For Immediate Release

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A Press Conference at AUB:

Is Waste Incineration an Option for Lebanon?

A Press Conference was held at the American University of Beirut (AUB) on the controversial issue of municipal solid waste incineration (or Waste-to-energy). The conference was organized by the AUB Collaborative for the Study of Inhaled and Atmospheric Aerosols (CARS), a recently established research group focusing on air pollution and toxic inhalable aerosols. Today's press conference included presentations discussing atmospheric chemistry, chemical engineering, atmospheric fluid mechanics, public policy, and economics.

The press conference presented scientific evidence on the waste incineration technology, its environmental and health impacts, and its economic and public policy feasibility in the country. Presentations and interventions were made by Dr. Alan Shihadeh Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture and expert on air pollution, Dr. Joseph Zeaiter (Department of Chemical Engineering, expert on waste burning processes), Dr. Issam Lakkis (expert in atmospheric fluid mechanics), Dr. Najat Saliba (air pollution expert and Director of the Nature Conservation Center at AUB), Dr. Jad Chaaban (economist and political economy expert), and Dr. Roland Riachi (public policy and natural resources expert). The group was also joined by Drs. Walid Saad, Carmen Geha, in addition to Mrs. Mona Hallak, Director of AUB's Neighborhood Initiative.

All AUB experts rang alarm bells on the adoption of waste incineration in Lebanon. The presentations highlighted air pollution as a major concern in the country. Many studies have shown the consequences of the lack of environmental regulations on the air quality in Lebanon. Within this setting, having an additional source of toxicant emissions like waste incinerators is dangerous and calls for stringent regulations by establishing a competent and independent environmental authority prior to approval and installation. This authority should be able to: issue permits, verify and enforce compliance, regularly evaluate rules and regulations, build capacity to oversee operation and monitor discharges (air, water, and solid residues) and train local

expertise. At present, this authority does not exist in Lebanon, leaving the country vulnerable to misleading assurances made by incinerator manufacturers. This is particularly worrying given the long and troubling history of waste incineration around the world.

The scientific presentations also discussed necessary conditions for the adoption of incinerators, inspired by developed countries: there need to be a mature and well-functioning waste management system in place for a number of years (e.g. sorting, recycling etc.), environmental policies/regulations to monitor and regulate emissions, as well as employing advanced air pollution control (APC) with state of the art technologies to capture harmful flue gas emissions. Solid waste needs to be disposed-of at controlled and well-operated chemical toxic waste landfills; and skilled staff should be easily available and regularly recruited and retained.

The press conference also included original simulations on the circulation of fumes from proposed incinerators within the Beirut area, showcasing the extent of potential toxic pollution contamination in the highly dense urban area.

The presentations also highlighted the fact that incineration is not convenient in Lebanon's case, given the lack of local expertise and the need for major legislative and institutional reforms to guarantee a safe and regulated operation. Moreover, incineration is extremely expensive (at almost 300$/ton, compared to alternative pre-existing technologies in Lebanon that do not exceed 70$/ton), and requires massive investments in the management of toxic residues (including securing hazardous landfill sites for these toxic residues).

Presenters also argued that incineration is an inferior technology in the Lebanese context compared to Anaerobic Mechanical and Biological Treatment, a waste management technique already applied in the country with promising results and low environmental and social impacts.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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