

## **Message from SUA Founder Daisaku Ikeda**

### **To the Class of 2019 Commencement Ceremony Soka University of America**

To the Soka University of America Undergraduate Class of 2019 as well as the Class of 2019 in the Master's Program of Educational Leadership and Societal Change: I offer my heartfelt felicitations on this magnificent day from which you will all depart anew with distinction. You are like sunbeams announcing the arrival of dawn, casting far and wide the piercing light of hope.

Your families and friends in attendance may be in awe seeing how much you have grown as individuals during your time at SUA, their hearts filled with immeasurable pride and joy as they look over you and your peers at this assembly.

I would like to thank the SUA faculty and staff from my heart for the warm encouragement and unstinting support you have rendered our students, each of whom are exceptional talents and treasures.

And then there are our honored guests and dignitaries who have come here as well despite the weighty demands on their time to offer their congratulations. Please accept my warmest gratitude and welcome to you all.

This day marks the time in which you—members of the Class of 2019—take wing as youthful leaders of global citizenry who will contribute to the peace and happiness of humankind. As such, I would like to reaffirm with you three key capacities that are vitally important in this day and age.

The first of these three is the capacity for dialogue to inspire change and creativity.

We are privileged today to welcome once again Leymah Gbowee, the distinguished Liberian peace activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. For 14 years since 1989, she led a women's nonviolent peace movement in Liberia, which had been wracked by civil war, striving with courage and conviction to bring about the end to armed conflict.

I understand that Ms. Gbowee began serving as a peacebuilder from around the same age as you are now, choosing dialogue as her "weapon" to oppose violence. She devoted herself to the war's women victims, heeding their mounting cries of grief while sharing her own experiences of tragedy; together, they shed tears as they transcended their sufferings and transformed their trauma into a sense of purpose in the pursuit of peace. And by doing so, Ms. Gbowee went on to build and expand a network united by hope and committed to the cause of peace.

Through her movement for dialogue thousands of women, most of them mothers, would ultimately awaken to the strength they themselves wielded. Transcending their religious beliefs, these women took each other's hand and joined in song after song, crying out in unison, "Peace! Peace!" Even soldiers and government workers thanked the women. As Ms. Gbowee later recalled, the men would gratefully tell them, "Thank you, mothers... Our future depends on you." In the end, she and her fellow women had opened the way to peace negotiations among the warring factions.

Writes Ms. Gbowee: "...when the powerless start to see that they really can make a difference, nothing can quench the fire."

Dialogue is the challenge to persist to the very end in our belief in the fundamental goodness of humanity and, by inspiring one another, to persevere in manifesting this goodness.

All of you have forged your capacity for dialogue here at our highly diverse SUA campus. I therefore call on you: Expand your network for change and creativity from wherever you may stand, bringing to bear the full and vibrant power of dialogue as you follow the inspirational model of hope provided by Ms. Gbowee's example.

The second source of strength is our capacity to stay true to our ideals in the face of any and all adversity.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the former president of what was once the Soviet Union who was instrumental in bringing the Cold War to an end, was among the dignitaries who sent congratulatory words to SUA on its dedication. He and I both urged those who strove to right the wrongs of our world to remain forever optimistic.

As in history and as in life, there is a constant struggle between ideals and reality. With every new ideal that a person embraces, it invariably spawns a multitude of difficulties. Which is why you need to have unyielding optimism and far-reaching vision.

Having endured incarceration by the wartime militarist regime of Japan, Josei Toda, my mentor in life, advocated the philosophy of "human revolution" and the ideal of global citizenship soon after the end of World War II. No matter what difficulty he confronted, he would unflinchingly declare: "We must wage our battles now for the sake of the future 100 years, 200 years from now. In 200 years, history will validate the path Soka chose to take. In the generations to come humanity will surely acknowledge the justice of our cause."

Never be bowed by the harsh realities before you; instead, hold your head up high and keep your gaze set ahead with this intrepid resolve: *This is what I will achieve! This is the future I will shape!* That is the heart of our Soka spirit.

That is what I ask of you, our graduates, as you forge on with fortitude in good cheer, your eyes looking firmly beyond the present to a time 10 years and 20 years hence.

The third and final source of strength is the capacity to recognize and appreciate the toil that others have undertaken behind the scenes.

My mentor, Mr. Toda, once attended a lecture by Albert Einstein, a privilege he deeply cherished.

One of my most memorable of Einstein's quotes is this:

A hundred times a day I remind myself that my inner and outer lives are based on the labors of other people, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.

Your growth as an individual will know no bounds as long as you remain truly grateful for the efforts of those who support you behind the scenes. This sense of appreciation is what will decide the path you must traverse and the values you will uphold. It is a core tenet in the study and discipline of our very humanity, one foundational to the honored educational principles of this institution.

The former president of Liberia, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who won the Nobel Peace Prize together with Ms. Gbowee, cited a way she believed nurtures genuine leadership—that is “to be put into a position where you suffer what the common person suffers.”

The central administration building of SUA is called Founders Hall, adopting the plural form of “founder” precisely because it represents all of you as well as your families, friends and people worldwide who have done so much in support of our university.

Your growth is thus the very fount of joy for our friends everywhere and very proof of Soka's triumph. The advances and contributions you make as SUA students and alumni are in themselves not only payment of your debt of gratitude to your fellow citizens of the world but also hope for the future of humankind.

I am profoundly grateful to all of you, as our youthful founders, for so brilliantly adding new chapters of success to this institution's storied legacy. For the sake of all of the youth who are to follow in your footsteps, I ask that you continue striving to ensure that SUA will always flourish in victory.

The 31st of May marks the bicentennial of Walt Whitman's birth. In concluding my message, I wish to dedicate these words that this great American poet of the people once shared with his students:

I try and try and try again, and then try all over if necessary, until the approvable result is secured.

May each and every one of you be blessed with good health, glory and success! You are all that I dream, every bit as precious as my own life, the ever-radiant sun of the 21st century!

Daisaku Ikeda  
Founder  
Soka University of America  
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