

Speech for Uni SA

As is our custom, I would like to acknowledge the Kuana people on whose land we are meeting today, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters, and to our non-indigenous brothers and sisters with whom we get to call Australia home, international guests and dignitaries.

It was with gratitude that I accepted the invitation to speak to you, the graduating class today. It is one of those rare moments where we reflect on and celebrate your achievements and to say a deep and sincere thank you to you and those who have supported you thus far in your life. Congratulations. You are amazing. I am so proud of all of you as individuals, and of us as a group. Thank you for your blood, sweat and tears and for making this day possible. It is my job now and the job of others, to encourage you to keep going, for all our sakes. You are at the forefront of making the case for change for our Peoples as only a handful of people in Australia are capable of doing. Not only do you embody the spirit of service, but in you we also see the culmination of a shared belief among our people, that whoever we are, and whatever we do, we can achieve so much when we put our mind to a task and marry that with hard work, discipline, and sacrifice.

In you, I see the promise that is part of our Torres Strait Islander philosophic tradition: each of us can pursue our individual dreams but still come together as one family, to ensure that the next generation can pursue their dreams. Just as each star has its trajectory across the sky, each of you are journeying in the same way – your own path, making your own story, doing things for your own reasons. What ever has motivated you in your life, has got you to this point. You established a benchmark for yourself, and you excelled it. Whilst you may have faltered on this path, you did not fall. While a chaos of things have happening in and around you, you kept your eye on the mark, and your heart followed. Each of you exemplifies the power of belief in yourself and a determination to do what needs to be done. In my view, to work in this way requires a warrior's courage – a conviction that what you are doing is the right thing; that your effort, and how you direct it, is the beneficial thing to do.

People I know who have been on this same journey have had friends walk away from them, have had to care for sick kids and elderly parents, have come back to University after working and hitting a glass ceiling, have had love and lost it; had to deal with racism and be taught by people who do not understand nor appreciate, nor make room for our circumstance. And still

our peoples persisted, drawing on courage that they didn't even know they had. They have had people around them with whom they could share the experience.

That is why I stand here today, with gratitude. There were many generations of people before us who protested for our right to be educated, and who have made our entry into this and other institutions easier. My father and mother made sacrifices so that my sister and I could get the great gift of education. And when we achieve all that we are meant to in our field, we are obliged by our position to do the same when our time comes. To give back, to honour all those have come before us, and those who come after us. We have to hold up the hopes and dreams of a people and show them what is possible. And we do this because each generation has moments that define it – each generation has challenges that must and will be overcome. In the fields in which I work, the challenges that afflict our First People's are often described as wicked problems - those problems that cannot be solved with the same thinking that created them. Each generation has a chance to think new thoughts and apply these new thoughts in different ways. You are no different to those who have stepped up to the plate and dealt with challenges in the past - the difference is that some of the challenges are of a scale and

scope, that are unprecedented in the history of humanity.

Some of those challenges are global – economic crises, intra-country relationships, natural and other disasters, wars and conflicts, the rise of modern global companies that have larger budgets than some countries, the demise of democracy, the rise of fundamentalism and the irrevocable change to our landscapes and environments due to urbanization. Couple this with the largest number of humans ever on the face of the globe and the largest number of adolescents that our species have ever produced provides a complexity and ‘unknown’ in human affairs that is new and unchartered. Whilst we can despair of these international circumstances that frame our own; the capacity for human ingenuity means that each of these issues are not insurmountable, we just need to change – our attitudes to wealth, our lifestyles, our financial behaviours, our sense of civility and ultimately our relationship to our country. For each of these issues, I believe we the Indigenous peoples of the world have answers. You are now part of the global solution locally applied. By bringing what you know to the fore and relying on our ways of communicating ideas we can be the change that needs to happen in the world.

Whilst there are those who are focusing on the international

arena, there are profound changes that need to happen nationally. I saw a very real, very recent example of this need. I opened a video called 'Stand for Freedom' a national campaign from ANTA detailing NT community peoples dismay at the introduction of the Stronger Futures legislation – 3 Bills in total to replace the NT Emergency Response Act 2007 which itself faced national and international condemnation. The Stronger Futures legislation on the face of it seems to maintain many elements of the NT Intervention for a further 10 years. Whilst consultations did occur over a 3 month period, and promises have been made to work in partnership with people in order to develop solutions to the problems they face, the challenge will be to ensure these measures, if introduced, operate in the best interests of communities and those who are vulnerable: not only to themselves and others in the community, but to the public and its governing institutions at large. This national campaign urges us to take a stand for freedom – as concerned citizens and supporters of human rights. Freedoms that have been hard fought for and sometimes won. Freedoms that have cost so many, so much. Ask those who have returned home from wars with their comrades and loved ones in coffins. Ask those in detention centres, or processing centres, or detainees, or those in our communities who fought so hard to keep hold of country, who never ceded? Ask the meaning of freedom to

those family members of those who have tragically been lost in custody? Or who have lost those to addiction? Or families who have both parents working long hard hours so what they tenuously have a hold on does not get repossessed? Only when you have fought hard for freedom, or had it taken away from you can you really understand the gift of it – something that is so taken for granted by many Australians. But you here, cannot afford to take it for granted. Perhaps your lives have been touched by the unfreedom – the control is not yours, you work in institutions that perpetrate the subtle violence of unfreedom. When we lack the compassion as a society to find ways of connecting with those who are not free and miss the opportunity to enrich our lives, we are the lesser for it. When we lack compassion by measuring progress by how many people can find a job that pays the mortgage, not by an economy that honours the dignity of work. We are lesser for it. When we treat the issue of social inclusion in ways that demean how we are not included we as a society are the lesser for it. You have your work cut out for you, that is true. As Australians we have our work cut out for us – at the very least, we have a Constitution to reform. We all have choices and because of you we have resources we can mobilize in national and international affairs. Choices that re embrace the notions of self determination, that allow people the right of informing

their own lives. You will find your mark, your measure and your worth by what you do in your relationships, in your families and in your communities. You are changed people, destined to make change happen. Be strong, be true, you have a world relying on you. Thank you for making your ancestors proud. Hone your skills, be on your way. You have a world waiting.