

UWC-USA Graduation Remarks 2019

Good morning! Families and friends of our 2019 UWC-USA graduates; trustees, volunteers, and all who have contributed to make their education possible; alumni who today welcome them into their fold; faculty and staff who have engaged and supported them over these two years; first year students who have learned and lived with them in a spirit of intercultural understanding; platform party, including today's speakers Musimbi Kanyoro and Len Necifer. Welcome to all!

Class of 2019, in a spirit of gratitude, please join me in a round of applause for all of the people who have helped to change your lives by supporting your journey to, and through, UWC-USA. And to all who have supported the Class of 2019, please join me in a round of applause acknowledging their accomplishment and continued promise.

At UWC, we talk a lot about change. Making change. Change agency. Change for a better world. I'd like to invite you to reflect with me today on what this means. In some ways, change is the most common thing there is. It is inevitable. We see it in relationships that grow, or that fade with time. We see it in the journeys of our children, in the changes we anticipate and in the changes that take directions we hadn't imagined. We see it in our parents, who go from taking care of us to needing our care. And perhaps most vividly for our community, we see it in our students who come wanting to change the world and leave changed themselves. Change is a constant part of our human story, regardless of country or culture.

But even if change is common and inevitable, it also turns out to be rare and difficult to achieve. Maybe even more difficult to accept. I'm not talking about the difficulty of institutional change. Or the difficulty of changing what we take to be unjust in our communities. In our political institutions. In the world. Those things are difficult to achieve for sure. But I've come to see that the most rare change of all, the most difficult of all, is the change we are called to within ourselves. The change that makes room for another who is different from us, who has disappointed us, or who has affected us in ways we might have preferred otherwise. The change that confronts hypocrisies we'd rather not confront, especially in ourselves. The change that challenges our comfort with what we know or believe. The change that takes us from childhood to adulthood, along with the recognition that the only actions and reactions we can control are our own. This is the most difficult change of all. Yet it's the most necessary if we are going to create a better world for others and for ourselves. It's the only change that ever really advances peace in our relationships. It's the only change that has any hope of advancing sustainable, resilient communities.

As we sit through today's ceremony, I invite all of us to reflect on how we've changed over the past two years. I hope that each one of us can celebrate the changes that have contributed to the good, and I hope we can be compassionate with ourselves for the changes that have hurt us or others. I hope, too, that we can reflect on the institutions that matter to us and consider how our actions and reactions shape them.

Allowing ourselves to change takes courage and compassion. Embracing the change in others may be the most important measure of our humanity. It will certainly determine our relationships, and any small or large difference we might make in the world. Honoring change is in some sense believing in our own potential, believing in the change for good that we might make, believing in the future.

With this in mind, I texted my children, Maureo and Alejandro, a quote I discovered a couple of weeks ago by Christian D. Larson. Never mind that after he read it, Alejandro texted back "You feeling alright?" Alejandro, I'm feeling alright, and I want to share the quote with the whole community:

"Promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind. Look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true. Think only of the best, work only for the best, and expect only the best. Forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future. Give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others. Live in the faith that the whole world is on your side so long as you are true to the best that is in you!"

And now, something that changes year after year yet always stays the same. Please join me in welcoming the beautiful, uplifting voice of our African Chorus.