

## Speech

### **CIHEAM Lebanese Alumni International Seminar**

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and Seminar Coordinator*

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Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear colleagues, and friends,

It is a pleasure and an honor to welcome you to Beirut for the **First International Seminar of Lebanese Alumni of the Four Mediterranean Institutes of CIHEAM**. This gathering celebrates our alumni, highlights their contributions, and fosters dialogue with Lebanese authorities, reflecting on past achievements while shaping a vision for the future of youth in Mediterranean agriculture.

I have often heard that alumni gatherings make everyone feel younger. Looking around, I see the perfect blend: the energy and creativity of youth alongside the wisdom and experience of those who came before. When these generations come together, the **CIHEAM spirit** is not just alive - it is thriving.

Our theme today, **“Investing in Youth for Sustainable Agri-Food Systems: Linking Education to Job Opportunities and Sector Priorities,”** is highly relevant to Lebanon. Our agricultural sector is aging and in need of young talent to revitalize it. The future of agriculture is not just about returning to the land; it is about moving forward through **innovation** - from precision agriculture and smart irrigation to renewable energy, new business models, and value chains.

I recently spoke with a young woman farmer from the Beqaa Valley, who said proudly: *“My greenhouse is my office, my phone is my extension service, and my drone is my new scarecrow.”* This combination of creativity, smart technology, and resilience is exactly what our sector needs to shape the future of food systems.

That’s why this seminar is about vision.

Today, around **100 Lebanese alumni** are gathered here - policymakers, researchers, entrepreneurs, teachers, and practitioners. You cherish your experiences in Bari, Montpellier, Chania, and Zaragoza: years of high-quality training, lifelong friendships, cultural exchange, and career opportunities. We have made some interesting extractions on your profile that are displayed on the back screen in this room. The mix shows a community where knowledge production (research/PhDs), policy/governance, and applied practice (projects, agribusiness, consultancy) are all interconnected.

Based on that our program is designed to strengthen synergies between CIHEAM and Lebanese institutions, fostering new programs, academic exchanges, and collaborative projects with

partners and the private sector. The seminar features **four panels** addressing key themes aligned with Lebanon's agri-food priorities, regional opportunities, and the launch of the Lebanese Chapter of CIHEAM Alumni.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Lebanon's partnership with CIHEAM has been longstanding and fruitful. Since joining in 1992, Lebanon has benefited from academic exchanges, research collaboration, and development initiatives that strengthened national capacities and contributed to Mediterranean cooperation. The establishment of two CIHEAM offices in Lebanon - **CIHEAM-Bari in 2023** and **CIHEAM-Montpellier in 2024** - underscores this active and trusted partnership.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to **H.E. Dr. Nizar Hani, Minister of Agriculture**, for his patronage, vision, and belief in the role of youth in agriculture. Excellency, without your support, this event would not have been possible. My gratitude also goes to **H.E. Dr. Kamal Shehade** for his engagement and for delivering a keynote on a priority topic we are eager to explore.

To my colleagues at CIHEAM, a very warm welcome: to **Dr. Frida Krifca, President of the CIHEAM Governing Board**, thank you for joining us; to **Professor Teodoro Miano, CIHEAM Secretary-General**, deep gratitude for your unwavering support and for your belief in the Alumni's role in building a stronger Mediterranean future. To **Dr. Maurizio Raeli, Delegate of Italy**, and all Directors of the four CIHEAM Institutes - **Dr. Biagio Di Terlizzi (Bari)**, **Dr. Thierry Dupeuble (Montpellier)**, **Dr. Raul Compes Lopez (Zaragoza)**, and **Dr. Chariton Kalaitzidis (Representing the Director of Chania)** - we are privileged to have you with us. Together, we continue building on past achievements toward a bright future of collaboration.

And to all our esteemed speakers and guests we welcome you all and we have high appreciation for you accepting to engage in the Panels and to joining this special event.

Finally, I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to the dedicated organizing team — from the Ministry of Agriculture, **especially my colleagues Abir Abulkhoudoud and Hanan Sammouri**, and from the **CIHEAM Secretariat, our colleagues Audrey Petiot and Yasmine Seghirate** — whose efforts were truly the backbone of this event. My gratitude also goes to all the organizers you who joined us today and made this seminar a success.

Let us all turn our event not only a touching memory but as the foundation of a lasting network that will sustain collaboration, innovation, and hope for the agri-food future of Lebanon and the Mediterranean.

**Thank you.**