

Brandeis University Graduation Commencement Address

By
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Well, Mr. Chairman, Mr. President, and distinguished graduates of the Class of 2004, and those who are taking higher degrees, let me, first of all say, on behalf of all of us who are honored, what a sense of gratitude we all feel for the recognition put upon us by this university. It is a great moment for all of us, and I feel deeply privileged that I am the one that is allowed to speak for such a remarkable group of colleagues on the platform with me, any one of whom I am sure could do a better job than I will do.

But let me say that, for all of us, this opportunity to be at Brandeis, at a university with a distinguished history and with a center sense of direction which deals with social justice at a time when our world cries out for it is a very, very special moment.

This Class of 2004 is really the first millennial class of the year 2000, and I congratulate you. And you have seen many things in your period of four years here, but highlighted amongst it must be the experience of 9/11, when the world was shocked and when our world changed.

I was remembering my own graduation just about 50 years ago, as I looked at the Class of '54 here, and wondered if I looked as youthful as they do. But 50 years ago, I was in distant Australia and, for me, the world was a very simple place. It was the rich world, it was the poor world. I had around Australia, and around the United States and around Europe sort of a wall.

I was educated to learn about the kings of England. I learned a bit about the Boston Tea Party. I learned all sorts of facts that seem now irrelevant. I learned nothing about Islam, I learned nothing about China, I learned nothing about India, I learned nothing about Africa, I learned nothing about Latin America.

And I came to do my postgraduate work in this country because I couldn't get into university in England. And so I came to a little-known university down the road here, where the first thing that happened to me was, as I entered Harvard, the sister of a friend of mine asked me where I came from, and I said Australia.

And she said, "But when did you come?"

I said, "A week ago."

And she said, "You've learned the language so quickly."

[Laughter.]

So that was my international world. I must also tell you that I had hoped at that time to go and compete in some international games in Russia. I was told by the Counsel General in Sydney that I had a choice. If I went to Russia, I could not go and study at Harvard. This was the days of McCarthy. This was the days of the Cold War, and the world was clearly divided between the rich and the poor and between East and West.

On 9/11, somehow this world, which has become even more connected, this world was visibly seen to be united. And events in Afghanistan and events of terrorism throughout the world came upon us not only on Wall Street, but in the Pentagon and in the fields of Pennsylvania, and when we came truly to recognize that our world is linked by trade, by finance, by our environment that we share, by health, by education, by migration, by crime and, yes, by terror. And all of a sudden we were united, visibly, as that wall came down in the image of the World Trade Center collapsing. And so we are today in the throes of coming to terms with being one world.

And you, as the Graduating Class of 2004, are not staying at the university, as I read in the International Herald Tribune, coming back from Europe yesterday. I read that the smart people, your professors and faculty who stay here inside the university, as it said in the Herald Tribune, worrying about parking tickets, while all of us go out into the world with the challenges that face us.

But let me say how grateful we should be to our faculties for what they do for us, and for their research, and for their training, and I'm sure I join with you in thanking them for what they've done.

[Applause.]

But we are going out into a world, and it is a world that is hard. It's a world that is difficult, not a world that has failed because, in the last 40 years, the life span of people has doubled and gone further than it had in the previous 400 years, where literacy has improved in many countries, where poverty is less in many countries, where infant and maternal mortality has improved in many countries and where our environment sadly has not improved.

And we come to confront the challenges that were pointed out at the year 2000, as you started your course, at the Millennial Assembly of the United Nations, when the heads of 200 countries came together and, one after another, proclaimed that the challenges that you will face--and that we will face--a challenge of this increasingly globalized world, and set the challenges before us as halving the percentage of poverty, of reducing by 2015 by two-thirds infant mortality and maternal mortality,

by getting all children into schools, by dealing with the environment and stopping its ruin.

These were the challenges that were set by global leaders in the year 2000, and it is not just for leaders today, but it is for you to try and see whether these objectives can be reached.

And what is the world you're entering? It is a world of 6 billion people, not the elite communities just of our universities in the East or in the United States, but 6 billion people, of whom 5 billion live in developing countries, of whom 2.8 billion live under \$2 a day and 1.2 billion live under \$1 a day.

It's a world within those countries where there are huge inequities--inequity which allows the top 5 percent in so many of these countries to have 60 percent of the wealth. It's a world where the billion people that are in the rich world have 80 percent of global income and global resources and where the 5 billion people have less than 20 percent. It's a world that is dynamic. The world that you will be in for the next 25 years will be a world that grows by 2 billion people, so that in 2025 to 2030, it'll be a world of 8 billion people, but 7 billion will be in developing countries. All of the growth, save for 50 million people, will go to the developing world.

And the world that you will know is not a world of London, Paris, Brussels, New York, Chicago, it is a world that is known to so many of your graduating class and your graduate students, a world that in this university is represented by 100 countries, a world where some of your graduates will go back to take on leadership positions in those countries.

It is a world in which you will find some 35 countries with cities within them with 10 million people or more, but 27 of those will be in developing countries. It's a world in which 2 billion more people will move into cities and towns from country areas. It's a world where we will all have to come to terms with the growth that is taking place in the developing world.

I had a chance last year to be at the summit of the G8 leaders in Evian, with President Chirac, and President Bush and many of the leaders, but also with President Hu of China, with Prime Minister Vajpayee of India, with President Obasanjo of Nigeria.

And into the room came President Lula of Brazil, a distinguished social innovator, who is conducting perhaps the most important experiment in the world today. And self-effacingly, after six or seven of these great people had spoken, he said, "You know, I'm a trade union leader. And if my parents could only see me now with all of you, how proud they would be, me next to these great leaders." He said, "As I look at President Mr. Hu and Vajpayee, and Obasanjo and leaders of the developing world, I wonder, we're invited to the G8 by you every year, but maybe next year we should be the G8 because we represent the 5 billion people. We represent, in the future, the 7 billion and the 8 billion."

And this is the world that all of you who are graduating today are going into. It is not just a world of the elite. It is a world that in 50 years' time will have 40 percent of the GDP from developing countries. It is a world in which you will have to take the lead, a world that is changing and a world where there is a need for equilibrium and balance if there is to be peace.

And the other thing that you should know is that this is not some distant responsibility that you have. We, at the Bank, have recently been working extensively with young people throughout the world. And I spoke to a group in Paris recently, representing about 100 million young people, and I was patronizingly talking about what we were going to do for their future until the young man from Liberia got up and said to me, "Mr. President, I want you to know that we're not the future. We're the now."

And you are the now. Of the 6 billion people on the planet, 2.8 billion are under 24, and a billion and a half are under the age of 15. So this is not a world of adults. This is a world of youth. This is a world where each one of you has a responsibility, where each one of you can make a difference, and it is a world that we're bequeathing and handing over to you that is not in the best-possible shape.

After the 2000 Summit, we all thought that the rich world and the poor world had come to a deal. Developing world leaders said we have to take control of our countries. We don't want direction from you. We surely don't want direction from the World Bank. We want to decide ourselves on our future, and we know we must build capacity. We must strengthen our legal and judicial systems. We must strengthen our financial systems, and we must fight corruption, and many of them are doing just this. And I am sure that some of the young graduates here today will go back to their countries and help lead them.

But the rich world said, "If you do that, we will help you build capacity," as indeed they offer universities, and help, and opportunity for people from developing countries. But they also said, "We will increase the development assistance we'll give you. We'll open our markets for trade." And what have we done? We have a round of trade talks which is going nowhere, and we have development assistance which is flat.

You young people should understand that the way the world is spending its money today, we are spending \$900 billion a year on military expenditure, \$350 billion a year on agricultural subsidies, which affect developing countries adversely, and maybe \$50- to \$60 billion a year on development. We should be spending \$900 billion on development, and then we would only need \$50 billion on military expenditures.

[Applause.]

And so all of you have an opportunity to put balance back onto our planet and to do so not just in monetary terms. What we have learned, and what I have seen in recent weeks and months, as I travel around the world, is that instead of focusing on the human dimensions of development, instead

of focusing on the concerns of the individual that are the same in just about every country, where we have shown in our studies of Voices of the Poor that just about everybody wants the same thing that you want.

We studied 60,000 people in 60 countries to come to the very obvious conclusion that what people want is a chance, they want an opportunity, they want to live in safety. The women do not want to be beaten or battered. They want a chance for their children. They want voice, and they want to invest in their future. If we could allow this for people around the world, we would not have the military expenditures to combat terror.

[Applause.]

And your chance and your task is to work towards this.

But there is one other level that is somehow missing as we now are focused only on Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East and terror, and it is something that you got from this university. It is something that is on the shield of this university, the Hebrew word "emet" or truth, the searching for values that was so well-protected by Justice Brandeis, the search for social justice and the belief in values.

Too little today do we have people standing up and saying that what should be done should be done because it's right, because of ethical, and moral, and spiritual values. And we need again to restore to the premier place in our world not just economics and not just individual advantage, but what you've got at the soul, at the core of this university, which is a sense of social justice, a sense of what is right, a sense of what is moral, a sense of true human belief.

I wish you great success as you go into this world and urge you to carry with you that message from this great university.

Thank you very much.