

2019 CONGREGATION
VALEDICTORY SPEECH BY KEITH OKO CLELAND
AT THE GREAT HALL, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON
THURSDAY, 14TH NOVEMBER, 2019

The Chancellor,
 Vice-Chancellor,
 Members of the University Council,
 Pro-Vice Chancellors,
 Registrar,
 Provosts of Colleges,
 Deans,
 Members of the College of Humanities Advisory Board,
 Distinguished Guest Speaker,
 Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
 Members of Convocation,
 Nananom, Nii Mei, Naa Mei
 Parents and Guardians,
 Fellow Graduands,
 Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning.

I deem it the greatest honour of my life to be selected to stand before you all to deliver the Valedictory Address for this morning's Congregation Ceremony. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to God Almighty, whose grace and favour abounds. To Him alone be all glory and praise for making this day possible.

In our primary school days, there was always one day we looked forward to the most; the day when we sat back to relax and reward ourselves for enduring an exhausting term. That was the famous "Our Day", and it was always a day of joy and laughter, food sharing and merrymaking. But then, the joy of those days is incomparable to what resonates through us this day as we celebrate the ultimate end of the academic path we embarked on about 22 years ago. Congratulations Class of 2019 and welcome to the greatest Our Day of our lives yet! This, indeed, is the day the Lord has made and we will rejoice in it.

We sit here together, not only in celebration of what we have accomplished, but also to reminisce on the journey we began together and reflect on its invaluable impact on each of us. There is a famous Chinese proverb that says, "千里之行，始于足下", which translates, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." My fellow graduands, our journey of 1,353 days as students on the hills of Legon began with one small step four years ago. Although we entered through the same gate, we embarked on vastly different paths with our own distinct expectations but we have all converged at the same finish line in celebration of our success story. We can confidently say that, by God's grace, we have fought the good fight, we have finished the race. Class of 2019, we made it!

It is only now that we stand across the finish line that we can look back with a set of different lenses and truly appreciate where we started from and what we have gone through just to sit here together. Notably, though many of us started this journey alone, we encountered strangers along the way who inspired us, who challenged us to be better

versions of ourselves, with some we broke bread, some shared in our struggles, and now, they have become friends who will be with us for life. We may have started alone, but we are certainly not leaving alone. We are leaving here as a strongly bonded, inter-connected body of networks and as better people, and we owe it all to this journey.

Indeed, it is the nostalgia of the beginning that immortalizes the experiences that live on in our hearts. We recall our anxiety from network jam while we tried applying for our first campus residences. We remember our first confusion when, in a desperate bid to find accommodation, some of us naively walked all the way to the Registry only to ask where the Porters Lodge was. We recollect our first university lecture in Jones Quartey Building (JQB) and our first rush to quickly register for University of Ghana Required Courses (UGRCs), where we come face to face with the almighty *modus ponens* and *modus tonens* of critical thinking, as well as Modern Language Association (MLA) and American Psychological Association (APA) referencing of academic writing. How can we forget our heart attacks when we checked our university exam results (MIS) for the first time?

As we progressed along the journey, the more we realized that this different world in which we found ourselves had changed our perceptions of what we thought we once knew. We had to adjust to this new environment which came with early morning lectures, some sleepless nights, group studies and the stress of meeting deadlines.

In more ways than we may care to admit, it was these challenges over the four years that shaped us and taught us invaluable life lessons; our capacities were stretched and we realized our full potentials. It is here, that our integrity was tested and we emerged as men and women of character and virtue. It is here, that we learnt to take charge of our own destinies. It is here on this journey, within the four walls of Legon, that we dreamt and imagined the future.

It is now here, finally at the finish line, as we look back in retrospect, that our hearts are filled with gratitude and appreciation. We thank this great world class University through whose gates thousands of celebrated and illustrious sons and daughters of Ghana and Africa have passed; many of whom have attained national and international accolades. Indeed, we are grateful to the hardworking staff of this University for the conducive and enabling environment availed us to pursue our academic dreams. We remain indebted to our lecturers, who inspired, challenged and trained us to become intellectuals worthy of the world. Fellow graduands, our wonderful lecturers deserve an applause.

Now, we wish to extend immeasurable gratitude from the depths of our hearts to our parents and guardians who raised, loved, nurtured, and inspired us in our challenges, who went to great lengths and beyond to ensure that our fees were paid, consistently provided allowances for our upkeep and spent years on their knees in prayer for us and still praying..... Our dear parents and guardians, we sincerely appreciate you more than you would ever know. Fellow graduands, let us rise to our feet and appreciate them with a resounding applause.

To my parents, Mr. Ramses & Mrs. Adelaide Cleland, words cannot express my immense gratitude to you. God richly bless you for being loving but very firm to bring out the best in me.

And now, let us, at this moment, with a short moment of silent prayer, show the greatest appreciation and thanksgiving to God Almighty for the many things that cannot be itemized.

Fellow graduands, we sit here at this Congregation, in celebration of our victory! But as we celebrate, let us not take for granted the quality of education that Ghana's Premier University has offered us. We must not forget that this is in no way the end, rather, it is just the beginning of the best chapter of our lives. The Chinese say: "走出学校的小门, 走进社会的大门." which means "We walk out of the small gates of school into the grand gate of society". The world, of which we have heard many things, awaits us beyond the walls of Legon. Though we may not know, for certain, what the world out there specifically holds for us, we are optimistic of the choices before us: to either accept it as it is, or to accept our responsibility to change it. And change it for better, with God, we shall!

In the immortal words of the late Robin Williams: "There have been others before you, they believed they were destined for great things just like you, and if you just listen, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you - Carpe Diem, seize the day!" Fellow graduands, we have never been alone. Many are they who have run this same race we have. They endured pain and struggles just as ours and at the end of it all, they sat on the same chairs you sit on today and wore the same gowns. Although they have long gone out before us, their immortal words of encouragement and hope resound on the hills of Legon to each and every one of us. If you listen carefully, you will hear them whisper their legacy to you - Carpe Diem, seize the day!

They want us to make our lives extraordinary; to ride on their legacy to greater heights and beyond. They stir us to dream big without fear of breaking the boundaries of our imagination. They inspire us with the words of Paul Brandt not to believe the sky is the limit when there are footprints on the moon. They encourage us with the words of David McCullough Jr to keep climbing, not so the world can see us, but so that we can see the world. They remind us that this is the time for the youth to plant the seeds of the future, because the world of tomorrow is in our hands. So let us seize the day, inspire change, push boundaries, and stand virtuous!

I will end with the words of Eleanor Roosevelt: "the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams". So, my fellow graduands, let us, as Les Brown said: "shoot for the moon and if we miss, we will be among the stars." Class of 2019, let us, together, move forward with focus and integrity and make our University, our nation Ghana, Africa and our loved ones proud.

God bless the Class of 2019! God bless the University of Ghana!! God bless our homeland Ghana!!!! Thank you.