

Occasional Address University of South Australia graduation ceremony Tuesday 26 September 2023

Presented by the Honourable Hieu Van Le AC

Chancellor Pauline Carr;

Acting Vice Chancellor, Professor Marnie Hughes-Warrington AO;

Members of the Official party and Academic staff;

Graduands, their families and friends;

Distinguished guests all.

I acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the Kaurna people and that we respect their spiritual relationship with the land.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I stand before you today, deeply humbled and grateful, as I accept this prestigious honour from the University of South Australia.

My sincere appreciation goes out to this esteemed university, renowned for its unwavering commitment to excellence, innovation, and a progressive approach to education.

Growing up in a culture that revered education, where scholars were held in highest regard, I was instilled with a profound respect for knowledge.

This award holds immense personal significance for me on multiple levels.

Though many years have passed, the memories of my wife and I's harrowing journey in a small, overcrowded wooden boat with 40 other refugees arriving in this country remain etched in my mind.

Our perilous voyage took several weeks on the open seas, during which we suffered horrific monsoonal storms, witnessed the eruption of a volcano, and endured constant hunger and thirst. There were times when it seemed beyond reason that we would survive.

Then on an early morning in November 1977, fate smiled upon us when our battered boat landed in Darwin Harbour. After a quarantine period, we were flown to Adelaide.

We arrived here a group of exhausted and ragged-looking people after a long tortuous journey, but amazed and excited with a prospect of beginning a new life in a new country.

As a young refugee in this foreign land, I discovered that my studies for an economics degree from Vietnam were not recognised, prompting me to return to university and start all over again. This decision was the one that I never regretted.

During my time at the campus, I immersed myself in the rich tapestry of the university experience. I delved into Australian history, embraced the arts, observed the intricacies of Australian politics, social dynamics, and immersed myself in the new culture.

I made lifelong friends, honed my English language skills, delved into the world of cricket and Aussie rules footy, and even learned how Australians enjoy their beer.

Completing my degree was not just an academic achievement but also an orientation to Australian life, which I thoroughly enjoyed and cherished profoundly.

As we settled into our new life here, from desperation at the beginning, hope gradually emerged, and this hope paved the way for dreams. Dreams that continue to inspire me every single day. The rest, as they say, is history!

To the Graduands,

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to each of you, as you reach this significant milestone – the culmination of years of dedication, hard work, and perseverance. And I am privileged to share this important moment with you today.

Your degree signifies not just academic achievement but also the vast potential that resides within each of you. The University of South Australia has always stood as a beacon of knowledge, innovation, and excellence. It has nurtured generations of intellectuals, trailblazers, and visionaries who have left an indelible mark on our society.

We are proud to be associated with an institution that continually pushes boundaries, challenges conventions, and fosters intellectual curiosity.

Graduation is a moment for reflection, a time to ponder the journey and the obstacles overcome. It's also a time to acknowledge the invaluable support from family, friends, mentors, and all those who have believed in us. Today, as we celebrate your achievements, let us contemplate the transformative power of education.

It's not just about acquiring knowledge – it's about cultivating critical thinking, challenging the status quo, and seeking solutions to the many pressing global issues. Education empowers us to shape our destinies, break barriers, and create a better world for all.

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and global interconnectivity, we face complex challenges – from climate change to social inequality, from global pandemic and technological disruption to military conflicts. Each of you possesses the power to be a catalyst for change.

Embrace this responsibility, for the world hungers for your innovative ideas, your passion, and your commitment to making a difference. As you embark on this journey of impact, remember that true success lies not only in personal achievement but also in one's ability to uplift and inspire others. Let us strive to be compassionate, ethical leaders who champion inclusivity, diversity, and social justice.

May our collective journey be filled with purpose, fulfilment, and an unwavering dedication to making a positive impact on the world.

Thank you.