

GRADUATION SPEECH
UNITED WORLD COLLEGE, FLEKKE, 23 MAY 2015

Dear Graduates, Dear Mayor, Dear members of the Board and members of the Red Cross, Dear Rector, Dear Faculty, Dear Parents, Dear Friends,

Dear Graduates.

This is YOUR day. YOUR day.

Congratulations!

In a faraway land – far far away from Flekke and Fjaler – and the beautiful land of my mother, Norway, lies the land of my father, Pakistan. And here comes a story that I want you to carry with you. There is little Ghazala of 4 years old, her mother is a sweeper at a school. Her job is to keep the school clean. Because she – the sweeper – Ghazala’s mother – is the lowest of the lowest on the class and cast rank – no one has asked Ghazala if she will be going to school, to join the other 4 year olds for their first day at school. Ghazala watches them with her big brown eyes, as she helps her mother. She dreams, she hopes, but she knows that this will not be her path. So she continues to help her mother, carry the heavy buckets of water, throw out the dirty water, clean the desks of the students. While she hears the sounds of A-B-C in the background. The tunes of the A-B-C. Until one day, this one man, the owner of the school, sees Ghazala, lifts her up in the sky and asks why – why is she not in school. She does not know what to answer, shies away. But suddenly before she can utter an explanation, she is guided into a classroom, and sat down at a desk. Together with the other 4-year olds. She is given her first pencil and her first book. A pencil to write and a book to read.

This is more than 25 years ago. Ghazala did well in school. She loved her school and worked hard. She was the first in her family EVER to get an education. EVER to learn how to read and write.

Today Ghazala is a medical doctor. And even though she could have gotten jobs in fabulous hospitals around the country, yes even abroad, she serves her village. She specializes in women and children’s health. She earns her own living. She pays for her little siblings to continue their education.

AND: She owns her own future. And she carries with her something nobody can take away from her: her education. And the right to define her future.

Now,

There are five things I would like to say to you today. Five things I would like you to carry with you.

1. Remember who you are. Your identity. Your parents made you who you are. Be grateful to your parents. Remember your country, **or countries**. And remember that you are now also something else: you have a global identity. You're a global citizen. A world citizen. Through the friendships you have made here, the conversations you have had, the choices you have had to make the last two years. You are a global citizen. One identity does not conflict with the other. My father used to tell me: remember Laila you may be 100% Norwegian and a 100% Pakistani, but you also have a third identity – the global Laila that you yourself define through your networks and experiences. Through your choices. 300% YOU. Carry your identities with you, carry with you the experiences that you have made in Flekke at UWC. This is also your identity. Your local and your global identities together will get you far. But do not forget who you are. Together they are your stability and passports to so much out there. And nobody can take that away from you.
2. Remember your values. What are you made of? What are you fighting for? What is important to you? Be honest to yourself and those around you. I truly believe that it is your values that define you, and will define you. They will define who you are. However many degrees you get, however far you reach, how many fancy titles or how much money you make, YOUR VALUES will always define you. How you treat other people, how you see people around you, how you include other people, whether you lift others up with you or choose to walk that path alone. Make your values your trademark, what people remember you for.
3. Take care of the networks that you have built here at UWC. Together with your family, your parents and your siblings (if you have some) – the friends that you have made here during the last two years ARE your family too. They know some of your secrets (*some* of your secrets!), what motivates you, your strengths and your weaknesses. You never know when you might need them or they you. You will all disappear to new places but remember what you share will always stay with you. And maybe tomorrow or in 10 or 20 or even 30 years suddenly the one sitting to your right today will call you up and ask

for *your* advice. Because he remembers the trust you built together here at Flekke so many years ago. Or maybe you will bump into the guy sitting to your left on a crowded bus in Midtown Manhattan or in your company corridors in Shanghai or on a hiking trip in Peru. So take care of the guy on your left and your right. Take care of your network. Be good to it. Water it, and nurture it.

(Do you remember the first 3 now?!?)

4. Remember to be in the moment and that you have reached far. You have been challenged, most definitely here at Flekke and Fjaler, but I am sure it has also been fun. Life is not an easy journey. And there will be challenges ahead too. There will be ups and downs. But take time to stop, catch your breath. Watch the sunrise or sunset, play your favourite song out loud, or dance even if you don't really have time. Dance! Just to feel how lucky you are. To be where you are right now. Be proud of your achievements – and be grateful to those who have helped you reach this far, they are your motivations for the next steps.
5. And finally number 5: a call to action! Remember what you carry with you, nobody can take that away from you. You own your own futures, like Ghazala – the daughter of the sweeper in Pakistan – now a medical doctor. This is the power of education. But with this lies also a responsibility. For the steps that you choose ahead of you. A responsibility to lead and to use your knowledge in the best possible way, a way which is right for you. You can make a difference out there, to someone or something. We live in a strong, yet fragile, big, yet small world. An individualistic yet infinitely connected world. A brutal, yet also compassionate world. We see wars, destruction, manmade conflicts and natural disasters. We see complex conflicts, despair, inequality, injustice and frustration. Yet we also see strength, dreams, creativity and hope. Sunrises and sunsets. The world needs you and your experience, your values and your skills. Don't give up in believing in what you think is right. Continue to dream, but ACT upon your dreams. Make the most out of what is given to you. I look at you, and I feel confident about tomorrow. Knowing that tomorrow's generation (and this one in here (point to belly!)), due to be born in about 2 months) will have YOU as leaders, as role models, as mentors. There will be people who will look to you for guidance. Therefore: use what has been given to you – and what you carry with you – with care.

Oh and one last thing, making it 5 ½: Remember to take time daily to step out of your comfort zone and stretch. *Just a bit further*. Life is a journey. Enjoy it!

... Oh and one more small thing, making it 5 and 3/4 . I would like to thank you. Here, now as a Norwegian. For spending time here at Flekke, for enriching not only Flekke, but also Norway. You are helping us becoming more global too. You are opening not only your own, but also our minds. Thank you for that!

Good luck to all of you. You make me and so many round you extremely proud. Never forget that.

Today is a day of celebration. A day of joy, laughter and happiness. But it is also sad for many of us who will say good bye to each other, but remember – as my Norwegian grandmother used to say to us when we were moving once again during my childhood: You need to say good bye to meet again.

And you will meet again.
We will meet again. For this I am sure.

Thank you.