

EFFAT COLLEGE, JEDDAH

2015 GRADUATION SPEECH, MAY 3, 2015

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته :

قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى : (يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ)
صدق الله العظيم

يسرني ويسعدني جدا وجودي بينكم ، أشارككم فرحة نجاحكم وتخرجكم .

وإني لأشكر الأميرة لولوة الفيصل والأخت هيفاء جمل الليل وجميع منظمي
الحفل لدعوتي كي أكون معكم .. متمنية للجميع التوفيق الدائم والنجاح .

سألقي كلمتي باللغة الإنجليزية وذلك لأنها لغة التدريس في الجامعة .

Good evening Princess Lulwa, , members of the Board, members of the faculty and administration, distinguished guests the parents and friends of graduates and, most especially today, you - our daughters, our graduates.

I am very pleased to be back here at Effat College, the last opportunity that I had to speak with students being back in June of 2003. I must confess that I am always rather hesitant when asked to give a speech – for a couple of reasons: it does not come naturally to me, it is a lot of hard work and I have to burden my husband to help me with it! But this is a special occasion and there is also a selfish reason that draws me to do it.

And that reason is this wonderful opportunity to stand here and look at you and see the hope in your eyes - hope combined with the energy and the will to make a difference.

You - a diverse group of bright, talented and well educated women - give me cause for hope, for a brighter future.

And it reminds me that over 35 years ago I sat in your place, about to graduate from Cornell University in the US. I remember those were anxious times – we were anxious about where the world was headed, what we would face as we engaged with it and just generally what the future would hold.

It was the late 1970s. We had just gone through the turbulence of the 1960s when so much in the world had changed and was in a state of flux – politically, socially and culturally. We thought we had an understanding of what was going on, and more importantly we were full of hope that we could take on the world and would be able to change the things we did not like.

You too will be leaving university during turbulent times. I dare say even more politically turbulent than when I left university. Our region – the Middle East – is simply a mess ! Several countries in our beloved Arab world – Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen – have unfortunately become dysfunctional states....and we know how long and difficult it is to reverse that trend.

As a result of the turmoil in our region, we have a huge refugee problem. In many cases, the greatest adverse impact of that turmoil is on our youth. School is disrupted, basic daily needs are

not always met, families are torn apart and there is no normalcy or daily routine of any sort. This deprives these young people of hope, and without hope it is difficult for them to envision a brighter future. A lack of hope or vision of better days to come leaves a gaping void that is too easily filled by those wanting to exploit our youth.

A country in our region that I did not mention - but one that I would be amiss not to bring up - is Egypt - especially given the leading role that it has historically played in the Arab world. Egypt is struggling to get back on an even keel after its revolution and the subsequent turmoil, but with the determination of its people and leadership and financial support from the GCC countries and others, there is a renewed sense of hope in the country. And where there is hope, change is possible.

Let me digress and take a moment to share with you what I think is a great example from a recent visit to Egypt of the power of hope, and how simple it can be to offer someone hope.

I made the trip with a charity with which I am affiliated - AlFanar - that is actually the first venture philanthropy to be established in the Arab world. It works with local NGO's and

gives them financial and managerial support to enable them to become sustainable.

You may have heard the expression - "Buy a man a fish, you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish, you feed him for life."

Well, that is basically our philosophy. We focus on providing programs of instruction to enable poor, and oftentimes uneducated, men and women to earn a living and provide for themselves and their families. The sense of accomplishment that comes from doing that gives them dignity and hope, and from hope grows a vision - the vision of what a better future might be. And their accomplishment gives us an amazing sense of fulfillment as well.

Actually, there is a great example of how simple it can be to instill something as wondrous as hope in someone's life from my visit to Mina, a real poor village about a 3 hour drive from Cairo.

AlFanar supports a small operation there to teach women how to save and provide micro-finance to each other. They actually meet each week, put money in a lockbox and consider requests to borrow. Do you know what made a huge difference in one woman's life? Two hairdryers. She borrowed money to buy two hairdryers to expand her hairdressing business, and she

succeeded. She had such dignity as she was telling her story, such a sparkle in her eye – such hope.

Luckily, we here in the Kingdom have been spared the direct impact of all the turmoil around us. As I tell people with whom I speak abroad, the GCC is an oasis in the midst of what can be a very inhospitable environment.

But make no mistake, we do have our own specific set of challenges. Our population continues to grow, and as a result we have more young people - both male and female - unable to find suitable jobs. More and more of our oil is being consumed domestically, putting pressure on us both to rationalize our usage and to diversify our economic base.

In preparing for this speech, I went back and reflected on a speech I gave at the 2004 Jeddah Economic Forum, where I shared my vision for our beloved country. It was comforting to see that many of the challenges that we faced back then have been addressed by the government and the private sector. I remain optimistic that we will see even more progress, especially given the focus and energy displayed by our leadership.

And, the point that I will continue to reiterate is that hope underpins vision.

In my case, it leads me to have even greater confidence today that we can achieve what continues to be my vision for Saudi Arabia:

My vision is of a country with a prosperous and diversified economy in which any Saudi citizen, irrespective of gender, who is serious about finding employment, can find a job in the field for which he or she is best qualified, leading to a thriving middle class, and in which all Saudi citizens, residents or visitors to the country feel safe and can live in an atmosphere where mutual respect and tolerance exist amongst all citizens, residents and visitors, regardless of their social class, religion or gender.

Why that vision?

Because I believe that with tolerance - which comes from the right education and guidance, with opportunity - which usually comes from a thriving economy, with a closing of the gender gap and with a closing of the economic gap, we can address many of the root causes of the problems that led to the turmoil in the region. Problems that when not addressed leave people without much hope, allowing them to be easily exploited by

others, including Al Qaeda and ISIS and other extreme organizations.

Like it or not, this is the state of the world outside the walls of this fine institution and those are the challenges that you will face. I certainly do not want to frighten you or dampen the mood of this joyous occasion. Actually, I would not share these views with you if I did not think you were equipped to take on these challenges. You certainly are.

So what does it take to address them?

It takes givers, not takers.

It takes socially conscious and responsible individuals.

It takes thinkers and doers.

It takes strong determined leaders.

And... as Robert Kennedy once said when trying to energize young Americans in the 1960s to address the causes of great social inequalities in the US at that time – it takes people who do not just see things as they are and ask why, but people who see

things as they could or should be – who have a vision of something better – and ask why not?

You – our daughters and our graduates – are such people.

And, tonight, be grateful – to Effat College, to your professors, to those who challenged and pushed you and to your parents for seeing the value in having you attend one of the best female colleges in the Kingdom.

Effat and the education that you received here puts you in a position to think critically, to make a difference – to ask why not?

And you can do that – regardless of the life choices you make.

The world today is different than the one I entered after business school - the whole world is much more interconnected today, life moves quicker, we can communicate more quickly and more freely, and we are bombarded 24/7 with tons of information and data.

But that alone does not make any of us smarter or better equipped. The ability to process that data and to think critically and put it in proper context and perspective is the skill set that will be critical today. To see patterns, the relevancy, the impact

and the real value of all that data and information - that is what will make the difference.

Today everybody knows a little about a lot. That is not good enough.

Today's leaders must have the ability to know what information to seek and from which source, and to then sift through it all and figure out what is really relevant to the task at hand.

When you hear or read something, never just accept it at face value - think critically. And always remember that information, data, numbers, statistics are all easily manipulated – there is no better example of that than the mis-information campaign that led to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. It is not good enough that years later – after all the damage is done – that people acknowledge having been dreadfully mistaken.

There should have been more people in the US thinking critically at the time and challenging the data and the message.

These skills and leadership qualities are important in your lives no matter what you end up doing.

So let me turn my attention back to the life choices that you have, as a group of bright and well-educated young women.

You hopefully already know it, but I have some good news – things have really changed here in the Kingdom since the time I graduated from university. You have a lot of choices and opportunities. You can choose to be mothers, executives, professionals, artists and/or entrepreneurs – and they are not mutually exclusive. I understand that there are even engineers amongst you. – that is a field that women certainly were not entering in my time.

But there is one skill you will all have to develop, no matter what you choose to do – and that is the skill of juggling. Maybe we can suggest that Effat offer a course in it!

What do you have to juggle?

Possibly a career, marriage, family, children, social obligations and societal norms - all important, all demanding and many unavoidable. To be a really good juggler you will have to perfect, or in some cases quickly develop, the ability to prioritize and multi-task.

Please do not misunderstand me, men have to do that as well, but I believe the pressures are a bit greater on women. Which is

fine, since - and I will now ask the men listening to me through the screen to please excuse my bias - but I do believe that women are naturally better at it!

More importantly, though, I believe that having to do this has a great side benefit. Consider the elements of successful juggling

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the discipline,

the thought processes,

the perspective involved in establishing priorities and striking an appropriate balance, and

at the same time the art of often making what others may have seen as impossible, possible.

All these skills are just as important in trying to address our political and social issues in the Kingdom, the region and the world as they are in maintaining peace and happiness at home amongst the family.

And that got me thinking about what other skills or personal attributes are important in life, whether in relation to your personal life, your career or your attempt to be socially

responsible. As I reflected on those people I met of different nationalities and from different walks of life who really positively impact lives and make a real difference, I do think there are a common set of skills and personal attributes amongst them. Let me share some of those with you:

First, a **passion** - a real desire to do something and do it well – something that gets you out of bed in the morning, something you are looking forward to immersing yourself in wholeheartedly.

Second, a **vision** - seeing what one wants to achieve and what is necessary and sufficient to get there.

Third, a **work ethic** – a willingness, even an eagerness flowing from passion, to work long and hard to achieve the vision and to overcome obstacles. But I also think you need to work hard, and play hard, in order to recharge your batteries.

Fourth, **thinking outside the box** – seeing what could be and asking why not? Not accepting “no” or “impossible.”

And this leads naturally to the **Fifth** - **entrepreneurship** – spotting and taking advantage of opportunities. And seeing through challenges and converting them into opportunities. It is probably no coincidence that north of here up at KAUST, where the focus is on scientific research and innovation, there is a special program to nurture entrepreneurship. Think about it – many of these attributes that I am describing are what lead to scientific discovery and innovation.

Sixth, integrity – absolutely a key attribute – people need to trust you, to respect you and to rely on your word.

Seventh, listening skills – the ability to actually take on board what someone is saying and then process it and develop, if necessary, a response. My father – God rest him – always told me that he never met a person and never had a conversation from which he did not learn something.

Eighth, intellectual honesty – the ability to be self-critical, to think objectively about an issue, to view it from different perspectives and to divorce the analysis from personal biases and agenda.

And now, finally, **Ninth** – what I refer to as “**being comfortable in your own skin**” – not trying to be someone else – not envying

anyone – of course we try to improve ourselves – but we also need to be able to laugh at oneself.

Effat has given you the opportunity to develop your technical skills and perhaps to develop some of these attributes as well, but now it is really up to you to nurture and grow them. And to model them for others, especially your children.

Now is an ideal opportunity, as you make career choices, to look for a mentor or role model.

Make no mistake – there will be challenges and hard times ahead, and they will often arise at the most inconvenient time. Do not be afraid – take calculated risks and especially do not be afraid to make mistakes or to try something and fail – so long as you learn from them and do not repeat them.

Believe me, I have made plenty of mistakes, and I have failed many times. I certainly did not enjoy it, but I learnt much more from my mistakes and failures than from my successes. I firmly believe that what does not break one makes him or her stronger.

Now is your time – go out there and make a difference - for your country, for our region, for the world.

You **can** make a difference.

You **must** make a difference.

And I will now end with an Aya from the Holy Quran:

وأخيرا أذكركم ونفسي بقوله سبحانه وتعالى :

(إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ)

صدق الله العظيم

Which means - indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.

Thank you very much.