Lebanon and the Armenian Evangelicals in the USA, who found the donors and people who had the passion who also searched for the first president in the person of a young professor, Dr. John Markarian. This partnership at Haigazian was mission-oriented, with the hope of maintaining high standards, following the American system of liberal arts, and obviously the language was English. These reasons were sufficient for the first year incoming students to be a mixed group of students, and not only Armenians. Why? Because it was an American system and the language was accessible to all. So in the first year, 43 students enrolled, of whom one-third were non-Armenians coming from a number of countries as Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and of course, Lebanon. A few years after the start of this two-year college that was focused mostly on humanities and the social sciences, it was felt that this would turn into a regular college, with other core sciences to be added. Eventually in the sixties, the successful business programs were introduced.

The initial purpose was teacher and leadership training, and this has been maintained all throughout our history, but its meaning has expanded and widened. Haigazian developed into an Armenian Evangelical-run city university with its American style and fully Lebanese commitment.

BL: Is President Markarian still in the USA?

HAIDOSTIAN: President Markarian just celebrated 103 years of his life. He is still in the USA, and our wishes for long years to him! May God continue to bless him and his wife, Inge, who reside in Pennsylvania.

BL: Rev. President Paul, what does community life mean in relation to academic life?

HAIDOSTIAN: I think I should share with you one of our findings from the exit surveys we do with our graduating students every year. When we ask “what did you see that was most valued for you at Haigazian University?” they consistently repeat two points, sometimes one scoring higher than the other. One, the serious academic standards, and two, the real family atmosphere on campus where people of various communities and belongings feel like they are under a unifying and peaceful roof of Haigazian, a reality that they rarely find in their own communities. Both points give us high satisfaction. Repeatedly, students have told us that when they get out of the taxi or they come to Mexico Street, they already feel that they have left behind all their prejudices and all their groupings, and this is a place where they can freely share who they are and what they have. So, what is community? Community is not only the inner university setting at Haigazian University. It is not simply the fact that we have diversity in the student body. Being diverse is not necessarily a formula for creating community. The fact is that your background is not the most important aspect when you are a student at Haigazian University, but the quality of your association with the others, what you can share with the others, leaving prejudices behind and dwelling on the positives. Sharing the positives is the caring aspect, the family aspect, which students have repeatedly told us they love at Haigazian University. Throughout the Lebanese civil strife, whether while I was a Haigazian student (1981-1984) or the president since 2002, we have noticed that Haigazian has given the same message to its students, that the typical divisive Lebanese politics should remain out of the campus, and we have been criticized about it sometimes. Political parties have wished that people who belong to their groups would also be vocal representing their political parties at university, and this is often presented as a value in many people’s mind, and this I respect. However, at Haigazian U. we tell them: “Real Lebanese politics should constitute matters of the economy, the environment, citizenship, and the law. Politics on campus means education in curricular and extra-curricular ways. Being active, therefore, is though positive activity in clubs or classes, but not in the sense of repeating the divisive politics of the country on campus life.” To conclude, to bring one’s own unique background may add something to the campus, but it is bringing that uniqueness or identity to fellowship with the others that should have priority.

BL: Who is supporting the university nowadays?

HAIDOSTIAN: The major supporter of Haigazian University is the Armenian Missionary Association of America. Basically, I would say that the majority of the support we receive is from the Association in the USA, the S. Philibosian and Conte Foundations, and the Haigazian board members who happen to be in the majority of cases American-Armenians and often Protestant Armenians, but not exclusively so. We also enjoy some local Lebanese support and a few foundations who appreciate our mission. Whether it is through special scholarship donations, small grants, or formal banquets we raise funds mainly for scholarships.

BL: President Rev. Dr. Paul, with the present prevailing economic and political hardships in Lebanon, do you intend to have a branch for Haigazian University in the USA?

HAIDOSTIAN: As early as October 2019, when I was at our Board meeting in Los Angeles, there was some discussion about additional or satellite programs or different types of programs outside Lebanon. At the current stage, there are no plans, but the discussion will remain open.

The main question is how better we can serve the local and global community. The economic and other limitations in Lebanon lead us to think about ways to secure the sustainability of our mission, but our commitment to Lebanon and its youth is unwavering.

BL: Why is Haigazian University seen as a neutral place for all people regardless of race, nationality, or creed?

HAIDOSTIAN: Haigazian University comes out of a religious theological understanding, which is Protestant. In Protestantism, the main value is the dignity of the human being vis-a-vis the generalized wider picture. There is a value system that focuses on the elevated value the human being receives through the work of Christ, the incarnation and the salvation that follows. The dignity of Christ is to be seen in each human being. Our types of institutions have a philosophy and theology that sustain them. In the name of Christ, each human being is valued and dignified. There was Armenian presence in Lebanon for many centuries, however the larger numbers came around 1920. When the Armenians came out of a genocide experience, having learnt from their pain and from their loss, the whole attitude of the Armenians was to make sure that they play a role and do their best in the country where they became its citizens and they adopted as their new homeland. This whole Armenian approach to the new homeland – to Lebanon – was coming out of that painful history which was translated into many institutions such as Haigazian University. Also, by living out a peaceful and constructive life. There is a history of pain in universal magnitude, but that pain, in the Armenian case, was translated into life, commitment, and coexistence.

BL: The Armenian Evangelicals had eight colleges in the Ottoman Empire before the genocide, and 250 high schools. All were destroyed; would you elaborate?

HAIDOSTIAN: From the mid 19th century and on and with the help of the mostly American Protestant Congregational and Presbyterian missionary activity, significant educational institutions, girls' schools, colleges, high schools, orphanages and theological seminaries were established. In most of these institutions, Armenian Evangelicals were on the faculty and the staff, and the ministry of the Armenian Evangelical Church (founded in 1846), was identified by its educational efforts. With the Armenian Genocide, and the forced deportations, almost all of these institutions were lost. Some American missionaries stayed behind in few of these institutions, but the majority either closed down or changed their character. With the loss of a major educational heritage, the Armenian Evangelicals felt they had lost part of their soul. It is no surprise, therefore, that the founding of such an institution of higher learning as Haigazian University, was a recovery of some of the mission and the dignity. Haigazian was not to simply add to the number of colleges of Lebanon, but to recapture a critical mission that was lost, and a heart for educating.

BL: What about Haigazian University and the Lebanese Rocket Society?

HAIDOSTIAN: The most attractive point for me in this is the fact that the Rocket Society story started only five years after the founding of Haigazian College (University) with a very small student body, with very limited budgets, and with very few people involved. Professor Manoug Manougian was this young physics teacher who started the Rocket Club at Haigazian in 1960. He only had a bachelor's degree when he started it, with some of the students who were not even aware of the level of importance of what they were developing. They were genuinely excited about it, but they did not necessarily know where this would lead them. The main lesson we learn is that when you have a vision that makes you work hard, your small size and the lack of budgets will not stand in the way. Now, that is very particular because we are not talking about a huge university. It was a couple of hundred students some of whom were from different villages and simple families, but they were put in the right place and they were given the right encouragement and opportunity. Their limitations did not stand in the way. And then from 1960 to 1966, the story developed, and I am very happy to say that the documentary that was prepared by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, called the "Lebanese Rocket Society" brought back the forgotten history of a promising Lebanon. One of the virtues of the Haigazian Rocket Story is that very quickly a localized small Haigazian project became a unifying pride for Lebanon. That is rare and precious. In this beautiful story in a tiny institution with a humble budget, within two years their secret had become a national project. Their pride had already become Lebanese. In the beginning it was called the "Haigazian College Rocket Society" but very quickly it shifted into the "Lebanese Rocket Society" with the Lebanese Army joining the efforts. That is a remarkable story. We have lessons to learn.

BL: How in 1960, five years after its establishment, was the rocket project established in order to participate in the space race?

HAIDOSTIAN: Yes, the vision of the teacher who was leading this effort was not simply to keep the students busy. He was dreaming, and they were also dreaming, of doing something that would compete with the advancing world, that is, the space race, of course, between the USSR and the USA It was the new science, it was the new thing, it was the future, and the small group of ambitious people in an ambitious college, dreamt of joining the bigger markets, which is very particular. Today, in many businesses, people try to evaluate the markets and their material resources. That is probably wise. People try to look at their resources materially, physically, and then try to draw projects. In education, the main recourse is the eagerness to learn, to change, to initiate, and the eagerness to break new ground. That is the capital you have in education. For example, it is the question mark that you focus on in education. You don't simply focus on all the answers that are already there, and these people in the Rocket Society wanted to join the world in the space race not with resources, not with history, not with the institutional strength, but with the eagerness to reach to the skies, to reach to the wider world, and I think that is a very powerful mission of any institution of higher learning.

BL: President Paul, don't you think that it is high time for Lebanon's government to recognize the efforts of Professor Manoug Manougian by offering him an award?

HAIDOSTIAN: Professor Manougian was here a few years ago; he visited Lebanon for the documentary film launch and there was some media interest in this topic, but honestly, I did not feel that the interest was high enough. I also received phone calls from people who didn't believe the story of the rocket. They said, "Is this really true or someone is exaggerating the story?" I didn't feel that the government or officials were ready to see the beauty of that project in the early 60s and its heritage. Maybe it was too long ago, and in Lebanon, our memory is highly selective, and it is highly utilitarian, so people do not see how it can be politically or economically utilized now. Valuable aspects of past history may or may not be remembered in any significant way. Some good publicity was made about the documentary, but memory is a strange power. In fact, in Lebanon, and now on social media, I noticed that we are usually very eager in being pessimistic about the future and being negative about our past. I believe this is a sign of mass depression. Since the present is not honoring us, we either mourn the past, or bury the future.

BL: What is your view on rocketry in the Middle East?

HAIDOSTIAN: Rocketry in the Middle East has become such a military term, and such a reminder of wars and lack of peace. If you conduct an online search for rockets and the Middle East today, you see everything but science, you see everything but progress, you see earth but not space. So, the whole issue of rocketry in the Middle East has been colored with wars. That is why in the film and in our garden, the replica of the Cedar Rocket is painted in white, or it is a white rocket. It is a peaceful rocket, a rocket of peace. This is also what the documentary film wanted to promote. By the way, a second copy of this rocket replica was also installed at the Sharjah Art Foundation in the UAE.

The focus of science has to be peace. We know that science is often used for destruction, wars, injustice, unfair competition, hegemony and harm. This is also how people think about rockets.

BL: Don't you think that the rocketry subject is an example of how Armenians and other minorities integrated into the fabric of Lebanese life?

HAIDOSTIAN: I believe that as early as Armenians had started creating educational and social institutions in Lebanon, and as early as the Lebanese Armenians went into industry, fine arts, sports, banking, architecture, engineering, medicine, and handcrafts, they already immersed themselves in the major veins of the diverse Lebanese body. They went directly there, and confidently so. And if someone thinks about society, one should say, "How could a community, individuals and families contribute to the positive development of a society and of a country?" The case of the Armenian community has been clear in many domains. So, the Armenians and other minorities who went into these domains, maintained the strength of Lebanon in the fifties and in the sixties and early seventies. The Lebanese-Armenian activity was not for any specific agenda. They were being themselves, true to Lebanon, and true to their identity. Throughout the twentieth century, Lebanon and the Armenians community developed a very positive story of participating effectively in the rich culture and business of the Lebanese fabric and the society at large. Now, is this something that Armenians in Lebanon did as a minority, or because they are a minority? No. They did because they were truly, genuinely in love with their society, their country, and did whatever they did naturally. It was not done for a political purpose. It was not

like a minority saying, "Let us do this. So that one day, we may enjoy some benefits." No. They did it because of who they are, because of how they do things. And the whole society benefited, including themselves. I believe that there was a major affinity between what Lebanon is and who the Armenians are. There was a love story, and this is not an exaggeration. Even Armenians who lived in other countries with no connection to Lebanon, and who had never stepped foot in Lebanon, they all loved Lebanon. Why? Because the Armenian Lebanese story of genuine development was told in a very eloquent way.

BL: Is Hagazian University a multicultural educational institution which resembles the Lebanese fabric?

HAIDOSTIAN: Yes, especially when you look at our student body, you notice that young citizens of all identities and regions in Lebanon are all present at Haigazian University. Of course, we are also proud that about 42% come from the different Armenian communities, but that is not our only pride. So, yes. Haigazian University is bringing together all these people who otherwise would remain distant. The same is true with the faculty and the staff. You notice that it is an education that educates all. But I think, as I said, it is not the statistics that I care about. When someone from any region or any social fabric, or any economic or religious belief comes to Haigazian University, does he/she feel respected as a human being? Did they get their chance, like valuable human beings, to get a solid higher educational experience? I think that is the most important question. For me, this question is more important than statistics, and public relations. Yes, we have everyone, but how is everyone looking at this experience, how is the student being enriched, their horizon widened, their heart softened, their mind sharpened? I think that is our focus. It should remain to be our focus.

BL: Is it true that many Lebanese governmental politicians graduated from Hagazian University?

HAIDOSTIAN: Usually, graduates of universities reach their professional positions based on the types of major that the university has, the type of background they have, what family they grew up in, what personality they have, etc. Now, there are a number of domains where Haigazian University graduates were seen more than in others. One was in the educational and teaching professions. Globally speaking, we have graduated a very high number of prominent educators, professors, and researchers, including writers. Why? Because, as I said, teacher training was a key strength at Haigazian University, and still is. So, we have school principals, university deans, and college professors from Haigazian University who have excelled in many countries.

The second area, which is about half the student body of Haigazian, is business and economics. So, managers, bankers, and auditors were prepared. And then, we trained many in the sciences. I mean those who went into Ph.D. programs in the sciences in Lebanon or elsewhere. Some graduates went into politics as well.

The third domain is also very critical and we are proud of our graduates in that field as well. It is social work! We have given to the world many social workers...and leaders of NGOs. I'm very proud to say that even as we speak, in UN or other NGO institutions, we have a large number of

our graduates who are doing a tremendous job with refugees and displaced people not only in Lebanon, but also in different countries where they're serving the global community.

When we speak about our graduates, I would not focus on recognizable names in government positions, but on effective people who humbly serve and efficiently lead. In fact, they may be unknown soldiers, not generals, and not in the high positions. I think serving society in its real needs and in a positive and ethical way; these are the standards. The rest for me is details. And then we have people who have reached prominent positions, and we are proud of them too if they have kept the ethics and the humility to serve as key values.

BL: Haigazian University will continue to thrive and grow with your leadership at the helm for many years to come, would you comment?

HAIDOSTIAN: I came to Haigazian University in 2002 for an initial three-year term, and then I asked the Board of Trustees at a meeting in New Jersey at the interview that I wished for a short term contract. "Why only three years?" I was asked. At that point, I was 39 so I said, "I'm too young, I will not want to stay for long years and then not find enough reasons to quit; or the Board may feel like I should leave but not find enough reasons to let me go." I would have never imagined that I would complete 18 years of this mission. I have sometimes felt that I should move on, and have already seen almost all of the Lebanese universities witness quick changes in the presidential positions so why not in my case as well? I believe that I am a mission-driven person, and also believe in God's calling, and have stayed and am glad I have done so.

I am not at Haigazian University because I need a career path that satisfies. I am here because I am thoroughly consumed by the mission and uniqueness of Haigazian University. As long as I can serve, I think as long as I feel that I can serve the right mission, I'll be interested. And as long as the Board feels that I am doing what I should do. Of course, there's always two sides of this. But I'm very proud of Haigazian University... I will never be satisfied with what we do, of course. I think we have many areas where we can improve. It is not that Haigazian University is doing well because the whole world is not doing well, while we did better here and there. No, I think we still have lots of things to grow in and to change. I have also learnt that in any university setting, you never get there, you are never satisfied. You have to adjust every year, you have to change every year, and you have to grow every year. You have to realign yourself with the rest of the world every year, which is a constant challenge, but you also have to distinguish yourself every year. I will never get to a point where I will say, "Well, I worked for so many good years and now let me take it easy and things will go smoothly." They will not go smoothly. A university is a very dynamic institution; it follows the ups and downs of the global society. So that will keep us busy.

This is very demanding. No one should envy a university president, by the way. Not at least universities of our type, which are not-for-profit. We are not here for material profit; we lose money, we work with deficit budgets every year, then we try to see how to do well even though the budget has a deficit and so on. So it's very demanding, but also very gratifying for the mission aspects that heal us.

BL: Is the Lebanese government making the necessary contributions towards Lebanon's educational sector? What are your suggestions?

HAIDOSTIAN: No. Unfortunately, it's too clear. I think that there are many missing links between the educational institutions of Lebanon, the private sector; that is, the school systems, and specially the private higher education, non-profit sector, and the official sides... I think there are many gaps. There are many missing links between the successive ministries of education and these institutions. I'm not saying that institutions should know more than the government would know, but I'd certainly say that private institutions, especially the private higher education institutions that follow a sense of mission and value have a wealth of experience, a wealth of knowledge about education, about Lebanon, about higher education, from which the Lebanese government does not benefit.

BL: Is peace possible in the Middle East?

HAIDOSTIAN: Our memory in the Middle East is always wounded and remains wounded and we have deep wounds in our memory. Why? Because where injustice is taking place and continues to take place against peoples, against nations, against groups, against lands... injustices are either denied or they're replaced by new injustices. Even the ones who demand justice in the Middle East, I feel, do not find the right approach, to respond to the injustices. They're lost. I think the Middle East is in the hands of the bigger and wider powers of the world. So the people in the Middle East are lost in their injustices and they're sad and bewildered. So, is peace possible? In theory yes. But the mechanisms of being bought and sold by powers, by choosing to follow foreign powers right and left, or isolating ourselves in small groups, all these make peace impossible. I believe that injustice may have many responses, mine would be human dignity... it may be an unlikely response to injustice. When you commit and injustice to me, and I lose my dignity and I respond without my dignity, then I am lost in my war. And the world will not take care of me, will not pay attention to me. We need to be strong and dignified whoever we are, in each group and in each country. We have to keep our dignity; then people should respect this, should listen to our issues. Peace is only possible if these types of mentalities are changed. Peace is not simply the lack of resolution of past issues; peace is a whole program, it is a value system and it is mentalities. I believe there are individual people, for example, who don't even have peace within themselves, or within their groups. Why should I expect them to have peace with me? They don't even have peace within themselves. Therefore, we should start within ourselves, within our groups, within our nations, within our countries. Only then would peace be possible.

BL: What are your insights into the Lebanese and Syrian situation economically and politically?

HAIDOSTIAN: First, our countries, Lebanon and Syria, are lost in the quagmire of the different types of the highly-charged agenda in the larger world. For example, in one discussion in the Eastern Mediterranean, there is the petroleum discussion. In another, it is the fact that the concepts of governments, the rule of law, and the precepts of citizenship are not realized in many of our countries in the Middle East; they simply are not. Our societies often dilute issues and are conflict driven. What is good governance? What is good citizenship? What is good independence? What is good development? How to put the young Middle Eastern potential into

productive work? So for all of these and other reasons, we cultivate our fertile ground for all sorts of old and new conflicts in the Middle East. I think that Syria and Lebanon are dismembered and their societies and economics are in disarray for both internal and external reasons. I am against using one part or the other part of the blame game. Some of our problems are purely internal and some of our problems are external and some are mixed. Imagine in the Middle East and in our countries, we even have enormous problems inside every group. It is not always the other – the other outsider and the other one in the country. Whether Lebanon or Syria, even within our own countries we have our own issues. So, because of these pressures, we are lost in too many agendas in a region which is charged. On the other hand, natural resources are used to weaken human societies, and religion is abused to create hell on earth, and distancing from heaven. I am sad for these countries... By the way, we still have potentials. I am still hopeful because in our countries and in our societies we have potentials which would take up the opportunities when we can. Both in Syria and in Lebanon, I think we have put potential in the cultures of the people which hopefully will lead to some change whenever there is an opportunity. As educators, we will also work as if the future is bright, and it will be bright at least in some of the minds and lives we will impact. In education, we learn to be humble. We cannot change the world wholesale. We work a person at a time, and then, there is hope.

BL: What is your view on Lebanon's USD floating exchange rate? When will this problem end? How is it affecting the educational system in Lebanon?

HAIDOSTIAN: I think there are a number of longstanding economic and financial problems in Lebanon. There are a number of key problems, not only in economics. One of the problems – I will start there – more than the exchange rate problem that I am sad about is the loss of trust in the banking system in Lebanon. That hurt me personally more than other aspects of economic failure.

Well, the fluctuations in the exchange rate hurts the economy, the family, the country and the individual. We will be able to adjust whenever it is possible to find stability of the Lebanese Lira. My worry is about the re-establishing of the trust in the banking sector. Now, the exchange rate fluctuations created a mess in the university accounting system in our payments, in our budgets, we're highly concerned and impacted. I mean on the one hand, we draft our budgets in the US dollars but student payments are in the Lebanese Lira. This is a wait-and-see period financially, and we will see what can be adjusted and when. We are trying to freeze any changes in our financial numbers waiting for this issue to settle. We will handle it, but I think the key is to re-establish trust with the banking system. The sooner the dilemma of the exchange rate is fixed the easier it will be for us. The key value is to keep supporting our students as needed and deserved, and at the same time securing the welfare of our staff and faculty, thus the whole balance.

BL: What are the challenges and problems of Lebanon's educational universities and schools?

HAIDOSTIAN: It is a fact that universities like ours have foreign currency expenses. Part of our expenses are in foreign currency, and abroad. Tuition will have to be paid by Lebanese people in the Lebanese Lira which is devaluating, so is everything in the economy of each family and institution. Huge financial gaps are being created on all levels. If we increase tuition fees,

students will be tremendously disadvantaged; and if we keep the tuition as is in Lebanon today with this currency exchange rate and all that, we will not be able to meet our financial challenges and make our payments and work on resolving our issues. So, it is a very confusing reality and we will need external support in some way. In our case, I hope that we will be able to do better so as to survive in a good way. I should mention here that I am not hopeless and we have the resolve to face the challenges and meet the needs of our mission. It is also a matter of faith for me personally to face the multiple crises at the same time. What do I know about next year? Not much. At Haigazian University we have a spiritual, academic and moral capital and we have a good name. I am trusting God of course; but I am trusting that we have a resource and a capital that's a good name; it's a good history... it is serious history... it's a quality issue. I am basically capitalizing on this for next year.

BL: What are the limits and advantages of online education?

HAIDOSTIAN: Online education brought some strength for some students in ways that the classroom experience was not bringing. We are glad we could move our platforms online and there were some successes in this way of teaching. Some people did better online. The same was true about faculty. But others who previously worked well could not cope with the online changes. Online education will not replace the face-to-face education. We're losing the sense of community; we're losing the sense of "we do things together... people learn together". These senses... I believe that people learn with all the senses together; not with some of the senses. So there is a loss. Some materials are taught well online and even better than in other ways. So it is an experimental phase for now. And then there are ethical matters, cheating increased, attention problems increased, online anxiety increased. But some people felt more relaxed learning online as well.

BL: How far did Covid-19 affect the educational system? Is there any light in the near future?

HAIDOSTIAN: The Covid-19 issue is that students, faculty and staff became more anxious about each other and about themselves than before. The university is about bringing people together, but the university may be bringing together people who are nervous and who are anxious and it will be a long time before people will be comfortable with each other. So this is one point. The second point is that when travel is limited, and universities have to do international work, academia loses. We host conferences and we go and present papers in conferences that will be changing, and some online versions will bring partial solutions. Covid-19 is here to stay, at least for a while. So, as all of life will change, so will university life.

BL: What are you plans for the year 2021?

HAIDOSTIAN: The new plans, I think for now, we will try to solidify our grip on online education – training, certifications – we need to be more comfortable with this. We're spending the next few months re-visiting this issue. Other than that, I should say that 2020 is our sixty fifth anniversary; so we cancelled the traditional celebratory programs and are replacing them by more creative celebrations, mostly online. Our main plan should be to put our seatbelts on, and drive the educational vehicle very carefully, and patiently.

BL: Why did you choose the educational sector?

HAIDOSTIAN: When I was 16, I knew I was interested in theology and I knew I wanted to go to some pastoral work; I wrote a letter to our church authorities and I said; “I want to go into theology and Christian Ministry; however, I want to be in the educational ring of the church.” Why? Because even then I could not imagine myself doing anything but education. In the example of my father, mother, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, most were either in education or church work, or medicine or law. I was a people’s person, I was a communicator always, and all my family history was education and the service fields. I felt that this is the only thing that’s there.

BL: What about the evolution of today’s students and how can you compare them to the previous generations?

HAIDOSTIAN: Today’s student is direct, transparent, untraditional, widely informed, and well-connected in more ways than any time before. The world of opportunity is before them. But today’s student is also anxious, unfocused, lacking clarity on meaning and value matters. The main lack for today’s student is the ground on which they will or may stand. The ground is shifting, and the risks are many. Therefore, we have to accompany them patiently and confidently, and provide a good example and company.

END