

Speech to UniSA graduates – 26 August 2011

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, distinguished guests and, most particularly, the graduands.

Let me begin by offering my congratulations to all of you graduating today. It is a great achievement; the culmination of a great deal of effort and the result of a great deal of commitment. It is a day to enjoy – a day to celebrate.

Many of you will have struggled, and juggled, to be here. But whatever your circumstances, I urge you to be proud - you have earned the right. But I also urge you not to forget that there are others less fortunate than you whose futures depend on you to use your skills and talents, and your knowledge, wisely. Don't let pride become hubris.

I also congratulate those who helped you get here today – the other part of the audience. Without the support of family and friends, some of you may not have made it – so it is a day of celebration, maybe also a day tinged with relief, for them, too. Whichever, it is a day for them to be proud.

I think that we should also congratulate the staff. Without them you wouldn't be here – while it is true that without you, most of them wouldn't be here either – it is nevertheless their commitment

to their field of study, their discipline or disciplines, that underpins your education. So this is their day too. And they deserve our thanks.

You are prepared now for the next steps in your life, and your career. It is an exciting time I know, because if I try really, really hard I can just remember my level of excitement when all those years ago I took the step that you are taking today.

Simply put, my graduating year and I all thought that it was simply fantastic; a real high - much better than any other type of high experienced in the '60s – I am told. We were out there; we had finished what we had set out to do. We knew with the certainty of youth that we could change the world (for the better!); we were tolerant, idealistic and wise beyond our years. We thought. The world was indeed our oyster.

And when you look back on it, even through the reality-tinged rear vision mirror, we did achieve a bit, my generation. The world is a different place – better in some respects though not better in all.

If the world was **our** oyster then, it is **yours** today. You, too, have completed what you set out to do. Like us then, your excitement will come partly because of that achievement and partly from the fact that not everything ahead of you is predictable – a sort of nervous anticipation.

There are challenges out there; but you are well equipped to meet them. You will know how to use your discipline to get to grips with complex problems. You will know how to work with others as they put their disciplines, and their culture, alongside yours as you search together to solve problems, or to lessen their impact. You know that the world needs changing for the better, and you should be confident that you can play your part wherever it may be that you choose to use your skills and your knowledge. You will know that committed individuals can make a difference.

There are indeed some big issues in this oyster of yours. Ones like climate change; the impact of changed rainfall patterns; reduced arable land and soil fertility; food supply; water - both potable and the rest; pandemics and health more generally; ageing populations alongside population growth.

The real question is obvious: how **do** we face the challenges, face them down, really? Just doing more of what we do now will not be the answer.

Regardless of what some might think, we know that we can't just do a bit more or do just a bit better. Even now, in 2011, we can't feed or house the world's population, nor provide all of it with clean drinking water, security or good health. Our planet can't sustain us now – yet by 2050 there will be an additional 2 billion people on Earth.

Many of you graduating today won't be content with just more of the same. Nor should you. The rest of us don't want you to be content with that either.

We all want you to apply your talents and your skills, your knowledge, to find new ways of doing things – better ways. Remember that it will be people with backgrounds like yours, with an education like yours that will discover what we need to do and use the new knowledge to yield many of the answers we need: good work in all the areas represented here today, and in the countries represented here; relevant work and ethical work that is transformed into products that will help human-kind to meet the challenges head on - and win.

One of the great things about graduations (and my best estimate is that this is close to my 150th so I do speak from experience) is that I have come away 150 or so times convinced that the world has a chance. Not just because they are happy and celebratory days; but because if you look closely you can see that the world, or parts of it, is in good hands. You see graduates with the hopes and the aims and the freshness to do good things. Graduates equipped to take us to new levels, as we search out what we are, why we are what we are, and how we got to be where we are. Indeed, that basic understanding is another of the great challenges of humanity – learning the very nature of things. And so, too, is taking what we have learnt and applying it for the benefit of humanity.

After 150 or so, I know that graduations ceremonies can go on a bit. So can the speeches. So let me leave you with three simple thoughts: be proud of what you have done and enjoy the fruits of your work; never forget the less fortunate or less privileged who need your knowledge and skills to improve their lot in life; and never stop believing in your values and in what you can do.

So I'll stop now – but I thank you sincerely for letting me share this day with you.