Graduation Speech
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After so many sleepless nights, an immense amount of stress, and countless hours of discussion and debate, we have done it my precious friends! We hold a place in history as being the first graduating class of the Sanford School of Public Policy, Masters of International Development Policy, at Duke University!

I will try to give you a glimpse of the international perspective of studying development. Taking into consideration that our program consists of mid-career professionals, it was a bold step for all of us to leave our professional path and return to school. For us this program is more than an academic advancement. It is a combination of studying, learning from different cultures and experiencing the life in the US.

In fact, I would like to dedicate my remarks today to history, history that we have been so fortunate to witness. It is a rare opportunity when one can simultaneously learn and then implement what has been learned within the same time frame.

I would like this speech to be a tribute to the three historic milestones that we have witnessed during our 2 years at Duke, and the lessons we have learned together.

The first lesson is the lesson of CHANGE. We have learned this lesson well, while living here in the United States. This great nation has shown each of us that it is not a wounded eagle, but rather a phoenix which throughout its 234 year history, has been reborn more than once. We were all witnesses of November 4, 2008, a day when history was made, a time of worldwide political renaissance. This great county has taught us that there is always room for change, and more importantly, that change is the sweetest victory when it is achieved in peace and democracy. We learned that change does not have a color, race, religion or social status. It is best achieved from the bottom up, through grassroots mobilization and community organizing. This is something that all of our countries should bear in mind as we look to the future. We have learned that defeat should be accepted with dignity, because in development and peace, everyone is a stakeholder. We have also learned that in a true democracy, the voice of the people is the ultimate sovereign because it is what is most needed to achieve CHANGE.

The second lesson is the lesson of TRANSFORMATION. Transformation was taught to us by this great institution, by the change from Sanford Institute to Sanford School of Public Policy. We have learned that transformation is a collaborative effort. We learned that leaders who are motivated and have a clear vision for the future are the most crucial factor in transforming institutions. Sanford's faculty, staff, and students all contributed to achieving outstanding results. We saw the practical implementation of our academic lessons, how leadership, the responsible use of resources, and knowledge gained through stakeholders analysis and policy analysis, can achieve great things, can make history.

The third and most important lesson is the need to EXCHANGE IDEAS. And who provides a more supportive environment for the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences than the Duke Center for International Development (DCID) and the Masters of International Development Policy (MIDP) program. This institution and program produce history every year by teaching the worldwide mid-career professionals. By producing history every year, they have taught us that we learn best from each other. During these past 2 years, we were able to see that no matter what part of the world our countries are in, or how far apart we live, we all face similar challenges in terms of development and poverty reduction. Development is not a local or regional concern. It is a global concern that cannot be achieved without alleviating poverty. Whether it is a poor homeless person living on the streets of New York City, a poor immigrant in Miami, a poor farmer in Ethiopia, a poor scavenger from the slums of Mumbai, or poor war orphans and widows from Kosovo, they all face the same obstacles and have the same needs. They are all disenfranchised, disempowered, poor, and antagonized. And it is our duty, my dear friends, to all give our contribution and multiply our efforts in alleviating poverty and enabling
development. Moreover, this duty should be performed by international cooperation and by that exchange that we learned by each other, just as we did during our years in MIDP.

This amazing academic experience that we have had here prepared us to face the many challenges that exist in the world of international development. Remember my dear friends, that this is not the end, but the beginning of our lifelong mission to help in developing the world. We have to learn from the events which we have experienced here. All of our countries need the CHANGE which we witnessed from the first historic milestone, many of our institutions need to TRANSFORM as we learned from the transformation of Sanford Institute to Sanford School, and all this is best achieved by EXCHANGING the ideas, knowledge and experiences just as we have done in our program. Let's take this academic background and all of the lessons we have learned from witnessing history and make them work in our countries and in the international field by tailoring them to our specific environments.

On behalf of the entire MIDP class of 2010, I would like to express the most sincere gratitude, to the Faculty, Management and Staff of Sanford School, Duke Center for International Development and Masters of International Development Policy. I would also like to thank our families, spouses and friends who stood by us during these years. Dear Management, Faculty, Staff, Families and Friends, I strongly believe that we are and will be the best depiction of your endless support.

I would like to invite all students, families, friends and guests, who are here today, to give a round of applause to the Sanford School and to the students' hard work as a symbol of gratitude.

Faleminderit. Thank You

Selim Selimi