

Commencement Speech by PROF. DR. IQRAR A. KHAN (S.I.)**1st Convocation****MNS University of Agriculture, Multan****February 15, 2019**

My dear Vice Chancellors, Members of the Parliament, Civil Administration, Eminent Citizens, Distinguished Guests, Respected Members of the Syndicate, the Academic Council, Deans, Directors, Chairpersons, Faculty Members, Representatives of Media and Press, Proud Parents and My Dear Graduating Students

Assalam-o-Alaikum

It is my pleasant duty to extend deliberations on the occasion of first graduation ceremony of MNS University of Agriculture, Multan as a commencement speaker. To begin my submission, I wish to congratulate all students of the first graduating batches of this University and to their proud parents. I would also extend my gratitude to the faculty and administration of the university for offering me this rare honor and opportunity. The university community must be proud of this achievement. History is being made today!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Commencement speakers are usually celebrities and people of fame. When I received the invitation for this occasion, I was perplexed and unsure of fitting the bill as a Commencement Speaker. Because I am neither a celebrity nor a person of fame. I was mindful of the fact that a speaker in this position is supposed to entertain and inspire and one to whom people look up to.

I looked back, thought I have been associated with this place and this is a unique occasion, hence, I felt compelled to accept the invitation. And more so to enjoy the company of the honorable chancellor with whom I have fond memories of his first stint as Chancellor.

As some of you may have known the history of the creation of this university. I happen to have been the first convener of the steering committee and had the pleasure of serving as Vice Chancellor for nearly a year here. I take pride in mentioning how we went around to make this university functional. I believe the story of MNSUA does have an inspirational value for those of you who intend to take leadership positions. Just compare it with Ghazi University or UET next doors and you will find the difference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my duty as a commencement speaker I have chosen to share with you some of my very personal experiences and stories linked with commencement ceremonies. The events are not necessarily in a chronological order:

The year was 1978, and the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (perhaps it was still Lyallpur) decided to award Honorary Doctorate to Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, the only Nobel Peace Prize winner in Agriculture in year 1970. A special convocation was organized which was presided over by the then President of Pakistan, Ch. Fazal Elahi, who was himself an alumnus of that great seat of learning. Fortunately for me, the medal winners (position holders) of the past five years were also included in the ceremony to fill the house.

Back then the university (UAF) auditorium was not as yet ready and a small but impressive ceremony was held in the upper floor of the library. And being one of the medalists in the years 1974 and 1976, I shared the stage with the Nobel Laureate. There cannot be a better inspirational event. That was my first year as a lecturer and no looking back...obviously I can't be aspiring for a Nobel! But, the inspiring moments have remained alive till this day. I am still writing project proposals and doing free lancing for the cause of agricultural research and food security. There is hardly a week during the past 10 years that I have not travelled to Lahore or Islamabad or both. Absolutely no personal agenda.

I think it would be a befitting tribute to the agricultural research community of this country (who are usually bashed) if I briefly explain the work and contribution of Borlaug. Also, that shall have an inspirational value for the young minds in the audience who will take the future roles.

Ladies and gentlemen, that was year 1941/42 when the world was embroiled in WW2 and corn crop in Mexico failed successively for two years. Millions of Mexican died of famine that ensued and there was no one listening. The Rockefeller Foundation announced to sponsor someone who could go to Mexico and address the corn crop crises. That was a fungal disease epidemic killing the crop. Borlaug was a young plant pathologist working for the forest college in Idaho. He accepted the challenge and moved with his small belongings in a back pack. The Mexican government had nothing to offer except a lab in a small university town called Texcoco, about an hour away from Mexico City. I have seen the lab where Borlaug landed and stayed with his back pack for years to come. The lab now stands converted into a museum.

A breeding program was started to develop resistant varieties successfully preventing the future disease epidemics. He continued to expand his work on disease epidemics threatening the food security of the mankind. Coincidentally, in 1943 the famine of Bengal occurred which killed another million plus, but for different reasons than crop failure. That was a clear case of social injustice and greed very ably investigated by another Nobel Laureate, Amrita Sen.

And, then came the era of MexiPak after a near famine in 1966/67, right here in this country. I am sure Governor Sahib must have some memories of those days before his departure for Glasgow. In 1968 a Borlaug center was established which is now called as CYMMIT. It is the result of combined efforts of CIMMYT and other CGIAR centers that world is now 'largely' food secure. CIMMYT has an unlimited budget footed by Bill Gates, Warren Buffet and the like.

I have picked the word 'largely' on purpose. Because, despite a plenty of food on the earth, nearly a billion people are facing some kind of hunger. Close to

home, >20% of our population are underfed. Nearly 40% of women and children are malnourished. Stunting and Wasting are the crises that PM has mentioned in his maiden speech. There is no medical solution to these challenges. We have to make this country food secure in the true sense of its globally accepted definition.

Not only for today, imagine when in your time on this stage, there will be 350 million people to feed and clothe from the same or reduced land and water resources. Look at the responsibility that you have to come on terms with!

Boys and Girls, I am placing a challenge before you and ask you to prepare for that.

My next memorable commencement speech is that of the year 2013 at LUMS. The speaker was Dr. Adeb Ul Hassan Rizvi, the founder of Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplant. the sheer humility of a simple but determined man who has single handedly created a world class philanthropically run medical service. Dr. Rizvi said and I quote.. 'Health becomes a luxury when you don't know where your next meal is coming'. And, 'we cannot let them die just because they cannot afford to live'. That is an epitome of service to humanity. Though I wondered how many LUMS entrants would have taste for service. But, I do know that the founder of LUMS does. LUMS run an admissions program by the title of 'Outreach'. That is now being followed by SIBA. I happen to be a part of some of the events where the outreach admissions process was being marketed. And I shared my humble contribution of restarting the Pre-Agriculture program.

What is pre-Agriculture and outreach? This is a case for affirmative action and mainstreaming the disadvantaged. Don't forget whom you have left behind when you were lucky enough to have been educated here.

Now, I will share with you two experiences from California. Back in 1988 when I received my diploma, the ceremony was held on Father's Day. How good a tribute can be when the parents are sitting to watch their wards receiving degrees on the Father's Day...Once more congratulations to the parents.

In year 2014, I participated in the graduation ceremony of my daughter at the University of California, Berkeley. There were two commencement speakers, very unusual event. Theodore Olsen was the Bush's lawyer and David Boise was Al Gore's Lawyer. The court battle fought by these two guys has changed the world. I am not saying for good or bad, but it did. That was first time in the history of USA that the outcome of Presidential election was decided by the court in the year 2000. The two candidates had two different philosophies. Al-Gore was an environmentalist who was later awarded Nobel peace prize for advocacy on climate change. He produced a film titled "Inconvenient Truth". Had he won, the world would have been different than what we have today. George Bush Jr. who was declared victor, is a son of a former President George Bush Sr, a former head of CIA. What happened afterwards is still alive as a consequence of post 9/11 events. We have lost >75000 lives and faced an incredible cost of war which is still sparking.

My purpose of citing this unique experience here is that the audience sat in front of these two lawyers were law school graduates. The speakers spoke about their passion and practice. They talked about the roles and responsibilities of a lawyer. Listening the lawyers who have reshaped the world (one by losing and the other by winning), one could only be respectful to their professional commitment. That was a monumental message arranged by the university.

I wonder if in today's ceremony we can ignite the flare for leadership that can change the agricultural and higher education landscape in Pakistan? And, I believe we can!

I will stop sharing examples by giving a last one. A few years back at UAF convocation, we awarded honorary degrees to two Indian individuals with high contribution and standing in Agriculture and Rural Development. Prof. Swaminathan, a former DG of IRRI and Manohar Singh Gill, the former Election Commissioner of India. Gill gave an interview to TV anchor Talat Hussain which

was aired faithfully. Gill made a passionate appeal for an opening to Kartarpur. Today, kartarpur stands opened.

Dear Graduates, you will forget what you have studied but you will never forget the place and the moments spent here. The nostalgia shall live with you. Today is a new beginning. The test of success of the university lies in your successful future. We want to see you emerge as entrepreneurs, innovators and industry leaders. You have to become lifelong learners. Rise to the occasion as change makers for the realization of 4th Industrial Revolution.

Before I close, I want to say a few words on the state of higher education in general and agricultural research and education in particular. We have expanded horizontally and failed to improve the quality of output at large. Of course, there are a lot of good examples, but what about the general decay. I am witness to the baggage in the universities created by Nepotism, Ethnicity, Religiosity and Greed. A cure has to begin before it gets too late. And we hope under tutelage of the honorable Chancellor, universities shall be recognized as a community of scholars which is reflected in the selection of teachers and students and by their standards as judged by the peers.

And, I quote Walter Lipmann (1936) as '*A free university is one in which the selection of teachers and of studies reflects the judgement of scholars, is determined by their standards, and is independent of money, the mob and the political power of the state*'.

We have very high hopes from the present government and expect 'Change'. A change that can make higher education truly responsive to our national needs through quality education, research and outreach.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you all for your attention.