

EMBASSY OF JAMAICA

SPEECH BY

HER EXCELLENCY SHORNA-KAY M. RICHARDS

AMBASSADOR OF JAMAICA

ENTITLED

“GET UP, STAND UP, DO YOUR PART: HUMANITY NEEDS US”

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Thank you, Provost McCauley, for your kind introduction.

As I am coming from Tokyo to Monterey, the “language capital of the world”, allow me to greet you all in Japanese: Mina san Konnichiwa! And in Jamaican dialect: Wha gwaan?!

Provost McCauley, Vice President Sydner, student speaker Dayna Brown, alumni, faculty, and staff - proud parents, family, and friends, and most importantly the distinguished graduating class of 2024, it is a real pleasure for me to join you here in beautiful Monterey, to share this momentous occasion.

You will agree that Professor Mike Gillen’s masterful playing of the bagpipes has added a special touch to this wonderful multi-cultural setting, providing a fitting soundtrack to this pivotal moment in the lives of the graduating class.

“You want to change the world. We will teach you how” is the promise on the website homepage of this renowned graduate institution. And nearly 70 years after MIIS’ establishment to advance understanding, promote peace, and drive change in pursuit of a more just world, you – the visionary class of 2024 – have pursued that promise and today you step forward as the next generation of global leaders and change agents.

On this joyous occasion, we celebrate your hard work, tenacity, and dedication.  
Congratulations!

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be invited to address you - a diverse class of graduates, coming from 20 countries. I thank President Laurie Patton and the Board of Trustees for this singular opportunity.

Indeed, I am humbled and amazed by the realisation that a promise I made nearly 20 years ago to the courageous A-bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki - to advance their plea and advocate for a nuclear-weapons-free world - has led me here today.

I am no stranger to MIIS. In 2005, I was fortunate to receive expert training from your Center for Nonproliferation Studies as a UN Disarmament Fellow. So today let me recognize and thank the Center's Founder and Director, the indomitable Dr William Potter, Mr Jean du Preez, Programme Director of Education and Training, and Ms. Masako Toki, Senior Education Project Manager and Research Associate. As leading champions of disarmament education and youth empowerment around the world, they have inspired me to remain on this path.

Dear graduates, I stand here as a public servant and global citizen to share some thoughts with you as you commence or continue your professional journey in the diverse field of international affairs.

Mine is the honour to encourage you on this journey, one which I started 30 years ago in diplomacy - full of aspirations, excitement, and apprehension mindful of the uncertainties ahead. But like you I was grounded in the remarkable education that I was privileged to pursue.

As a Jamaican diplomat, I have had the opportunity, to engage in difficult negotiations to control the trade in conventional arms, prohibit nuclear weapons, protect the oceans, reform the UN Security Council, and promote gender equality, all in the interest of advancing global peace and development.

To do so required collaboration with a vast network of representatives from governments, international organisations, civil society, and academia. Together we have harnessed our collective intellect, energy, passion, and creativity to make progress, to effect change no matter how small, despite the challenges.

I come from a country renowned for its dominance in athletics and, while I am no athlete, when I reflect on my experience in multilateral negotiations, I can attest that efforts to drive change is at once a marathon and a relay. It is about hard work, keeping your spirits up, playing your part; then passing the baton on. I can also tell you, as you have learnt at MIIS, that multicultural collaboration is essential — no woman or man is an island.

Education is an agent of change, and at MIIS you have been accorded the special privilege of pursuing an exemplary education.

Whether you have undertaken programmes in global security, sustainability, development, education, or language services, you have been prepared to produce sustainable,

equitable solutions to global challenges. And you have been equipped play a leadership role in addressing the complex threats of our time.

Indeed, as we gather here this afternoon, we do so against the backdrop of a world in crisis – a world increasingly dominated by wars and conflicts, a worsening climate crisis, stagnant progress towards the SDGs, rising poverty, growing inequality within and between nations, as well as disinformation and polarisation to name a few.

Amidst these multiple crises, one might ask, what of the solutions? Where is solidarity, where is diplomacy, where is dialogue?

Sadly, we see an over-reliance on military solutions, with global spending totaling nearly 2.5 trillion dollars since 2023. And, in the words of former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, “the world is over-armed, and peace is underfunded”. This has led to untold human suffering on the one hand and high profits for the military-industrial complex on the other.

We see the erosion of international norms with multilateralism under severe strain. In fact, we see in Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Sudan, Ukraine, and now in Palestine, blatant and relentless breaches of the basic tenets of the laws of armed conflict.

Such breaches of international law alongside the erosion of human rights, disregard for “we the people”, rampant injustice and the glaring double standards in the rules-based global order are leading to deep mistrust.

“Our world is suffering from a bad case of Trust Deficit Disorder”, according to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. People are feeling troubled and insecure. Trust is at a breaking point. Trust in national institutions. Trust among states. Trust in the rules-based global order”.

Certainly, the world today is not the world we want; and definitely not the world we need. As we look around, there is no denying the sense of hopelessness, helplessness, and pessimism pervading our world. But as I look across the lawn of this historic Hall, I see glimmers of hope, transformative action, and optimism in each of you.

You possess the power to change, to disrupt the status quo for the betterment of humanity. In pursuing your passions in the months ahead, fully embrace your role as global citizens with open hearts and minds, transforming the status quo into floodlights of change.

We are looking to the youth, to you our graduates, for leadership not tomorrow, but today.

In fact, this is the vision of the UN Secretary-General. In his address last month at the UN Global Youth Forum, the SG declared that the world needs the infectious energy and conviction of young people to tackle interlinked challenges, tragedies, and injustices.

As he said “Every generation serves as [a] caretaker of this world. Let’s be honest: mine has been careless with that responsibility. But yours gives me hope.”

So, how do you move forward to change the world, putting your education to use - balancing personal benefit and your duty as global citizens? As you ponder this important question, my charge to you is to “Get Up, Stand Up, Do Your Part: Humanity Needs Us”. This is inspired by the 1973 song “Get Up, Stand Up” by Bob Marley and the Wailers.

The Jamaican Reggae icon’s visionary message of self-empowerment, love, peace, solidarity, and justice has influenced me greatly. Bob, a young man from an inner-city community, used thought-provoking lyrics embedded in reggae music, as the voice of oppressed and marginalised people, to champion social justice in Jamaica and indeed across the globe.

His message transcends nationality, race, class, and language, and remains relevant for us all today.

I have also been influenced by the bold advocacy role that my country – a small island developing state - has played in leading and supporting global causes.

As a country that experienced the abhorrent system of chattel slavery and nearly 500 years of colonialism, Jamaica was at the forefront in the fight against apartheid and racism, becoming the first country to declare a trade embargo against apartheid South Africa in 1957, even while the island was still a colony of Great Britain.

For us social justice and human rights are paramount and as another Jamaican reggae singer, Peter Tosh, sang in 1977 “We need Equal Rights and Justice”. Indeed, we will not achieve durable peace without justice, and I am heartened that MIIS has been exploring this issue through the Katherine Wasserman Davis Collaborative in conflict transformation and the Critical Issues Forum, among other initiatives.

Today, we remain among the strongest voices in the fight against climate change, especially to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. I pause here to laud MIIS’ goal to achieve carbon neutrality on campus by 2028.

As YOU get up and stand up for humanity, I share with you three guiding principles which have served me well on my journey. The first is: To take responsibility. You have heard the saying, “If you want to change the world, change yourself”.

For me this advice embodies some key values: commitment, integrity, accountability, empathy, and giving back.

Japanese Buddhist philosopher and educator, Dr Daisaku Ikeda, said “Everything begins with us. Hope, in this sense, is a decision”. Each of us must decide to have hope, to take action.

My own sense of taking responsibility is rooted in my country’s national pledge. Some of its inspiring words that have been my North Star since elementary school commits me to a profound promise to: “[...] to stand up for Justice, Brotherhood and Peace, to work diligently and creatively, to think generously and honestly, so that Jamaica may, under God, increase in beauty, fellowship and prosperity, and play her part in advancing the welfare of the whole human race”.

I encourage you to find your own way to contribute to building a peaceful and sustainable world. In doing so, be assured as American philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, said: “What lies behind you and what lies before you, are tiny matters compared to what lies within you”.

This brings me to my second guiding principle: To use your agency. There will be varying challenges and doubts along the way about your capacity to influence change.

But you are not powerless – remember this always. Use your agency - to get up, stand up, speak up – challenge the status quo and find innovative ways of making progress. Your voice matters.

My early concern was whether my voice would be heard or ignored. The reality is that small states like Jamaica are often viewed as peripheral in the international system. And we face barriers to participation due to the inherent challenges of “smallness”: limited technical, human, and financial resources. Furthermore, on a personal level, I am a female representative of colour in a largely male dominated field with its own set of intersecting limitations.

It has not been easy. And notwithstanding these obstacles, I have approached my involvement in global negotiations with confidence and fortitude rooted in my conviction, education, and network. And the obstacles have not hindered me from assuming leadership roles in my field, including my current role as Chair of the UN Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters. Furthermore, I have used my agency to champion a humanitarian approach and bring a gender perspective to the field of disarmament.

As part of my network, I have been deeply inspired by one of your alumni, Ambassador Elyane Gomez Whyte of Costa Rica, who has a similar approach. In 2017, against the odds she successfully chaired the UN negotiations that led to the adoption of the historic Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The third guiding principle I leave with you is: To embrace solidarity and intercultural collaboration. Secretary-General Guterres affirms that “humanity’s welfare – and indeed, humanity’s very future – depends on solidarity and working together as a global family to achieve common goals”.

You will find therefore that the friendships made, and cooperative networks created over the years are key ingredients to fostering an environment in which change becomes possible.

“At the core of each individual’s pursuit lies the driving force of our humanity”, as Nagasaki University Professor Fumihiko Yoshida said. It is because we value our humanity that we must strive tirelessly to eliminate destructive acts like war, inhumane weaponry, and poverty. It is imperative that we urgently translate this sentiment into actions aimed at sustainable peace. In essence, humanity needs us!

As you, the Class of 2024, embark upon a new phase of your life’s journey, I am fully confident that you are well equipped to live up to the expectations of your generation. I implore you to be courageous, to get up, to stand up, and to never, never give up the fight.

May I invite you to get up, stand up and join me in singing Bob Marley’s “One Love” as we celebrate our common humanity and as we celebrate you.