



SPEECH OF ELAISA VAHNIE

AT VIRTUAL CELEBRATION & RECOGNITION FOR CLASS
OF 2020 FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES OF MYANMAR
ORIGIN IN THE USA

JOINTLY HOSTED BY THE MYANMAR STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONAL
NETWORK USA AND THE BURMESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

JUNE 11, 2020

Greetings all of you, Class of 2020!

It is an honor and a privilege for me to stand here and say a few words in celebration and recognition of your accomplishments!

First of all, I would like to make sure that you know that more than 300,000 Burmese Americans and all our friends across the United States are celebrating with you, standing with you, and applauding you for your outstanding academics and the many accomplishments that you have achieved! At the same time, they believe in you that you are the best, that you offer the best solutions, and that you are the best future for them and bring hope for everyone! Because:

You are going to be part of the 21st century global workforce:

Today, some 2,000 of you, Burmese Americans of Myanmar origin, have just graduated from your High School. As you begin thinking about your next chapter, we know that some of you will be attending some of the greatest and best colleges and universities across the nation. But did you know that 90% of those that came before you in the class of 2018 and 2019 actually enrolled in college, doing better than any other demographic in the United States? Can we expect, or ask of you, that you will do even better than your previous classes by every one of you planning on going to college this FALL? Let me tell you this: all universities in the US—public, private and community colleges—offer a great and high quality education.





Don't feel let down if you didn't get into the school you preferred to go to, nor allow financial reasons, or any reasons to stop you from continuing your higher education. The higher education system in this land of freedom and opportunity has been designed in a way that it is financially possible for everyone to attend college through utilizing the opportunity you have been given, either scholarships, grants or student loans, and so forth.

All community colleges in the US offer a good quality of education at an affordable cost. May we also ask those who have not decided to go college to decide today that you will go to college no matter what, so that you will be able to ultimately be a part of the 21st century global competitive workforce as a productive global citizen of the rapidly globalizing world.

You are our leader:

You have led yourselves not only to this success—and this was not an easy path nor a short one— you travelled thousands of miles, facing various difficult situations, sometimes dangerous ones. But you overcame all of these obstacles, while you also brought with you a unique strength, resiliency, and understanding of your own background of diversity, complexities, and ethnicities. As you began your academic journey in the United States, that situation was likely compounded by the fact that you did not speak English or your English was not yet good enough, or you didn't look like others. But you know exactly who you are, where to go and that you stand on the principles of equality, diversity, respect and dignity. But you also know that you can even lead us all to a better place as an agent of change, consistently and fully recognizing those challenges but standing with facts and truths. You, as a leader understand the issues rights here, right there, clearly see the opportunity for change by knowing your responsibility to think and to think responsibly, but also by taking action upon what you know is right, because the right things are for the greater good of our shared society, consistently with a clear vision. And I know in that process, you will bring diverse group of people together regardless of your ethnicities, nationalities or religion beliefs—weather you belong to Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Shan, Rakhiane or Bamar, or any other groups, or whether you are big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor— treating everyone the same and equal with recognition, appreciation and respect,





but I also know that with your knowledge and experience you will pull and transform all types of resources whether it be intellectual resources, monetary resources, your network capitals, or social capitals to redirect and recycle them to achieve the common goals set regardless of your personal, professional, party-line or ethno-linguistic-religion differences.

So you are our future, right there:

You are our future because you will change the world by becoming a blessing not only for your family, your community, for others and yourselves, but for everyone.

In fact, you are also our hope:

You are our hope, the best hope that your parents have, the best hope that your community has. And the fact of the matter is you offer the best hope for democracy, freedom, peace and prosperity for your motherland.

As long as you are determined to get an education, prepared to lead, and look to the future, you will bring countless successes not only for you, but for the community you love and the world you want to make a better place to live. But let me also make sure I say this to you, too: never take things for granted, remember your roots, at the same time, dream big because what you think and dream is what you become, make sure you follow through this dream with resolution, then you are there and we are here to follow you. And we all will be there together in a win-win. Now may I request from you one thing and only one: will you make a commitment today that you will visit Burma/Myanmar—whichever part of the country that might be—at least one time in your college years? I can promise you that if and once you do that, you will become a stronger person. I am excited to think about what is possible for your future, so go on, approach everything before you with respect, be confident, you are our leader, our hope and our future.

Congratulations and God bless you!

