Good Morning!

Nelson Mandela once said that education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world and on this auspicious occasion, as we look back and celebrate the achievements of the graduates, it is my deep belief that each of us graduating today is gaining power to change the world.

I am proud to be part of an outstanding graduating class of 2019 who are drawn from the Medical College, School of Nursing and Midwifery, the Institute for Educational Development, and the latest addition to the growing Aga Khan University family, the Graduate School of Media and Communications. I am deeply honoured to be a pioneer member of the Master of Arts in Digital Journalism programme and extremely humbled to present this valedictory speech today.

That we are all graduating today is testament our hard work, commitment and the sacrifices we have all made over the last few years. I am convinced that the happiness radiating in the room today lies both in the joy of our academic achievements and the thrill of the collective effort to get here.

The titles of the courses we undertook may have been different but the academic toil was the same. Today, we leave behind a rigorous academic life. We leave behind the tough balancing act of work, family and school.

The greatest sacrifice for me was in the time I spent away from my family-especially my daughter-but what kept me going was that this was necessary pain and it has been worth it for me as I’m sure it has been for my fellow graduates. We expertly negotiated vicious traffic as we tried to make it on time for morning and evening classes. We have had sleepless nights, finishing up a
steady stream of assignments, reading tough academic books and we have written even tougher exams. But we are here. We made it.

Writing an exam or academic paper, as we know, is a solitary endeavour. Can be quite a lonely affair. Yet the success of any graduate relies on the support of those around them.

I would like to say thank you to some of the people who have walked the academic journey with us.

First of all, I would like to extend a special thank you to His Highness the Aga Khan, The Chancellor of Aga Khan University for his visionary leadership and generous donations that support the existence of the university. It is his vision that has enabled us have access to quality education.

To our sponsors, thank you for believing in us and allowing us the privilege to chase our dreams through education. As a member of the pioneer class of the Graduate School of Media and Communications, I wish to extend special thanks to the German government through KfW and BMZ for providing scholarships to support our academic pursuit. Asanteni Sana.

To the members of faculty, thank you for pushing us to greater academic heights than we would have imagined possible. Thank you for relentlessly and tirelessly pushing us forward even when we pushed back or complained quit loudly sometimes. Your understanding nature and unwavering support was essential to our academic victory today.

To the school administration, librarians and all the staff at Aga Khan University who, in different ways, supported us in the pursuit of education, we say thank you.

We remain indebted to our family members and friends who have invested and sacrificed time, money and a lot more to get us to where we are today. All these accolades demonstrate that indeed it takes a village for one to succeed.

Ladies and gentlemen, please indulge me a little as I take you back to my initial interaction with Aga Khan University. As part of my application to join the Master of Arts in Digital Journalism Programme, one of the questions I had to answer was: Why did you choose Aga Khan University?

I will not tell you the answer I wrote, because it did nothing to capture the essence and uniqueness of Aga Khan University. But I will tell you what I should have written, for these are the things I treasured the most in my two-year academic journey.

One of the things that sets this university apart from the rest is the student-centred approach to education. If you are like me, who came from a background where the teacher was the law and
interaction between the teacher and students limited, then the Aga Khan University approach may have startled you too.

I was puzzled. What did they mean? Were not we coming to class to be lectured and instructed about what to do?

Let me put this in perspective. The lecturers were available to us whenever we needed them and their support cannot be overstated. The teaching format was also flexible, fun and very immersive. Which is not to say that the programmes were not extremely demanding or intellectually engaging. Learning too was very experiential. We were highly encouraged to voice our opinions and share feedback with the lecturers and in this way, we always felt valued as students. These are the things that made Aga Khan University extremely exceptional for me.

The Aga Khan University has not just been a place where we have built knowledge; we have also created wonderful networks that we will carry into the future. I know I am speaking for a lot of us when I say that our interpersonal and leadership skills were tested and sharpened through class discussions, group work and class projects.

To the doctors, nurses, teachers and journalists graduating today, I urge you to put a dent in the universe through the impact you create in your respective professions by putting your patients, students and audiences at the centre of everything you do.

As someone who believes in lifelong learning, I hope this is just the beginning for all of us. I draw from the wisdom of Kimani Maruge, the Guinness World Record holder for the oldest man to enrol in primary school at 84, who said that he would never stop learning until he had soil in his ears. May you never stop learning.

Congratulations Class of 2019.

God Bless Aga Khan University.

Read online: https://www.akdn.org/speech/ms-faith-oneya/kenya-2020-convocation-aga-khan-university