

Commencement speech,

American University in Kosovo,

26 May 2010.

Good afternoon President Hall, Ambassador Bill Walker, Chairman of the Board of Trustees and members of the Board, faculty, parents, friends and, most of all, good evening, the class of 2010. Let me extend my warmest congratulations on your graduation – and my thanks for allowing me to share this wonderful occasion with you. You have achieved your goal through hard work and a committed pursuit of your ambitions but also, as I am sure you know and appreciate, thanks to the support and sacrifices of your parents, family, friends and the AUK faculty and staff.

I am delighted to be back in Kosovo, the country in which I spent two of the most rewarding years of my life. I am often asked if I miss Kosovo. My answer is always yes - above all, I miss the great people of Kosovo. Being with you tonight, the class of 2010, who represent the future of Kosovo and of the region of Western Balkans, Europe and beyond is a confirmation of everything I believed in and worked for.

I am particularly happy to be back in a free and independent Kosovo. On my last day as SRSG on June 30, 2006, I addressed the Assembly of Kosovo and concluded by conveying my conviction that the people of Kosovo would soon realize their dream. We all knew that the dream was independence. The dignified and patient response by the peoples of Kosovo since the declaration of Independence to the regrettable confusion of international mandates, to the continued provocations of those who still refuse to accept the reality and to the formidable challenges of building a new democratic, prosperous and multiethnic Kosovo have confirmed the trust and confidence I always had in the maturity and dignity of the peoples of Kosovo.

It is fitting that we celebrate this day at an Institution, the American University of Kosovo, which brings to mind the decisive role the US played in bringing the conflicts in the region to an end and in supporting the road

to independence of Kosovo. The former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright talked about the United States as the “indispensable nation”. Indeed, the US has been absolutely indispensable in the political process that finally allowed the citizens of the Western Balkans to turn their back to conflicts and hatred provoked by reckless politicians and embark on the way towards a future of harmonious relations among people and among states.

Dear Class of 2010, you are graduating at an exciting time. You are the generation that can and should reap the harvests of the seeds of freedom that generations before you planted, cultivated, kept alive through struggles against all odds and at times almost insurmountable obstacles. Your ancestors did not have the opportunities or choices that you possess. As you look ahead, I think you have a right and almost an obligation to ask yourself: What will be my contribution to history? On this day, I want to make a plea that you see the pursuit of your own goals and interests in the larger context of serving the interests of your country. I am saying this because I do believe that it is noble to honor the debt that you owe to those who made freedom possible and those who helped you get to where you are today. We also know that your country understandably may be short on the kind of new talents required to build a modern European democracy and which you now bring to the task. But most importantly, I believe you owe it to yourself to put your talents, skills and ideas to a cause that is larger than yourself. I assure you that serving a larger good helps you realize your own potential and gives you a chance to play an important role in writing the next chapter in the history of your country and continent. You will find that enormously fulfilling and rewarding.

You graduate at a time when, almost automatically, you are also citizens of the world. The transport and communications revolutions have brought us all closer wherever we are. We are part of the same planet, the same threats, the same challenges and the same opportunities. There are, of course, those states and politicians who are worried about the challenges of interconnectedness, who believe that we as people are more different than we are similar and cling to outdated policies of separation that should have died with the end of the cold war. But those states and politicians are on the wrong side of history and will be left behind as the world moves on.

Class of 2010. Many of you are citizens of Kosovo and have every reason to be proud of that. And many of you are the proud citizens of other countries in the region of the Western Balkans and beyond. The European Union has on more than one occasion confirmed that all countries in the region have what is called a European perspective. Thanks to the skills

you have developed during the education at this prestigious University and on which you will no doubt build in your future aspirations, you will have the chance to help your countries move forward on their European journey. As such, by working hard you enjoy the prospects of being citizens of an enlarged European Union at some stage in your professional career and life.

As we know, there are those in Europe who are still querying whether further enlargement will strengthen or weaken the European Union. Such doubts about future enlargement are strangely at odds with the origins of the EU which began taking shape some 60 years ago when the European Coal and Steel Community was established as a precursor of the European Union. The immediate goal was to bind the two historically conflicting and powerful countries, France and Germany, into a process aimed at member states and citizens living and working together in a durable peace in a larger community of nations, a community built on friendly neighborly relations, tolerance of differences and pursuit of common goals of democracy, economic development and human rights. Having disastrously failed to prevent and stop the conflicts in the region of the Western Balkans in the early nineties, Europe must not repeat that mistake by hesitating or failing to deliver on the promise of a durable peace through membership for all countries in the region.

Being part of a globalized world and a larger Europe carries with it responsibilities not only to yourself and your country but also responsibilities for the welfare and progress of others. The contributions that you make by turning your country into a vibrant democracy, tolerant and open society built on the rule of law, and dynamic business environment will help to attract support and investments, producing jobs, prosperity and stability. Your contributions will also help in ridding the region of what is a mostly undeserved negative image of conflict, corruption and crime. I know the people of Kosovo particularly well and know that such images are unfair. I know that the virtues of the majority are paying the price for the greed of a few. You are the generation who can change this image once and for all. By doing so, you will also make sceptics in Europe realize that they need you just as much as you need Europe.

Class of 2010, Your graduation is a confirmation of your academic achievements. But education is not simply a matter of achievement. It is a vital step in preparing you for life and adulthood. As spelled out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education is also about understanding, tolerance and respect for others that are basic

underpinnings for peace in our world. It is only through respect, tolerance and friendship that we can value and reach out to each other and reach out across geographical, social and cultural divides and establish a fruitful partnership with other people, whether our neighbors or further away. This University with its 22 nationalities is a dynamic and living confirmation that we are all part of the same universe, that we share the same destiny and that it is only through working together that we can build the kind of future that we want for ourselves and for future generations.

Speaking about peace and universal human rights is also talking about the ideals of the United Nations. I was proud to represent the United Nations as SRSG in Kosovo and for that matter during an almost 30 years long career in the UN. Today, however, nothing pains me more than the hesitancy of some member states of the United Nations to recognize the reality of independence of Kosovo. I am sure that an organization built on the principles of justice and equality will correct this anomaly in the not too distant future and that one day soon the flag of Kosovo will be flying next to those of 192 other member states of the UN.

Since leaving Kosovo to rejoin my family in Washington DC, I have devoted a lot of time to teaching University graduate students. I have been driven by a keen desire to be challenged by young people with critically constructive views about today's world – its multiple and complex challenges and its amazing opportunities. I have been blessed by being stimulated by students with the curiosity to test new frontiers and the courage to query conventional wisdom and thinking. I have enjoyed sharing my experience with the students and I have realized that I get at least as much back as I put into preparing and engaging in class. In fact, I have realized that many of the students are smarter than me which should not have come as a surprise. It is because of my experiences with students from my own academic life that I have so much belief and confidence in you.

I have no doubt that you will enjoy these days and your achievements. You deserve it. But do not rest on your laurels. Your family expects you to work hard. Your country needs your service and contributions. The young supporters of the Obama presidential campaign often shouted the slogan: "...we are the generation we have been waiting for..." Class 2010 – you are the generation we have been waiting for. Now go out in the society and make a difference.

Let me conclude by paying tribute to the American University of Kosovo, its leadership, Board and staff who in just five years have built up a University

that enjoys international recognition and which plays an outstanding role in disseminating the good news coming out of Kosovo and the region. And let me, once again, convey my warmest congratulations to the Class of 2010 on your graduation and wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

Thank you.