

Chancellor O'Brien, Mr. Kruyt, President Lajeunesse, distinguished faculty members, fellow graduates, distinguished guests, families and friends:

I am deeply honored and blessed by this opportunity to represent my fellow graduates on this prestigious occasion. It is indeed a privilege for me to speak on behalf of these great minds, and therefore I express my gratitude to those responsible for my selection.

Let me begin my address by asking you, fellow graduates, to stop and think of where you have come from and how you got to be here today. As graduates, we should always remember the foundations from which we have ascended – our families, communities, friends, teachers, professors as well as the various institutional support systems that have helped us along the way. Each and every one of us here will be able to identify someone who has inspired us, or an institution that has supported us. It is important that we remember them today and include them in our celebrations of success.

In my own case, my thoughts are very much with my deceased father and mother. My father, for example, was an African rural farmer and elementary school teacher, who not only inculcated in me the yearning for higher education but also worked the land laboriously, together with my mother, to set me on a track through my early education that has culminated in the doctorate degree that I have just received. I have no doubt they would be delighted and extremely proud of the fact that their son is receiving a Ph.D. from one of Canada's great academic institutions, and that he has been given the great honour of presenting this address in front of some of America's most esteemed intellectuals.

During my life I have benefited from the generous support of many people, too numerous to name here. Let me mention however that this Ph.D. would have been much more difficult to achieve without the enormous support received from my three supervisors, Dr Syed Ahsan (from Economics); Dr. Bill Reimer (Sociology & Anthropology); and Dr. Reeta Tremblay (Political Science). A special credit must go to the New Rural Economy Project of Dr. Reimer for the huge research funding provided me. Faculty members in the Department of Economics, where I have been teaching for the past five years, have also played a critical role in this achievement. My dearest friend in life, Leonie Morris (Department of Biology), also shares in this success for her continuous support.

Each of you, fellow graduates, have your own story about the family members, friends, professors and others who have supported you in your journey. My challenge to you is to always remember the support systems that have sustained you. Our debt to them should continue to inspire us to do meaningful things with our lives. Over the past few years Concordia has given us access to dedicated and talented people, inspiring ideas, valuable knowledge and skills, and a sense of hope for the future. It would be a mistake if we were to use such resources only to improve our own lives. Instead we must follow the footsteps of previous Concordia graduates by contributing as alumni to those that will come after us. In this way we become part of the legacy that makes Concordia a welcoming and stimulating place of learning.

The second theme of my address to you relates to what I believe is our larger societal responsibility, particularly to the cause of global justice and peace. Whatever position you will occupy in life from now on, whether in academia, private industry, government, or community development, we must always strive to do something to make our world a better place. Remember that Concordia has given us the necessary education to help us achieve this mission.

This University is an institution that thrives on academic diversity, academic excellence, and cultural diversity. It is a place where older people, like me, approaching their 50's, and those who are young in their 20's and 30's, like you, can learn from each other, thus creating a mature and vibrant intellectual environment so crucial for understanding the complexities of our world. It is the place where academic excellence is rewarded, irrespective of one's age, and where the children of African rural farmers and those from diverse backgrounds are encouraged to study together. This openness and accessibility are indeed among the greatest assets of Concordia, which should help us to contribute meaningfully to the world.

Fellow graduates, as we leave these walls today, we must realize that due to the phenomenon called globalization, our world is becoming more and more integrated. Thus our standard of living here in the developed world will increasingly be affected by the consequences of weak economic governance and political instability in developing countries. Likewise, the wellbeing of people in those countries will remain vulnerable to any unjust international development policies and agreements that we impose upon them. I therefore ask you, as graduates, to use the education obtained from Concordia to help improve our world by seeking global justice, accountability and peace.

Finally, persevere in whatever you choose to do in life. Know that everything you had to endure within these walls – the long days and longer nights, the endless term papers (for which you never received the A's you expected), the stresses of exams - all these will pale in comparison to the challenges of life awaiting you in the real world. But your achievements today should be a source of inspiration and testimony to the virtue of perseverance: Whatever the challenges lie ahead, you will surmount them if you persist. We all have our own stories of life challenges. Mine will require a book to tell, for which we don't have the time here today. But I can say only this to those of you in your fifties, sixties, or even seventies, who are studying or planning to study, do not give up. Don't allow these young people to frighten you out of the classrooms!

We don't know what life holds for us tomorrow but in the words of George Eliot: "Great things are not done by IMPULSE, but by a series of SMALL things brought together".

On behalf of my fellow graduates, we thank you all - families, friends, professors, staff – all of you who contributed to us reaching this milestone. I wish you all a wonderful day of celebration and successful lives.

Je vous dit merci. Thank you.