



**Speech of Ambassador Christina Lassen,
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

Monday 30 May
Al Kafaat University

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Dear Professor Fathi Oueida,
Dear Directors, Dear Professors,
Dear Members of Al-Kafaat Foundation,
Dear Students,

I would like to thank you for inviting me to visit your beautiful campus and to join you in the celebration of the achievement of one of your graduates, Roudy Doumit.

It is a great pleasure to be visiting a place that provides young people with access to one of the most important basic rights, the right to quality education.

This visit here makes me "*re-connect*" with the times when I was a student myself, thinking that university studies will allow me to better understand the world. And here I am years after, still in the process of learning. Because life is a long process of learning. It also makes me wish that I enjoyed being a student a bit more instead of worrying about what comes after!

Because being a student is something more than just being a book reader; it is about developing confidence and critical thinking, about discovering yourself and understanding others, and it is also about enjoying the freedom of expression and of thought. I visited today your audiovisual department. It made me think that it is not only

the complexity and difficulty of the technology that is impressive, but also the fact that it is being used to send important messages to all of us. And there is no better means of delivering them than through art.

It is always a great pleasure to attend events that focus on young people; this is where I can feel refreshing spirit, hear at times innocent and at times provocative ideas and honest opinions. The young people are the future. And this is why it is so important to support them in realising their dream, in exploiting their full potential and in providing them with a space to develop ideas.

For the European Union, higher education is of huge importance. We learned this lesson at home. One of the biggest achievements of the EU has been to create exchange programmes for students within Europe. These programmes bring together people of different nationalities, with various cultural backgrounds, who are all working together. This has proven to be the most efficient lesson of understanding, unity, solidarity and integration.

We believe that investing in education is the best investment one can do. It provides the very foundation upon which new generations of European and Lebanese citizens will develop. The EU has made it easier and more attractive for people from third countries, including citizens of Lebanon, to study or do research in Europe. We are supporting these exchange programmes and also other programmes that foster young people's development, courage and creativity. The competition at the European film festival is just one example.

Education is about connecting and understanding. So is a film festival. Here I would like to not only congratulate Roudy Doumit again but also to thank him for bringing back to our attention the issue of "re-connecting". New technologies usually come along with benefits, and they usually make our lives easier. But technology can also create new problems or at least challenges. There is a very thin line between connecting with people thanks to technology and disconnecting with them at the same time.

At the end, we are learning the most about the world and about ourselves by interacting with people. To appreciate people that surround us, to understand ourselves, to take

advantage of the opportunities given to us... all this requires our attention. Walking through life with open eyes and an open mind, this is what reconnecting is all about. Let's not forget that. Especially now. Refugees, disabled persons, vulnerable children and women, minorities – they all deserve our attention and understanding, particularly when it comes to connecting them to the most basic rights of all - education. And this is what this university is succeeding in.

A big “Mabrouk” to the winner. I am convinced that this award will encourage not only you, but also other aspiring young directors to further pursue their dreams. Because Lebanon, and Europe, need youth like you: ambitious, brave and creative.

A big “Mabrouk” also to all students participating, to all the students pursuing their dreams as well as to all the teachers that are showing them the way.