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COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

Hello everyone, I have been given the honor to speak on behalf of the NRSD program. I would like to thank the staff at AU and UPEACE particularly, Ken Conca, Rob Fletcher and Amr Abdallah who have challenged and expanded my world view while equipping me with the tools to respond to meet real life challenges.

I also want to extend my congratulations to my fellow NRSD cohort. It has been a pleasure being a part of a group of brilliant individuals who have shown themselves to be innovative, intelligent, creative, hard-working but know how to have fun while doing it. I see so many bright futures. The truth is, I have lovely things to say about each and every one of my fellow NRSDers but for now I will speak to everyone.

I have never done a commencement speech and so I thought about what my concerns were and what I would want to hear. So, I will be direct. I am a worrier. I'm kind of angsty. Black is (usually) my favorite color but the NRSD ladies helped me change that. Anyway... what is on my mind, *what next?*

Well, I will start with a quote by Wangari Maathai the founder of the Green Belt Movement and the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate she says, **“Until you dig a hole, you plant a tree, you have watered it and make it survive, you haven't done a thing. You are just talking.”**

Now we have talked a lot these past 2 years, debating on what development is or what is “sustainability.” What are the right ways to go about policy or implementing development?

We have learned how to critically think and assess strategies in order to determine appropriate courses of action. We have been prepped for elevator speeches, gained experience through practicums and internships.

We are sharpened tools ready to work and yet you walk up to a counter at the job fair and they say “we aren’t hiring but check out our website!” Awesome!

Now why do I bring this up?

I do this to give us all some perspective but also to remind us all that whatever obstacles we come across we are qualified, we are prepared and your motivation and ultimate goal whether you get your dream job or just your foot in the door is to be impactful within your sphere of influence.

So, do your job to the best of your ability because it’s not about you it’s about the greater good (and please forgive me for being cliché). In order to do that, it starts with awareness. David Foster Wallace gave a great commencement speech titled “This is water” at Kenyon College. He talks about how we must

“Learn how to think how to pay attention then you will know that you have other options.” For us, we need to take advantage of those times where the banal routine of adulthood may overshadow why you chose this field in the first place and so I challenge all of you to remember the initial reason that inspired you to apply to the GEP programs.

Why?

Because it is not about the right now or how much, or how life may not meet expectations. It is about how we all can use our skills effectively, positively so that for example- the unsustainable means of extracting natural resources will never be an option or holding organizations accountable who have compromised their position as a result of self-preservation and power instead recognizing the initial goal of serving the most vulnerable. Now these are all very grand things and too much to comprehend in all of its many facets. We cannot possibly save the world

but we all have the choice to employ our new found skills in whatever capacity to impacts the lives of others even in its smallest measure.

My very long winded point is, **Do not** let your knowledge and self-awareness atrophy from the day-to-day necessities.

- Do not be boggled down or distracted by perceived unmet expectations or be tied into the rat race in general.
- Do not let your efforts be defined for the moment but invested in a legacy. Some may find that there may be some sacrificing in the short-term, but the goal is not to be comfortable **but to be the agent of change** that we have learned about in our classes.

Finally, have no fear.

Remember, have confidence. Know what you are capable of and that you are well trained. Know that life will most certainly reveal unexpected situations but that's okay because we got it and we are qualified to meet those challenges and therefore will be able to adapt.

Lastly, *and this is truly the final thing*, I wish you all a little discomfort because out of discomfort comes innovation and the motivation to change so that we all plant trees instead of just talking about it.

Thank-you.