



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

**Inauguration of the Arab Master in Democracy and Human
Rights**

Saint Joseph University – 27 October 2017

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Excellency Minister of Education, Marwan Hamade,
Rector of Saint Joseph University, Dean of the USJ and Rector
of the *Faculty of Law and Political Science*,

Excellencies,

Faculty,

Dear students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you today to participate in the official inauguration of the 'Arab Master in Democracy and Human Rights'. And to those of you who decided to participate in this programme, either as students or lecturers, I want to say: you chose the right topic and we need you!

Looking at the curriculum of this master's program, I see that you will focus on some of the most important and cross-cutting issues of the 21st century. And I am delighted to say that they are all very close to my heart and that of the European Union. They are in the DNA of the European Union. Because the EU was founded on the very ambition to promote and protect human rights, democracy and rule of law. We believe that sustainable peace and stability, long-term development and prosperity cannot exist without respect for human rights and democratic institutions. And this commitment underpins all of our internal and external policies.

Countries wishing to join the EU must show respect for human rights and democracy, and as you know, we have a long and complex application procedure. But moreover, all of our cooperation, partnership and trade agreements with countries outside the European Union, state that human rights are an essential element in relations between us.

Democracy and human rights are not arbitrary topics for us. Instead, they define us and are at the core of what we do and stand for. Because our conviction is based on our own historic experience.

And this historic experience is particularly important at this moment here in this region. The Arab World is still in turmoil,

the outcome of which will probably only become clear years from now. Now, more than ever, promoting human rights and democracy is essential in addressing the threat of terrorism, the challenges of demography, migration and climate change, and in seizing the opportunity of shared prosperity in the Arab World.

And you will be among the leaders to do so.

You will be among the leaders to take this agenda forward in Lebanon and the countries you are from, and on a regional and global level. Because the timing of the launch of this program is not an easy one. Human rights and democracy are under pressure in all parts of the world. That is one of the reasons I am glad you chose this programme. Because the current international environment, there is a clear risk that the EU is becoming a lonelier actor in the defence of human rights. There are not many places in the world today where human rights are at the center of policies. The EU has its shortcomings too, but if you look around the world, the EU stands more alone these years that we would like to. This is a challenge, but it is also something we are proud of.

But we need strong partners in the fight for democracy and human rights. So not only do your countries need your voice.

Europe needs your voice. After the Arab revolutions, many people in this region started doubting what can be achieved by individuals in terms of change towards democracy and the rule of law. But rest assured: Critical individuals can change the core of policies for the better. We need to be together in this, side by side to raise these issues with our interlocutors worldwide.

For me, one of the most important interlocutors is the Government of Lebanon, and the presence of Minister of Education Marwan Hamadeh here today attests to the firm commitment of the Lebanese authorities to strengthen democracy and human rights. This support is essential, and we hope that it will increase even further in the coming months and years.

And several positive developments have taken place in Lebanon over the last year. The parliament's decision last October to establish a National Human Rights Institute and the National Preventive Mechanism were huge progress that was long overdue. And the subsequent appointment in the new government of a Minister for Human Rights, Ayman Choucair, was an important follow-up. I know that Minister Choucair is personally dedicated to advance the establishment and operationalization of the Institute and the National Preventive

Mechanism, and we support the Ministry in its quest to do so. We will also help the minister organise national consultations as part of the follow up on the second UPR (Universal Periodic Review) undertaken by Lebanon, and will continue providing technical expertise on amending and drafting legislation to ensure Lebanon's compliance with its international human rights obligations.

I am really pleased that the programme has chosen first and foremost Beirut and secondly the USJ as its new base. USJ is a truly excellent institution of outstanding academic reputation. And I am confident that this program will make a difference and become a valuable source of expertise in the field of Democratic Governance and Human Rights throughout the region and beyond.

We look forward to working with you, supporting you, and listening to you. The European Union is and always will be your reliable partner in the fight for democracy and human rights.

Thank you for your attention.