Message from SUA Founder Daisaku Ikeda

To the Eleventh Undergraduate Commencement Ceremony
Soka University of America

To the members of the Undergraduate Class of 2015 of Soka University of America, I wish to express my heartfelt congratulations to all of you on this auspicious day! I consider each of you to be a cherished treasure, a source of enduring hope for humankind. I am deeply appreciative of your efforts, undertaken in the spirit of unity and through earnest application to your studies, by which you have together written a new chapter in the history of your alma mater. I am truly proud of all of you.

Allow me also to offer my felicitations to your families, who are proudly watching over your growth and development, and to your friends, who are sharing the joy of this day with you.

At the same time, I express my warmest greetings and profound gratitude to our honored guests who have joined us today, as well as to every member of the SUA faculty and staff, for the wholehearted care and counsel that you have extended to the students over the past four years.

As founder, I am particularly delighted that the renowned peace activist and educator, Professor Jody Williams, is attending and will be the keynote speaker at today’s ceremony. Thank you very much, Professor Williams.

Commemorating this occasion, I would like to offer my encouragement on the following three points.

The first is that you focus on making the next ten years of your life victorious as you advance under the banner of friendship. As you know, SUA was founded here in the hills of Aliso Viejo at the start of the 21st century, and the first graduating class set forth from this campus in 2005. In the ten years since then, SUA has come to be seen, by a variety of measures, as one of the top liberal arts colleges in the United States. Moreover, numerous distinguished academics and people of insight are applauding SUA for its efforts to foster the warm, noble spirit of humanistic education and value creation.

All this has been made possible because the alumni have taken flight into the world with the resolve that they themselves are the young founders of SUA. They have gone on to make their way along yet untrodden paths in their respective areas of endeavor and in their communities. To our great joy, alumni representatives have joined us today at this celebration, being held at their alma mater, imbued with memories of youth.

Today you set out from this citadel devoted to the ceaseless cultivation of the wisdom of global citizenship. With hearts filled with pride in this fact, and with confidence in all that you have learned here, please exert yourselves to the fullest as you take on various challenges in your respective fields of mission over the course of the next ten years.
My mentor in life, Josei Toda, encouraged young people going out into the world to persevere during the initial ten years of their new endeavors as the crucial period of training to hone their skills. I too was personally trained and educated by my mentor for ten years and this became the foundation of my entire life.

No matter what trials and adversities you may encounter, you possess the solidarity of friendship that you have forged here at SUA.

The German literary giant, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and the renowned poet and playwright, Friedrich von Schiller, were bound by the deepest ties of shared purpose as they continued to spur each other to realize majestic artistic creations.

Schiller’s masterpiece, *William Tell*, is a tale of a legendary Swiss hero completed in the writer’s final years. The landscape and climate of the lakeside in Switzerland in which the story is set are described with vivid and intimate detail by Schiller. However, as Schiller was suffering from illness, he had never had the opportunity to visit the actual location. How was he able to depict the lakeside in Switzerland so precisely? This is where his best friend, Goethe played an important role.

It is said that Goethe, who had traveled to Switzerland, described the scenes to Schiller who then went on to complete the novel. Schiller writes in *William Tell*, “We swear that no Extremity shall part us.” In like manner, I would like to encourage the members of the Class of 2015 to support and encourage your fellow alumni, upholding the ideals of Soka education as you compose similarly triumphant episodes in your own lives.

My next hope for you is that you will take a courageous stand to build solidarity for peace.

Professor Jody Williams is, as you know, the founding coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) which played an instrumental role in the realization of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

Initially, such a treaty was seen as impossible. So what enabled Prof. Williams to persist in mobilizing public opinion in support of a treaty to the point that it was finally realized?

I have discussed the significance of this history with different thinkers, including the late Dr. Joseph Rotblat, who also visited SUA. In our dialogue, he emphasized the importance of solidarity, stating, “If we unite, we can change the world. It might take some time, but viewed from a long-term perspective, the people will be victorious in the end.” I can never forget his words and the resolute confidence he expressed that individuals can indeed make a difference.

Prof. Williams is a transformative peace activist, an exemplary model of someone who took a courageous stand to build global solidarity for peace. When she initiated the campaign to ban landmines, her efforts ran into a wall of cold indifference, of people who refused even to try to understand. From her parents and her grandfather, however, she had inherited an indomitable spirit, and this blazed ever more brightly within her.

She has written, “For me, ‘no’ isn’t necessarily the end of possibilities; it’s an obstacle to be overcome.” And also: “Calls for change without actions to back them up are largely irrelevant to me.”
The essence of Soka education is found in the courageous action we take for the sake of our fellow citizens. One courageous step can open the way for the realization of human possibilities such as have never been imagined.

It is my hope that, having studied at this university founded by and for the common people, you will grow into world leaders who truly know the hearts of the people and who take courageous action on their behalf. As proud and valiant Soka graduates, imbued with compassion and wisdom, please continue your advance, forging ever expanding bonds of solidarity for peace.

The third thing I would ask of you is that you become people who can generate hope from within, who believe in the infinite potential of your lives.

It was in May of 2011, the year that the Class of 2015 entered SUA, that I started composing the lyrics for the song, “The Light of Hope.” Fulfilling the hopes embodied in those lyrics, you have indeed climbed “the steep hill of learning” over the course of the past four years.

The light of hope that can break through adversity and scatter the oppressive darkness of suffering is to be found within your own heart. All of you possess limitless possibilities in the unseen depths of your lives. Therefore, you must never look down on or denigrate yourselves. You must never allow yourself to doubt the boundless potential existing within your own life.

No matter what hardships and trials you may encounter, please know I will always be your ally and supporter. I will continue to watch over your growth.

In this world of deepening chaos, each and every one of you possesses a unique mission, a mission to contribute to the happiness and wellbeing of the people and to world peace. I hope that each of you will, from this day on, work even harder to create the noble path of peace that our times demand.

SUA has a tradition, a culture that we can be truly proud of. It is a tradition of caring for others, of equally sharing in our joys and sorrows, of striving to realize the hidden potential within our own lives and in the lives of others. It is this that makes SUA the university it is.

It is my fervent hope that each of you will make the sun of the dignity of life shine wherever you are, in all of the challenges that you decide to take on.

Let me conclude this message by expressing my very best wishes to each of you: May you all, proud and cherished members of the Class of 2015, be blessed always with excellent health, happiness and glorious victory!

Daisaku Ikeda
Founder
Soka University of America
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