

Geneva Graduate Institute, Graduation Ceremony, September 2023

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Dear parents, dear colleagues and friends, ladies and gentlemen and first and foremost dear students and soon to be graduates, good morning/afternoon to all of you and a warm welcome to the Geneva Graduate Institute, and to the Maison de la Paix. Bienvenu à toutes et à tous. It is a great pleasure for me, for us, to see so many of you here for this very special day! Nous sommes très heureux de vous accueillir.

Dear students and soon to be graduates, you have made it. You have gone through and fulfilled all the requirements of a demanding program and of this you should be proud. You should be proud of your achievements and success. But you should also be proud of the individual you have become in the process. Please give yourselves a huge round of applause.

While you should definitely and legitimately feel pride – the other side of the coin is gratitude. Nothing of what we do is owed only to ourselves. The support, the benevolence, the resources, the friendship or the love others have given and shared with us all play a huge role. Please join me dear graduates in applauding all those towards whom you feel grateful, your families naturally, whether they are physically here today or not, but also your professors and teaching assistants, your colleagues and friends here at the institute or beyond. A few weeks ago I was sitting in a room very similar to this one, as the mother of a wonderful graduating young woman. So I have a soft spot for mothers today I have to say... hence please join me in a very special round of applause for your mothers – wherever they are today.

During your years at the institute, while the challenge of a demanding program was heavy in itself, many of you have also had in addition to adapt to a different context and culture. Over and beyond, all of you have had to learn how to live and thrive in a profoundly diverse environment. More than 120 nationalities are present at the institute and each single student has a very unique and generally blended life experience, which turns this place into a fascinating concentrate of the kaleidoscopic nature of our world.

While those years have allowed you to deepen and expand your knowledge, while you have acquired analytical and professional skills, you have also had to develop in such a context important and highly transferable competencies – competencies that will be highly valuable in the next stage of your life.

- First, you have had to learn to listen to each other And deep listening is both at the

same time exceedingly rare and ever more necessary in a world where the trend is rather to talk past each other

- Second, the rich diversity in which you have been embedded during your years at the institute has led you in all likelihood to develop a healthy critical distance to your own convictions and opinions. Critical thinking and the capacity to rethink, to creatively look at the world will be another highly valuable transferable competence for the world that awaits you.
- Finally, respect. Diversity without respect and tolerance can easily generate confusion and conflict. But diversity with respect and tolerance, as you have learnt on a daily basis over the last years, makes every single one of us learn, grow, adapt and transform oneself. Respect and tolerance is not easy... and here again it does not seem to be the spirit of our times if we look at the state of our world, quite to the contrary. So your experience at the institute is here again invaluable and will guide you I am convinced in the next stages of your life – professional and personal.

A graduation ceremony symbolically marks the end of an important period in life. But it is also a commencement – a ceremony that celebrates in advance what is to come, the new beginnings that await you. To all of you I wish the very best for the next stage of your lives – may your journey be as fulfilling and rewarding as possible, with many professional achievements as well as many personal joys.

As you are turning this page of your life, you are leaving behind familiar ground to enter uncharted territories – moving from the lake to open seas as it were. You can approach this with two very different states of mind. The unknown in front of you can be a source of excitement and exhilaration. After all, the future is yours to invent and to explore.... But the unknown and its uncertainties can also be a ground for fear and worries. I hope that, throughout your life, you will keep your compass set rather on the excitement and exploration side.... Because fear is a self-fulfilling prophecy... fear translates into withdrawal, close-mindedness, paralysis and status quo, and then in direct consequence into conflict and violence... which then in turn generate more fear.

“Why is this age worse than earlier ages?” Asked the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova in 1919. Is our current age worse than earlier ones? This is an impossible question with clearly no definite answer. But the times ahead will be rough seas, that much is sure.

We have entered an age of radical uncertainty, defined by an entangled set of challenges. Whether we talk of war and a return of the nuclear threat, of the climate, of the destruction of

biodiversity and vital resources, of extreme inequalities and their profoundly disruptive social and political consequences, of possible future pandemics, of cyberwars and systemic disinformation, each of those challenges alone and even more all in interaction are threats, in the existential sense, to humanity as we know it.

And still, we should not let fear take the steering wheel. The way in which we look at what happens is even more important than what happens. Shadows take over when we do not bring out the lights. Victor Hugo once said - “ *la coincidence d’un affaiblissement avec un agrandissement, tout homme a pu l’observer en soi* ». It is in periods of great challenges that the urgency of survival will galvanize mobilization, adaptation and transformation.... Then, as Jean Monnet said and showed just after World War II, “ *everything becomes possible even the impossible* ”.

This is the kind of pragmatic optimism that we need today. This does not mean that we are naïve, or fooled We are all aware of and clear about the dangerous nature of rough seas ahead... but we should make the choice of realist engagement. Standing still and waiting for a probable doom is the surest way to see it materialize. We should instead choose the path of actively affirming a desirable future and of collectively mobilizing for it. I will not say that this is your generation’s responsibility. I strongly believe that this is a responsibility for all of us, that we share across generations... we are all in this together - and the issues we are facing are too extreme and too urgent for us not to bring our strengths together. In the long run humanity has only survived difficult times through *collaboration*. Competition is a luxury for when times are easy - to be discussed but too much competition may also have been the source of many of the problems that make our times so complex and dangerous...

What will it take for us to choose the positive engagement path?

1. First, it will call for courage. The courage to fight for peace because war is always a defeat for humanity, the courage to fight for sustainability and equity, because without them peace is impossible in the long run, the courage to reinvent effective multilateral collaboration, because without it none of our existential challenges can be properly addressed and humanity will exhaust if not destroy itself. Courage is not temerity... it does not mean ignoring risks, danger or fear... it means controlling them in a reflexive manner, knowing how to live and act in spite of it all.
2. Second, it will call for integrity. Courage implies and is unthinkable without integrity. The word integrity comes from the latin root *integritas* - the state of being whole, complete but also sound (in spirit)! The etymological exercise takes us one step further in fact - to the verb *integro* - which means to repair but also to renew, to start again, to recreate! We need today to have the courage of integrity. In the double sense of soundness and

- responsibility and of creativity and reinvention. Those should be the competencies of the leaders of today – leaders preparing for peace in spite of the deafening noises of war!
3. Third, we will need benevolence – a combination of respect and empathy... because without benevolence there is no collective action and mobilization. Benevolence should come from the realization of who we are – we are alive because we die and we die because we are alive... and this is true for all single one of us.... Benevolence should emerge once we understand the deep inscription of our species in our natural biotope. We, humans, are absolutely, essentially dependent upon humus – our earth... the only one we have... forgetting this is *Hubris* and at the same time a crime against ourselves as a species Recognizing our individual fragility should make us humble, benevolent to ourselves and to others Herein lies, I will propose to conclude, the source of our collective strength, the well from which humanity has always drawn its resilience...

Before i close, let me express my huge thank yous to the professors and the teams at the institute that have been there throughout your course of study and have furthermore organized and made this day possible. Thank you to the team at the direction of studies and to all members of our different administrative departments! Please join me in thanking them!