

## **High School Graduation Speech June 6, 2008**

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Chairman of the Board of Trustees  
International School of Brussels

Ladies and gentlemen of the Class of 2008,

In this moment of pride for yourselves, your friends, your parents, your beloved ones, I bring to you a message of humility.

In a time of disintegration, of broken down values, of fragmented principles, I dare to call your attention to the holistic beauty of this moment.

It was only twelve years ago when you crossed the gates of this or another school, fearing the forsaken solitude of the interminable hours between that grudgingly uttered good bye and the sight of your mum or dad at the patio again at the end of the day.

It was probably just seven years ago when home work began to build up as a chore to be performed on a daily and grinding basis.

Three years have passed since you felt that the peak of achievement waited for you in the High School classrooms.

And here you are today, wondering what next.

There is pride in your eyes, there is hope in your hearts and there are plans for glory in your minds.

Pride, hope and glory are well deserved, and you must savor the moment, as the diver who jumps from the highest cliff.

However, neither pride or hope or glory is a good strategy. Being humble, focused and not seeking the credit will do a lot more to move you to the next level. The thrill of the jump and the coolness of the water are simple preludes to climbing the whole cliff back again, reaching the new peak with sweat and tears.

In a world of interminable wars, of terrorism-laden territories, of famine amidst incomparable wealth, you have been privileged to be exposed to the greatest of all diversities: That of cultures, habits, languages, attitudes and patterns of behavior. Very few schools in the world can boast the enormous diversity of nationalities to be found at ISB. Moreover, you are now a strong generation of multinational, and dare I say, transnational individuals, whose ability to cope with and celebrate diversity is second to none.

Tolerance and understanding are the most effective antidote to prejudice. Like a parachute, your mind functions better because it is open. Like an iPod, you carry in your heads a baggage of sounds and images that will shape the choices you will be making in the very near future.

However, nothing will replace your focus on your principles, your values, the ethical and moral ground where all great ideas flourish. Nothing will take away the need to look after your family, your friends, your health. Nothing will replace your need to be fair and just, understanding and courageous in the face of adversity.

Courage, my friends, is not the absence of fear. Only idiots have no fear. Courage is the mastering of it.

Master your fear, be humble, aim higher, live your dreams, be fair and just, remembering not solely where you are going but, particularly, where you came from and, one day, you will look at the

education you received in this great school of ours as a foundation upon which you built the greatest of all buildings: The building of your character within the frame of your integrity.

In the meantime, savor the moment and, as Mahatma Gandhi once said, be the change you want to see.