

University of Guam Graduation Address

By

President Emanuel Mori

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(recognition of dignitaries present)

(I want to share a secret. When I received the invitation to speak at this graduation ceremony I could not help but recall those seemingly endless lectures that I sat through, not without pain by (pause), well, better not mention any names. But knowing that lots of professors will be at this event, though not those of yesteryear, I now have a chance to get even.)

The Honorable Dr. Robert Underwood and your Board of Regents, Faculty and Staff, my fellow graduates, ladies and gentlemen; it is indeed an honor and a privilege for me to address this Graduating Class of 2009. I bring to you warm and heart-felt congratulations from the government and the people of the Federated States of Micronesia. You wouldn't know how happy I am to be here today celebrating this important milestone in your lives with all of you; fellow graduates, your parents and your friends.

It is with deep humility that I express my sincere gratitude to President Underwood and to you, the Graduating Class, for according me this rare privilege as the President of the Federated States of Micronesia to stand before you.

With your indulgence, I would like to greet the FSM citizens who are in the audience and those that may be listening; "Kulo, Kaselehlie, mogethin, rananim." On our collective behalf I would like to express my sincere "Si yuus mase" to the people and government of Guam for being such gracious hosts in receiving us into their homeland so that we are able to take advantage of the many opportunities available here, but most especially, in education.

I am delighted to know that most of you, my fellow citizens, are contributing in one way or another to the community and economy of Guam. Let me ask each one of you to try even harder, in the future, for the benefit of both the FSM and Guam.

Ladies and gentlemen, you will agree with me that this institution's first and foremost purpose is the pursuit of academic excellence, and to that end, please join me in congratulating and applauding the outstanding graduate and valedictorian Kristine Delos Reyes (applaud). To each and every student who is graduating here today, I congratulate you for taking the high road and for completing your own arduous journey.

Let me assure you that upon setting foot outside these academic premises, a new reality will set in. Unfortunately, the current reality has some pitfalls for all of us, because our world is currently centered in an economic downturn that is unprecedented in modern times.

The United States is engaged in two warfronts at enormous human and financial costs. Global efforts to stabilize world trade are stalled. And in our region, climate change is eating away the valuable shorelines of Guam, Micronesia and beyond while manufacturing

more frequent and deadlier typhoons for the future. Meanwhile escalating prices of food and fuel are threatening food security for many.

Graduates, I am happy to be able to say that all is not gloom and there is a silver lining in our seemingly dark situation. Indeed, Guam has entered upon a new frontier, a frontier of opportunity as the United States is significantly increasing its military presence on Guam.

This will create thousands of jobs and business opportunities for all of our people; a frontier of change championed by President Obama himself that has already inspired hope and optimism not only in Americans but in millions around the globe. For instance, President Obama's decisive action in confronting the global economic crisis---an astounding \$800 billion economic stimulus package is already helping peoples' lives, including many here in Guam. Furthermore his proactive approach to climate change and the environment gives us hope for positive changes in our world.

This is but a glimpse of the land you are about to enter---it is no Garden of Eden, but it is a land of real opportunity awaiting you.

Graduates, you now have the opportunity to step up to the plate to help fill the dreams of your forefathers; that of a life of dignity underpinned by a better standard of living that is in harmony with nature. Each of you must strive to put your personal stamp on the vehicle for social, economic and political development of our region. You must also look beyond the shores of Guam for opportunities and competition, for our world has become one global economy.

Happily you and I know that our islands are endowed with vast marine resources. Although our islands are relatively small and isolated, together, our geographic location provides us with a strategic value of considerable proportion. However, our most precious and valuable resource is our human resource---you, the young people; the graduates.

The promise and hope of these islands rest upon your shoulders. Having been endowed with a wealth of knowledge and sustained discipline by the University of Guam, you must look within yourself to answer the call of your forefathers. Development comes from within, for indeed determination and will power can move mountains.

The University has enriched your mind and enabled you to build self-confidence. Your attitude and your work ethics are your passports to a successful future or a life of interminable want.

We live in a free and democratic society. The choice is yours. I am confident you will make the wiser choice.

In this connection, the University of Guam has brought each of you to the doors of opportunity of your choosing; be it on Guam or elsewhere in our globe. In point of fact, the university has trained a considerable number of remarkable leaders in government, business and civil society; many of whom are here on Guam and in the neighboring islands of the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Marshalls and Micronesia. And while I may not be a fitting example, I am a proud product of this fine institution for which I am continuously grateful.

Therefore I dare say to you graduates, the university has prepared you well to be productive members of your respective families and communities.

On your behalf and mine, I wish to register our profound gratitude to the past Presidents and to our current President, Dr. Underwood, and also to the faculty and staff of the University of Guam for providing us with the sound academic footing and discipline we need to face the real world.

Moving forward from today, I would like to ask the University to continue to expand its commitment on issues that are unique to the Micronesia region.

Guam's growing commitment to support the Micronesia Center for a Sustainable Future, an initiative sponsored by the Chief Executives of Micronesia, is a very strong step in that direction.

With this facility, we can move forward with greater sub-regional cooperation and coordination. Together we can make this Center a reality in the next two years.

I would like to take a moment to focus just a bit more on climate change---and I do so because it is arguably today's most serious threat to mankind and it touches literally all facets of life in our island communities.

Science has ascertained that, sad to say, mankind has in fact contributed to the root cause of climate change, but happily, mankind can halt and reverse climate change if it takes action now.

The harmful effects of climate change are already felt in our islands and they are likely to get worse. Global warming is upsetting island ecosystems, causing catastrophic land erosion, and damaging stable food crops.

Left unchecked, climate change will obliterate most of our coral atolls islands from the face of the earth. In my estimation therefore, this university can and should lend a helping hand not just to Guam but to the larger Pacific region as well to help face the challenges posed by climate change.

The University should also put more effort into producing scientists skilled in identifying and containing health hazards and environmental pollutions since health is another key sector that must be improved upon.

In short, I am suggesting that this university places greater emphasis on the challenges produced by global warming and focus on practical ways to empower communities and the private sector in our islands to help us adapt to and combat climate change. I have focused today primarily on climate change for a practical reason. With climate change worsening, just about every program worth working for under health, education, and economic development will become useless.

I therefore challenge you, today's graduates, to take on climate change as the priority challenge of your generation. It requires sustained and persistent efforts. It requires determination and an enlightened mind. You can hold climate change in check and reverse it. I am confident the university has enabled you to measure up to the challenge. It is your call.

Once again, congratulations! May God bless each and every one of you and guide you in your chosen career.

I thank you all.