

## A Statement Issued by The Group of the 11 Universities in Lebanon: The Higher Education Sector Is at Risk and Urgent Measures Are Required

As Lebanon reaches its first centenary, it also reaches a critical phase. Today, we are witnessing real danger that may lead to a fundamental change in the country's human facet if efforts are not urgently made. The economic, political and health crises that Lebanon is going through are affecting the educational sector in general, and the university sector in particular. In addition, the challenges, problems and demands in regard to the educational sector have accumulated greatly over the years and have not received the attention needed by the relevant official entities.

The higher education sector is an essential component of society. It has helped build Lebanon and the Arab world throughout history by contributing to scientific and human knowledge, as well as essential research resulting in the initiation of highly qualified human resources and the true Lebanese capital. The universities of Lebanon prepared elites in all social, political, financial, administrative, health, and educational sectors, including jurists, engineers, experts in sciences, and others who form the foundation of every society and represent hope for its future.

Faced with this dangerous situation, and in implementation of the message that unites us, we, the 11 leading universities in Lebanon, decided to ring the alarm and call on the State, the Presidency, the Parliament and the Government to:

**First** - The mission and role of universities that carried the responsibility of the higher education sector in Lebanon should be respected and the universities must be active partners in the decision-making around the future of this sector, and not be marginalized in the framework of the Lebanese government and in particular the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

**Second** - Commitment to applying the laws in force, particularly:

- Law No. 2852014/ on the general provisions of higher education and its regulation in terms of powers and tasks of the Higher Education Council.
- Decree No. 2176 of 122018/1/ related to the mechanisms for licensing and granting permission to start teaching and the recognition of degrees and its renewal in the private higher education institutions.

**Third** - Commitment to the administrative and technical procedures and recommendations emanating from the work of all higher education committees, whether in terms of granting or rejecting licenses to universities to open new branches or specialties without any exception, which imposes an immediate reversal of the decrees that recently legalized university branches that had been previously rejected by technical committees, and that in October 2019, the Higher Education Council had frozen all licensing for branches and universities. In case this is overlooked, resorting to specialized judicial references under the principles of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the constitution will be a must.

**Fourth** - Appointing a reliable general manager of higher education, to organize work within the directorate and decide on hundreds of outstanding licensing applications for new educational programs stalled by the ministry for many years without any technical or legal justification. The general manager of higher education is also expected to issue direct work decisions on applications that have previously obtained preliminary approval. The delay and procrastination in response to applications are affecting the future of students who are duly registered in universities as well as graduates.

**Fifth** - Stressing on the necessity of pushing higher education laws forward within a strategic plan that leads to best practices and modern trends, especially the quality assurance law and the remote digital education law.

**Sixth** - Consideration of the economic dilemma, as in light of the financial suffering that the higher education sector is going through, it is necessary to preserve the permanence and continuity of Lebanon's educational institutions. Here lies the need for coordination between the government and universities in developing draft laws and financial decisions that will determine the fate of higher education in Lebanon to facilitate the work of universities in providing higher education with the quality that characterizes Lebanon, and this coordination is achieved through:

- 1- Lifting the restrictions imposed by banks on university deposits.
- 2- Allowing foreign banking operations and transfers in foreign currencies to cover the operating expenses of universities and their purchases required for laboratories, scientific research centers, and others.
- 3- Cancellation of all bank guarantees to ensure the operation of the new specialties and the release of the guarantees that the banks currently have.

**Seventh** - Supporting universities responsible for managing and operating health centers that provide health and medical services in Lebanon, which are at risk today due to economic hardship, and are suffering from the lack of access to their dues from the state. If this grim reality persists, the universities will, unfortunately, have to dismiss many of its staff.

**Eighth** - Providing the Lebanese University the utmost care and support in the challenges it is facing and reinforce its presence in all regions, whereby the reforms that the eleven universities are seeking to achieve are to serve all Lebanese universities, especially the non-profit ones. The Lebanese University plays an essential and extremely important role in the higher education sector, present, and future.

In conclusion of this statement and appeal,

We call upon officials and decision-makers in the legislative and executive authorities to accelerate taking measures to save the higher education sector through the issuance of urgent government legislation and decisions to prevent its collapse, which, if it occurs, will inevitably have a catastrophic impact on the social reality in Lebanon in general.

We also call on parents, students, professors, and all citizens to raise their voices loudly to achieve these reforms and rally around their universities to support them in this difficult time, to the benefit of the students who will contribute to the building of the society through their participation in the advancement of the state of law and institutions.

This statement is a message of hope for Lebanon, and we warn and hold responsible anyone who works on obstructing the continuity of universities in fulfilling their mission and role, and we stand our ground to continue playing our role as a beacon for this country to protect Lebanon's thought, knowledge, citizenship, and justice.

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