
CHAIRMAN GRADUATION SPEECH 2024

Bismillah-ir Rahman ir-Rahim

Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan

Patrons of the University, their excellencies President Rahmon of the Republic of Tajikistan, President Japarov of the Kyrgyz Republic, and President Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The Honourable Minister of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, Dogdurkul Kendirbaeva

The Honourable Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Tajikistan, Saidzoda Rahim Hamro

Honourable Governor of Khorog, Alisher Mirzonabotov

Honourable Governor of Naryn, Altynbek Ergeshov

Members of the Board of Trustees

Acting Rector Christopher Gerry

Dean Maxim Khomyakov

The Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences

Parents, family members, honoured guests,

And the stars of today, the Graduates of the Class of 2024

As-salaam alaikum

Good morning.

To you, the graduates. It is an honour and privilege to stand before you today as we celebrate this significant milestone in your lives. Today marks the culmination of years of hard work, dedication, and perseverance.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of Central Asia, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to each one of you. I also convey our sincere appreciation to the Chancellor, and to the Patrons of the University, the Presidents of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Republic of Kazakhstan, for their valuable support. Our gratitude goes to the Ministers of Education and Science of the three Founding States, and the Governors and Mayors of Naryn, Khorog, and Tekeli for welcoming UCA into their communities.

Today, we acknowledge the outstanding efforts of the Acting Rector, faculty, management, staff, and volunteers in educating these exceptional young women and men. This is an important moment to express our heartfelt appreciation to the families of the graduating class. Your unwavering commitment to both your children's education and the vision and mission of this University has been instrumental in this journey. Thank you for your tremendous support.

UCA was established with the vision of providing world-class education, fostering critical thinking, and nurturing leaders who will contribute to the region's social and economic development. From the moment you were selected to join this institution, our goal has been to cultivate your growth in leadership, intellect, and personal development.

And as I see your excited faces before me, my confidence grows. In your eyes I see passion. I see the spark of hope and unbridled idealism.

I see the capacities of resilience and adaptability – capacities you have already demonstrated, but qualities of which the world is in desperate need.

I see a respect for and belief in the power of pluralism – the understanding that when difference is welcomed, encouraged, and seen as a source of strength, we bring out the best in each other and in society.

Your time here has provided you, I hope, with an informed acquaintance of your chosen field. You have, through UCA's core curriculum, been introduced to literature, the arts, philosophy, and the study of knowledge and its various ethical expressions. You have, through UCA's coop programme developed tangible technical skills in your chosen professions. And you have formed the foundations of what I hope will be lifelong friendships.

Overarching all this is UCA's mission to cultivate inspired and ethical leadership to drive positive change.

Leadership is a theme that lies particularly close to my heart, and I will leave you with three observations from my own experience.

The first is that leadership requires an ethical framework, or alignment with a strong value system. True leadership is not defined by titles, status, or financial success but by the ability to inspire, to make a positive impact, and drive change. In your lives you will face circumstances that require you to navigate complexity, and ambiguity, but in your pursuit of excellence do not forsake the ethical orientations which have been instilled in you here, the values of compassion, respect, and integrity. In our interconnected but rapidly shifting world, these values will be an anchor of stability.

The second is that leadership is not a solitary endeavour. It involves empowering others, fostering collaboration, and enabling an environment of success and fulfilment. His Highness the Aga Khan has emphasized the importance of ethical leadership, stating, "A secure pluralistic society requires communities that are educated and confident both in the identity and depth of their own traditions and in those of their neighbours." As UCA graduates, you will be catalysts for change.

The third is that leadership is a journey, not a destination. It requires continuous learning, self-reflection, and adaptability. Be open to new ideas, seek diverse perspectives, and never stop learning. The world needs leaders who are compassionate, empathetic, and committed to creating a better future for all. Whether you choose to lead in your workplace, your community, within Central Asia, or internationally, your actions and words have the power to inspire and uplift others.

UCA has provided the foundation, and you must forge the path forward.

Next year, the University of Central Asia will celebrate its Silver Jubilee, marking 25 years since its establishment. As we reflect on our journey, we anticipate a future filled with promise and continued growth. And as we look forward, I want to conclude by looking back. It is only by examining from where we have come, that we will know where we are headed.

During the opening ceremony of this campus in Naryn in 2016, UCA's Chancellor His Highness the Aga Khan reflected, that "students of world history remind us how Central

Asia, a thousand years ago, led the world in trade and investment, in urban development, in cultural and intellectual achievement. This was the place that leading thinkers from around the known world would look to for leadership. What were the latest breakthroughs in astronomy or mathematics, in chemistry or medicine, in philosophy or music? This was the place to find out. This region is where algebra got its name, where the earth's diameter was precisely calculated, where some of the world's greatest poetry was penned. Why did this happen then? Why did it happen here? Above all, I would suggest, it was because of the quality of "openness." By that I mean openness to new ideas, openness to change, and openness to people from many backgrounds and with a variety of gifts."

Graduates you are Central Asia's gifts to the world today. Leave here with your heads held high. Lead with integrity, innovate with purpose, and act with compassion. The future is yours to shape, and I am confident that you will do so with distinction.

Congratulations and thank you.