



Statement of The American University of Kurdistan's Board of Trustees

The American University of Kurdistan

December 2–3, 2024

The Board of Trustees of the American University of Kurdistan convened for its annual Board Retreat on December 2, 2024, followed by the Full Board Meeting on December 3, 2024.

During the Retreat, chaired by the Board Secretary, Trustees engaged in comprehensive discussions on AUK's mission, strategic plan, and long term direction. The mission and vision were reaffirmed as ambitious and inclusive, with recommendations to refine the mission language for clarity and incorporate measurable outcomes. Trustees examined AUK's goal to evolve into a research focused institution over the next 15–20 years and reviewed the piloted faculty evaluation system designed to strengthen scholarship, teaching, and service. Faculty recruitment challenges were discussed, with emphasis on attracting young scholars, supporting local talent with international exposure, and ensuring appropriate acculturation to the American model of higher education.

The Board reviewed institutional performance indicators, including a 69% graduation rate and a 97% first to second year retention rate. Trustees emphasized the importance of analyzing student outcomes by gender, socioeconomic background, and English proficiency, while ensuring continued support for vulnerable student groups, particularly Yezidi students. Plans were made to expand KPI dashboards and create mechanisms for ongoing assessment of outcomes.

Further discussions focused on Board governance, committee structures, and institutional oversight. Trustees supported merging the Advancement and Communication Committees to enhance efficiency and recommended earlier distribution of Board materials to strengthen preparation and engagement. Risk management was identified as a priority area, especially regarding insurance coverage, financial reporting, and liability protections. The Board affirmed the need for improved financial reporting processes and updated Bylaws to reflect current practices and committee structures.

Trustees also examined Board performance and governance effectiveness. The Board reaffirmed its plan to engage the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) to conduct an external review beginning January 2025. Professional development for Trustees – particularly in finance, risk management, and strategic planning – was emphasized as essential for advancing AUK's long term goals.

Fundraising emerged as a central topic, with Trustees committing to deeper involvement in the University's philanthropic initiatives. The Board reviewed progress from the 10th Anniversary campaign, noted the challenges facing the Advancement Office's capacity, and discussed strategies to strengthen donor cultivation, enhance communications, and build the AUK Endowment. Long term ideas included endowed chairs, research positions, climate related initiatives, and establishing a university affiliated holding company to support innovation and generate revenue.

At the Board of Trustees, chaired by His Excellency Masrour Barzani, he welcomed the Trustees and expressed appreciation for their continued dedication during a time of heightened regional uncertainty. He reflected on the broader political and security landscape affecting Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, including developments in Syria and southern Lebanon, and emphasized the importance of conflict prevention efforts.

The Chairman highlighted AUK's vital role in fostering dialogue through the Middle East Peace and Security Forum and commended the University for its contributions to regional peacebuilding. He congratulated the President and the AUK community for achieving NECHE candidacy status, marking a historic milestone for higher education in Kurdistan and Iraq. The Chairman also extended his appreciation for the successful 10th Anniversary Gala, which secured more than \$7 million in pledges,



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and acknowledged the generosity of several national and international donors toward AUK's mission. At the Board meeting, the Trustees approved a series of committee recommendations. These included acceptance of significant donations and grants – among them a scholarship gift nu Kurk Insaat and a \$2.1 million U.S. Department of State grant – as well as approval of multiple facilities, IT, health and safety, and operational projects. The Board approved furnishing the Impact Hub, the installation of vending machines as a pilot initiative, procurement of essential HVAC and disaster recovery systems, and multiple engineering and technology upgrades.

In academic affairs, the Board approved the proposal for a master's degree in Artificial Intelligence, recognizing the field's growing relevance across disciplines. The Board also approved the AUK Calendar for 2025–2026 and commended the University's ongoing work to prepare for substantive change authorization.

The General Audit and Risk Committee presented AUK's Financial Statement for FY 2023–2024, which the Board unanimously approved. Discussions also highlighted the challenges of obtaining insurance within the region and the need for stronger risk mitigation strategies, including currency diversification. The Trusteeship Committee reported approvals for the renewal of Ambassador Khalilzad's term and the formal affiliation of the MEPS Forum with the Board of Trustees.

In Other Business, Trustees reflected on the outcomes of the Retreat, acknowledging the value of focused dialogue, strategic alignment, and strengthened governance practices. They affirmed the importance of AUK's continued commitment to excellence, innovation, and service to the Kurdistan Region and its students.

Dr. Honar Issa,
Secretary of the Board of Trustees