

Graduation Remarks for the Class of 2006  
School of International and Public Affairs  
May 25, 2006  
Dean Lisa Anderson

Welcome and good afternoon.

Let me extend a very warm welcome the School of International and Public Affairs class of 2006, to our celebrated faculty, distinguished guests, dear friends and families.

It is said that rain is auspicious at weddings—I think the same must be true of graduation ceremonies. Certainly, this is an auspicious occasion.

This afternoon we gather to celebrate the accomplishments of, and to convey our fondest hopes for, some remarkable people. The students of this School--past and present--are uncommon individuals and we are very proud of those who are graduating this year. We are pleased to be able to welcome you all--family and friends who gather from a few blocks away and from around the world--to this celebration.

I am particularly pleased to welcome President Dolores Fernandez and Sandra Ruiz of Hostos Community College and Dean Peter Awn of Columbia's School of General Studies. More the five years ago our three schools began a collaboration designed fulfill the hope of Bronx Congressman Jose Serrano for a more diverse American foreign service. Working well and hard together, and with the Congressman's consistent support, we crafted a route--from Hostos to to General Studies to SIPA--that educates students to this end, and I am delighted to mark the graduation of the first students to complete that program today.

#### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This School was founded sixty years ago in the aftermath of World War II as a School of International Affairs to be a light in the darkness, to provide the staff of a new world, whose promise was the United Nations and whose peril would be the Cold War. Over time, we came to realize that, for all of us, there is promise and peril at home, in our own communities and neighborhoods, and we grew to encompass Public Affairs.

Over time as well, our conception of what was distant and what was near also began to change--our neighborhood grew to encompass the world and the world came to be represented in our neighborhood. The boundaries began to blur, as parochial difficulties created international crises and global incentives reshaped local opportunities. Today students come from nearly a hundred different countries to study and work together, linking the personal and the political, the local and the global, day-in and day-out. For us the headlines are not abstract news of far-off places and distant events. They are about our lives, intimately linked as we are with each other, our friends, our families around the world.

This class, the Class of 2006, understands the relationship between the particular and the universal, the personal and the public, life at home and abroad intimately and immediately. Their days at SIPA have been colored by heartbreaking tales of human and natural catastrophes: from Indonesia to Louisiana, communities we care about have been ravaged by natural disasters and human miscalculations. They have seen growing challenges to civil liberties and the rule of law at home mirrored in assaults on human rights and the principles of international law and organization around the world. We have seen growing intolerance of migrant communities in the United States and religious minorities in Europe. Slower, less dramatic dilemmas have also shaped the experience of these students—from AIDS in Africa to asthma in children right here in Morningside Heights, from trafficking in women in Eastern Europe to domestic violence in Brooklyn—we have pondered the problems facing our communities and ourselves. We look to the public sector and to democracy--this last two years was a banner year for elections--in Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Chile, Germany, Liberia, Bolivia, Israel, Italy, and many other places—and yet few seemed wholly satisfied by or confident in their outcomes. We celebrate the potential of the private sector with hopes for corporate social responsibility and yet, as public-private partnerships proliferate, we confront corporate scandals that weaken confidence in the ethics of business. We look to the not-for-profit sector and to international organizations, only to see the Red Cross stumble again New Orleans and even our beloved United Nations held up to scorn.

It is a complicated time into which we launch these students, a time of uncertainty and anxiety.

In the face of that, however, I am confident--almost recklessly so--because I

know who sits before us today. The individuals we celebrate this afternoon are part of the answer to these questions, part of the solution to these problems. In each of its programs, the class of 2006 was among the most selective in our six decade history. It was hard to get into this class at SIPA and those who did are enormously talented.

The need for an educated and skilled policy elite to serve our common welfare has never been greater, and we take pride and comfort in the fact that today's graduates will be among tomorrow's leaders. They have enormous opportunities to shape the world in ways that will make it better: more prosperous, more secure, more equitable, more sustainable. In choosing to make their careers in improving their society, whether in public service or the private sector, they have demonstrated that we place the responsibility for our future in good hands.

We believe that what we provide for our students, in class and beyond, is important in preparing them for the challenges they will face. But before we introduce the people to whom we should give much of the credit for that preparation--the faculty--I remind you that we also recognize that there is something distinctive in the temperament of the students who ventured here for which we at SIPA cannot claim all the glory.

These people combine a high tolerance for risk--an ability to see opportunities where others see only challenges--with a commitment to serve a social good, to make the world a better place. That these people have both courage and convictions is something we only celebrate; it is their family and friends who share in the credit for that, just as you share in our pride. Graduates, let us thank your friends and families.

## THE FACULTY

We know the individuals we celebrate today have learned a lot in their time here, and we know that they learned much of it from each other. I often tell them that the most valuable people they will have found at SIPA are their classmates, and the network of colleagues those people represent will last them a lifetime.

But we also like to think that they profited from the remarkable faculty of the School. Joining us today are a few of the extraordinary scholars and practitioners who have made it their business to equip our students with the skills, the knowledge, and the confidence they will need to make their world better. The SIPA faculty knows that it is

people like these who will shape their future, and they have done everything they can to make them good at it.

The faculty here are unusually dedicated scholars, practitioners and administrators. I wish to identify several who played especially important administrative roles. Rodolfo de la Garza served as the Deputy Chair of the Department of International and Public Affairs, helping to manage the sixty full-time and 170 part time faculty who served as instructors this year.

Overseeing specific degree programs were William Eimicke, Director of the Picker Center for Executive Education and the Executive MPA Program; Steven Cohen, Director of the Program in Earth Systems Science, Policy and Management; and Arvid Lukuaskas, Acting Director of the Program in Economic Policy Management.

Whether they study urban immigration and civic participation in the United States, examine the privatization of social service delivery in New York City, work to improve management of environmental policy-making or research the causes of financial crises, these faculty bring an intellectual as well as personal commitment to the responsibilities they have carried at SIPA, and they do so with grace, humor and, naturally, intelligence.

They were aided in the responsibilities by their colleagues and friends on the faculty of the various programs. The MPA Program aims to impart policy analysis and management skills to students who will be working in the public service at national and local level from Harlem to Hong Kong, Brooklyn to Belarus. The Executive MPA Program, housed in the Picker Center for Executive Education, has been a source of special pride since the students--and their faculty--devoted most of their Saturdays for the last two years acquiring these skills.

The Program in Economic Policy Management also grants an MPA degree. These students, most of whom come from developing countries, combining 12 months here in an accelerated and demanding academic program with a six months internship in an international financial institution.

Last among the MPA programs, but by no means least, is our newest offering, in Environmental Science and Policy. This program, which is also an accelerated one-year program, prepares professionals in environment policy-making with exposure to not only to management and analytical techniques but also to the natural sciences of the

environment.

I would like to ask that all of the faculty associated with the several MPA programs rise to be recognized.

Our largest single program, with its many concentrations and specializations, is the MIA. Well-served by a diverse and talented faculty, from the core instructors to the concentration, program and institute directors, the MIA program prepares students for careers in international organizations, economic and political development, national militaries, emerging markets, environmental policy, human rights advocacy, trade, finance, news gathering and myriad other professional pursuits around the world. Among the faculty of the MIA Program is the Interregional Council, which represents the Regional Institutes. Each of these offers a certificate for students who specialize in studies of the corresponding area of the world, drawing together faculty and administrators with expertise covering nearly the entire globe.

I would like the faculty of the MIA Program to stand to be recognized.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the administration that supports that faculty and their students. I would particularly like to thank Associate Dean Sara Mason, who completes her first year at the helm of the Office of Student Affairs with patience, grace and wit and Associate Dean Rob Garris, who completes his last year at the head of the Office of Faculty and Curriculum with an equal measure of grace, wit and, yes, patience. For all their good work on behalf of the faculty and students, I would like to express my personal thanks to the entire School administration.

## INTRODUCTION OF HH THE AGA KHAN

I am pleased and proud to be able to welcome to this ceremony one of the most distinguished figures on the world scene today—an individual who uses his global influence to foster the values we hold dear at SIPA, His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV.

The Aga Khan, a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammed, became 49th Imam -- spiritual leader -- of the Shia Ismaili Muslims in 1957 at the age of 20. For nearly five decades as Imam, the Aga Khan has served not only as spiritual leader of an community with millions of members around the world—from Canada to Pakistan to Central Asia to East Africa, where His Highness spent much of his childhood--but also

as an activist and statesman working on behalf of universal development through the Aga Khan Development Network, a global network of agencies focused on fostering health, education, culture, rural development, institution-building and economic development—that is, on improving living conditions and opportunities for the poor, whoever they are, where every they are. It is a testament to SIPA that he entrusted us with one of his three children—Hussein graduated several years ago and now works with the Aga Khan Development Network’s cultural programs. We welcome him back and take this occasion to congratulate him and his finance, Kristin White—an alumna of the School of Public Health—on their recent engagement.

Your highness, we welcome you here as a proud father, a deeply revered spiritual leader, a widely admired philanthropist and a tireless advocate for the poor and the disinherited.

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#### PRESENTATION OF THE GRADUATES

Now we turn to the moment in the program for which many of you, indulging a bit of self-interest, have been waiting: the Presentation of the Graduates. Associate Dean Robin Lewis, who directs our Global Public Policy Network, a collaborative association of public policy schools around the world, will do the honors. We are proud of all our students, but would like to note that of the individuals who will shortly be presented to you, ten have completed the requirements for dual degrees with our GPPN partner in Paris, Sciences Po, and twelve more, the requirements for a dual degree with a second partner, the London School of Economics.

As Dean Lewis pronounces each name, the graduates will come up to the dais to accept our congratulations. We have an official photographer; friends and family need not approach the stage to record the moment; we will do that for you.

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#### RECOGNITION OF REGIONAL CERTIFICATE AWARDEES

In addition to earning their SIPA degrees, a few intrepid souls have also fulfilled the requirements for a certificate attesting to their expertise in an area study. Dean Garris

will read their names.

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#### PRESENTATION OF AWARDS AND PRIZES

All of these students are exceptional. To a person they are bright, enterprising, and personable. We have, however, some special awards endowed by friends of the School for distinction in a number of fields.

Dean Lewis will introduce the awards.

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#### PRESENTATION OF TEACHING AWARD

Four years ago we added to our program the recognition of a member of the faculty for exceptional commitment to his or her students. The students were invited to make nominations, and the enthusiasm for the winner this year once again reflects a remarkable degree of consensus in so varied and opinionated a community as ours; Associate Dean Rob Garris will present the award.

#### SIPASA REMARKS

All of the students here have, I hope, taken a lot from SIPA, consumed knowledge, appropriated techniques, devoured ideas. But as important as your learning has been the character you have shown, caring about this institution and sharing your time, your insight, your wisdom with us and with your fellow students.

Every year I wish I could mention each of the hundreds of students who contributed to our community by name: This year once again, students have exhibited generosity, humor and tenacity that have served us well. SIPA students have many talents. Not only can they sing and dance--something Follies illustrates each year--but they are also visual artists of considerable talent and accomplishment as well, and Emmanuel Letouze's remarkable account of life at SIPA in his ubiquitous cartoons attested.

Tom Randall and Veronica Ruff took SIPAnews to a new level with their work on the anniversary issue—which will be mailed to all alumni (including you!) in June.

Tom Glaisyer and his confederates brought us into the modern age with the Morningside Post, our new site for blogs—including audiocasts taken from a new weekly radio show on the Columbia student radio station, WKCR.

On the communications front, the editors of *Communiqué*—Catherine Morgan and Veronika Ruff again are to be congratulated for having not only given Manu Letouze a forum for his fabulous cartoons, but with their other contributors as well, provided a valuable lens on life here at SIPA. And, of course, once again, we survived Follies—for which we thank Maria Jonsdottir.

We are grateful for the work of Amelia Erwitt and the rest of the Class Gift committee—the generosity of current students is proving to give a very powerful impetus to alumni support of the School.

Christina Glavos and William Zhao served as exemplary representatives on our Committee on Instruction.

Most of the credit for the excellence of next year's class will go to Laura Johnson and Kelly Kineen, who organized wonderful Open House and Orientation programs on our behalf.

Neal Parry and JP Leous not only won the Journal of International Affairs' Andrew Wellington Cordier Prize for an essay on "Who is responsible for Marin Debris?" but used the prize money to establish the prize for work on the environment and—I am not finished—worked with the administration to identify more environmentally sound carpeting and window coverings for the International Affairs Building.

And of course, we are grateful to the students of the Conceptual Foundations insurgency, many of who are departing this year but they should know that even if we do not assign Michel Foucault to all incoming students, they have nonetheless left a permanent mark on how we think about our curriculum.

I could go on, but it is time to let the students themselves have a word. To represent them, we give you their representatives: each year, the class elects two students from among their ranks to represent them as co-presidents of the SIPA student association, SIPASA. It is now their turn to wish their classmates farewell.

Dan Oleks, MIA co-president

Kamil Kaluza, MPA co-president

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## CONCLUDING REMARKS

You have seen them all, and heard from a few of them. It is hard to let go of these people. We grow attached to our students: your friends and family. I am sure you want to celebrate with them now, so let me leave you with a few of the words of wisdom and sentiment you should be expecting on an occasion like this.

Over the years, I have commended many virtues to our graduates. I hope that you honor your parents, that you take risks to do what is right, that you push yourselves to accomplish more than you think you can, that you make virtues out of necessities and opportunities out of challenges. I hope you return our favors, redeem our confidence, and make us proud. I hope you are fortunate enough to find satisfaction in your calling—but I hope you are never satisfied.

You have heard from the Aga Khan that the paths you have chosen are the paths of the righteous. As he has said elsewhere, “The search for justice and security, the struggle for equality of opportunity, the quest for tolerance and harmony, the pursuit of human dignity—these are moral imperatives which we must work and think about on a daily basis.”

It is well to remember that he called this a *search*. As he has also said, “strive as we might, we will still fall short of our ideals ...climb as we might, there will still be unexplored and mysterious peaks above us.” I would like you to remember that. I hope you will be accepting without being complacent, I hope you will be both tolerant of what is and impatient for what might be better. Columnist Vincent Villano had it right in his valedictory column in *Communiqué* this year when he reminded you all to “never be satisfied.”

I hope your lives are deeply satisfying, but I hope at the same time that you are never truly satisfied.

Congratulations. This concludes the graduation ceremony for the School of International and Public Affairs Class of 2006. Thank you all.