Message from SUA Founder Daisaku Ikeda

To the Tenth Undergraduate Commencement Ceremony
Soka University of America

To the Undergraduate Class of 2014 at Soka University of America, I wish to express my heartfelt congratulations to all of you on this most auspicious day! You represent the most cherished treasure of humankind and the source of enduring hope in the 21st century.

Allow me also to offer my felicitations to your families, who made it possible for you to study at SUA, and to your friends, who have stood by you over the years.

At the same time, I express my warmest greetings and profound gratitude to our guests and benefactors who have gathered here today, as well as to every member of our SUA faculty and staff for the care and counsel that you have tirelessly rendered to our students.

I am both proud and delighted that Dr. Amartya Kumar Sen, one of the world’s most distinguished economists and thinkers, is attending this ceremony today as our keynote speaker. Few things in life are more enriching and encouraging for promising young leaders of tomorrow than to be inspired by an individual whose convictions are as profound as his insights. Thank you, Dr. Sen, for joining us today.

In my mind’s eye, I can see every member of the Class of 2014, standing triumphant and poised to embark upon a long gallant journey from the gentle hills of Aliso Viejo. I applaud your commitment to learning, for the tenacity with which you prevailed over every challenge.

Drawing from what you have learned during the youthful years you spent learning at SUA, the Class of 2014 has succeeded brilliantly in solidifying the foundations for our school to flourish in triumph for all time. You have done so by proudly carrying forward the worthy traditions established by our alumni while adding to their weight and luster.

I am embracing you in my heart, firmly clasping your hand in appreciation and admiration for your unflagging and illustrious service. Thank you! Thank you very much indeed!

To celebrate this occasion today, I would like to set our sights on the challenges you will be facing over the next ten or 20 years and beyond, and share three points that you may find instructive.

The first is this: The vow you make will be your light; use it to open new vistas for the future.
Every great work of art, be it literary, visual or musical, is inspired by an equally great theme. A truly sublime life is no different.

The vow that you have embraced here at SUA is a lifelong theme that should be upheld and pursued in the course of leading a life of great purpose. This may sound hyperbolic to some, but I believe it to be absolutely valid.

Your vow made in the time of youth is an unerring compass enabling you to navigate the stormy vicissitudes of life. Its guiding light will always lead you back to the path you must take, piercing through the pall of fear, uncertainty and confusion that will, at one time or another, obstruct your advance.

As a young man, Dr. Sen witnessed firsthand the tragedy of a great famine that ravaged his homeland of West Bengal. That experience led him on the path as a preeminent scholar in welfare economics and related studies.

To create a society in which human beings may live as human beings in happiness, with each accorded the dignity we all deserve—Dr. Sen has dedicated a lifetime of pioneering research in the quest for solutions to poverty and other human security challenges. I believe that a fiery sense of purpose burns brightly in Dr. Sen’s heart, one that has never waned in his commitment to serve humanity.

I call upon the Class of 2014 to do as Dr. Sen has in tackling each difficulty before you with unswerving tenacity. And never fall prey to timidity, to impatience or to doubt as you grow ever stronger and capable in pursuit of your loftiest goals and ideals. It is only through ceaseless and unyielding effort that you can cast a light upon faraway vistas to shape the future course of humankind.

The second point I’d like to share is to have faith in the infinite potential of your lives and bring to bear its boundless reserves of hope for the sake of yourselves and others.

The outstanding poet-sage Rabindranath Tagore bestowed the title “Mahatma” (the great soul) upon Mohandas Gandhi, the champion of India’s nonviolence movement. It was also Tagore who gave Dr. Sen his name Amartya, which means “immortal” in Bengali.

There is no doubt that Dr. Sen’s efforts have responded to the hopes of his illustrious mentors. His relentless pursuit for solutions has contributed mightily in illuminating humanity’s path for an eternity.

Rabindranath Tagore was also a great educator who firmly believed that the source of immense power in human beings can be found within us. I am in complete agreement with him.

The potentiality inherent in young people’s lives knows no bounds. Within your lives dwells a life force that is ten times, a hundred times, and if I were to cite a phrase from
the Buddhist sutras, hundreds of millions times more powerful than you can imagine. What then is the key to drawing forth that strength?

Tagore’s wisdom reveals penetrating insights into this question. He wrote, “To live in perfect goodness is to realize one’s life in the infinitive.”

Please know that in dedicating yourselves to the dignity of life and doing “good” for the happiness of the people, for the flourishing of society and for a peaceful world, you will inevitably encounter an unending series of hardship and challenges. Yet, within such struggle lies the true path of “human revolution” and the strength to create positive value from every adversity. “Soka” or “value creation” is thus the process of harnessing infinite hope from within, for yourselves and for others. This is a belief I would like to entrust to you, the successors of our future.

The third point I would like to share is this: Friendship is a priceless treasure; may you continue to expand the intrepid solidarity of global citizens dedicated to peace.

I am told that Tagore, while visiting Southern California, was inspired to establish Tagore International University (Visva-Bharati), Dr. Sen’s alma mater. Walking along the golden orange groves basking in the sun, he was deep in thought as to how he could create an institution in which people would come together, learning to transcend ethnic and national divides. Upon his return, Tagore would open a school based on such thoughts.

I cannot help but feel that the founding spirit of Soka University of America shares a deep resonance with Tagore’s educational undertaking.

The robust ties of friendship forged between young global citizens, having overcome differences among one another in learning conditions founded on universal human values: this is the greatest force of nonviolence to counter society’s destructive tendencies that fuel human misery and impede the building of a peaceful world.

I recall with great fondness and appreciation my friendship with Rosa Parks, mother of the American civil rights movement, who was instrumental in the opening of SUA. Mrs. Parks was someone who cherished her friends throughout her life.

It is believed that an important factor in the success of Mrs. Parks’ struggle for civil rights and its impact on the world was her rich, extensive network of friends.

Please remember that you have spent time on a campus made most beautiful in the world through the friendships you have forged here. Even after you depart this campus, I hope you will continue to engage one another in genuine trust and integrity, and cheerfully, wisely and vibrantly expand our united community of courageous global citizens across the world.

My beloved students, you are my most precious treasure. To watch you exerting yourselves to the utmost and succeed in the grand stage of the world as the years
unfold—that is my greatest joy and inspiration. I will be following your progress warmly, hoping that you will all triumph.

In closing, allow me to dedicate these words from Eleanor Roosevelt, another respected mother of human rights, in honor of your graduation day:

It seems to me that we must have the courage to face ourselves in this crisis…
We must join in an effort to use all knowledge for the good of all human beings. When we do that, we shall have nothing to fear.

Cheers to the glorious Class of 2014! Cheers to your proud parents and families celebrating in joy! May all of you enjoy the best of health and your lives be filled with happiness and victory! Please stay in high spirits!

Daisaku Ikeda
Founder
Soka University of America
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