

**Speech as Guest Speaker at the graduation ceremony of the  
College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University,  
on Wednesday, 9th February 2022**

Councillor, Vice-Chancellor, other members of the Executive, academic and professional staff, graduates and guests,

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today. I also pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and I extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people present.

To be invited to speak to you, 16 years after my graduation from this world renowned institution, is indeed a great honor for my country, Bhutan, and for me personally. And for this, I'm deeply grateful to the College of Asia and the Pacific.

But today is your day! And as you celebrate with those who've helped you on this incredible journey, I rejoice with you and offer my warmest felicitations.

I wondered what I should say to a group that is infinitely smarter than me, but I felt heartened that we shared some common spaces and experiences. Most of you don't look much older than 16 years - a lifetime for some, but not too long ago for me to forget the academic rigor, endless hours at Chifley and Menzies library and lugging heavy reading bricks in my backpack that I often struggled to get through.

Of course, your group had to adapt to a highly disruptive pandemic that continues to confront us today. Therefore, I admire your grit and perseverance in reaching your goal despite these challenging times.

My studies at the ANU helped to strengthen my foundations on diplomacy, international relations and public policy. For me, the ANU provided a wonderful blend of a western education with an Asian perspective and focus. I could draw on the rich resources of this premier institution. First among these was the wisdom and experiences shared by my Professor, Bill Maley, and the practical lessons on diplomatic negotiations from Dr. Pauline Kerr's classes. I found myself applying the principles I learnt here, when I was posted several years later to the hub of multilateral diplomacy at the United Nations in New York.

Almost 30 years into my work as a diplomat with several overseas postings, I find myself agreeing more with Albert Einstein's famous quote, "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know." And so, you can understand my awkwardness in having to play the one with the wise words. It is in this spirit that I venture my first advice to you - keep your mind open to new and evolving knowledge, and let every minute be a learning moment.

Unlike what most people think, diplomatic work is not all glamor. It is often a slow, dogged process of doing your homework, taking small incremental steps and always trying to understand and accommodate views, which may not only be different, but even

diametrically opposed to your own. Maintaining and promoting harmony and peaceful coexistence, in a world crowded with over 8 billion unique individuals, belonging to 195 nations, with different religions, cultures and values has, in itself, always been a grand challenge.

I saw this up close during my stint at the United Nations. Despite the skeletal team at the Bhutan Mission, we strongly believed in not only our ability to represent our interests effectively, but also to play a meaningful role and contribute to the greater good of humanity. It was in that spirit that our team pursued an initiative on Happiness at the United Nations inspired by Bhutan's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness. This received the support of the international community and saw the United Nations General Assembly adopting a resolution on holistic sustainable development, which in turn led to the 20th March of each year being declared as the International Day of Happiness.

Another lesson which I would like to share is the importance of trust, which is earned by integrity. Regardless of which career path you choose, at some point, it is inevitable that you will be called upon to exercise leadership for which you will need to build work relationships based on trust. And just as it is in diplomacy, trust is an essential ingredient for exercising leadership to build successful teams, organizations and to motivate individuals. So always endeavor to operate on the basis of trust.

While financial security is important, you will no doubt also seek greater meaning from life. For me, I have always been motivated to render service beyond self, and to add value and contribute to make people's lives better. These feelings were only reinforced during my important diplomatic assignments. I hope that all of you will find similar inspiration.

Wherever I traveled, people always spoke highly of the ANU and its world class faculty and excellent research capabilities. I've also met many fellow ANU alumni excelling and making a positive difference in their respective fields. These are indeed reflections of the ANU's strengths, and the reason for it being held in high esteem in Australia and around the world. It is this great honor that you're now a part of.

On this special day, my prayer and wish is that with the knowledge, skills and the valuable degree you've been conferred today, you find fulfilling careers to contribute meaningfully to your families, your communities and your country. And that you will do it with humility and bring even greater pride to the ANU.

Thank You!