

**SPEECH GIVEN BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNIDO,
DR. KANDEH KOLLEH YUMKELLA
AT THE GRADUATION OF THE CLASS 2008-2009
MARYMOUNT INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
ON 30 MAY 2009**

**The Principal of Marymount International,
Distinguished teachers,
Parents, Relatives and Friends of the Graduates,
Our Distinguished Graduates of 2009,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I feel honoured to be here to celebrate the graduation of all of the brilliant young ladies, the future leaders of the world. To be frank, I am very nervous for two reasons; first, although I give speeches around the world as part of my work, it is the first time that I address a high school graduating class. Second, and more importantly, I am nervous because, my daughter Binta (Ms. B, as I call her), is part of this graduating class (and she has warned me not to give one of my long boring diplomatic speeches).

First of all, on behalf of all parents, I want to thank all of you the great teachers and boarding supervisors for taking care of our girls, and for molding them into professional young ladies. It is not easy to manage teenagers (I know because I was a teacher before).

To you our graduates, you have to enjoy this moment and this great day as you march on to become adults; dream great dreams about life in the universities you will be attending in a few months; aspire to own your own driving license; maybe you might even receive an increase in your allowances; or perhaps start your first summer job. You should cherish this moment and victory, and have fun with your families. Above all, you should

aspire to be successful and socially responsible citizens (note that I did not say rich citizens, I said successful citizens; because life is not just about money).

At the same time, your school wants you to remember the values and the atmosphere they created for you to become a well rounded, educated and socially conscious professional woman. Your school is multicultural, multi-religious, and your curriculum has exposed you to some of the realities of the world you will meet when you enter adulthood. I know that all of you have participated in extracurricular activities such as, the Model-United Nations and community service. So you are familiar with some of the contradictions and dilemmas of the world. Let's think about some of these contradictions.

1. The Fast Pace of Change: You the graduates of 2009, are entering a very interesting world. In the past year up to your graduation you have learnt new words like financial crisis, recession, lay offs and unemployment, and climate change or global warming. At the same time, as you were becoming familiar with your iPhones, skype, and facebook communications, a new phenomenon came by called Twitter. What does all this mean? It means that your world is changing fast and you must be ready to multitask and learn things fast.

2. Gap between the Haves and Have-nots: Life is becoming better for some, for example, some are becoming Slumdog Millionaires very quickly due to innovation and creativity. At the same time others are becoming poorer every day. Some people can gain access to the best health care services when they get ill, others in various parts of the world cannot have access to basic medicines or even afford one meal a day. Some people are enjoying MTV shows and social network services, but many others across the world walk 3-4 miles every morning to get to school and may come home and have only one meal a day if they are lucky.

3. Unfair Trade: A significant amount of the oil and gas which provide the electricity and fuel for our cars, or the cotton that is used for our brand-name clothes, or the hot chocolate and coffee we drink, may come from countries where the majority of the

people are living under one dollar a day (i.e. a whole family living on less than how much you and I spend for a cup of Starbucks coffee).

4. Gender and Racial Discrimination: While we celebrate the graduation of you, our brilliant daughters and elegant young ladies, there are others who are denied education just because they are girls, or may be denied access to education or jobs because of their race or ethnicity.

5. Environmental Degradation and Climate Change: As you and I enjoy 24-hours electricity and drive our nice cars, we are also contributing to global warming, which will affect all aspects of human life. But the negative impact of climate change will be worse for the poorest of the poor, especially those living in Africa. Just think about it for a moment; the people who are releasing the least amount of Carbon Dioxide and other green house gases, will suffer the most from climate change that you and I have caused.

For all of the above reasons, your school wanted me to remind you of social justice and social consciousness, and what we call the millennium development goals (MDGs for short). Your colleague has done a brilliant job of presenting the MDGs before my speech. “Social justice is a concept that some use to describe the movement towards a socially just world. In this context, social justice is based on the concepts of human rights and equality”. Social consciousness is the understanding by an individual and/or an organization of the broader interests and expectations of society. It is a sine qua non for social responsibility. Interests and expectations will vary between countries and cultures, though organizations should, as a minimum, be aware of and respect international norms of behaviour such as those laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, environmental conventions, etc.

The adoption of the eight MDGs, by all countries of the world in 2000, was an effort to ensure that we all commit ourselves to help lift others out of poverty and protect our environment.

Whatever success you achieve always reflect about the society you live in. Ask yourself how you can make others also benefit from your success, or how you can make life better for others. What can you do to reduce your own carbon foot print and reduce your contribution to global warming; reduce how much water you waste; help a little girl in another part of the world receive \$1 so that she can get access to food or medicine.

Finally,

I give you 4 tools as you move on in life; tools that have contributed to my success.

Have:

A sense of purpose;

A sense of proportion;

A sense of ethics; and

A sense of enthusiasm.

Good luck!