

HJ International Graduate School Peace and Public Leadership: Sakena Yacoobi's Commencement Address

Thomas G. Walsh
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Dr. Sakena Yacoobi was the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate during HJI's 2025 Commencement Ceremonies held on May 231 at 4 West 43rd St. Dr. Yacoobi is the Educator and Founder of the Afghan Institute of Learning, and former recipient of the Sunhak Peace Prize.

What follows is the Commencement Address of Dr. Yacoobi.

First of all I would like to thank some special people, Dr. Reverend Moon and Mother Moon, because if they were not there, none of us would be here. I really appreciate their efforts and their leadership. Second, I would like to thank another special individual who has touched my life and who has changed my life, Dr. Walsh, the president of this university. Also, I would like to thank all of the board of the trustees, every one of the academic professors, colleagues and above all, all of you graduates. Thank you for all your hard work and your efforts, and I congratulate you for 2025.

It is you that is going to make this world a beautiful place. It is you that is going to transform lives. It is you that is going to bring peace.



Let me tell you, peace is something that we can all bring together collectively. As an individual, no one

can bring peace. We can bring peace in a nation, and in the world, just if we all work together side by side, without prejudice, without resentment, without thinking of our different religions, or different ethnic groups. Through our religions, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or whoever we are, script has taught us that every religion has something in common - To be good, to be a good human being, and to reach out to each other. I really want to tell you one thing about this university. The people who are here, and the founders of this university, are an excellent role model for us. As a role model, you can do so many things in this world.



I just want to tell you a little bit about my program. If I could change 14 million people's minds. If I could change 2 million children and mother's lives, while I am a very little individual, can you imagine what you could do? You are highly educated. You have a master's degree or are receiving a doctorate degree. This degree is putting more responsibility on your shoulder. Yes, it's wonderful to graduate, but the more education we get the more responsibility we have. We have ethical responsibility, we have moral responsibility, we have family responsibility, and we have citizenship responsibilities. These are the responsibilities that are on our shoulders to carry for the people of the next generation.



As Mother Moon told us, we are all one family. We are under God's one family. We are all sisters and brothers, and we have responsibility for each other - to reach out and to help each other.

When I started working in Pakistan in the refugee camp, a lot of people asked why I chose education. I said, "I'm an educationalist." I believe that education must be a special curriculum developed for different cultures, ethnicities, and peoples. If we adjust our curriculum according to one's culture, religion, nation, and status, that will help people to transform. We want to include critical thinking in curriculums. Critical thinking is a very serious tool that makes us think and ask questions - Who am I? Why am I here? For what purpose did God create me?

What am I supposed to do in this world? These are questions that make a person whole.

Dr. Walsh and one of our colleagues said that we are taking a holistic approach. Yes, a holistic approach means that we are studying human beings from all directions. When we talk about all directions, what we mean is education, health, poverty, and status. Nothing is wrong with being rich, and nothing is wrong with wellbeing. But how are we using that money? How are we going to change a country with what we make?

When I started talking to Mother Moon I learned a lot from her. Dr. Reverend Moon and Mother Moon were not greedy individuals. They were thinking about the whole world. They admit that their mission is for you and I to have a better life, for you and I to be a bridge between the poor and the rich. That shows you that Mother Moon and Reverend Moon really had a fantastic mission. Now it's up to us if we are going to accomplish that.



Dr. Sakena Yacoobi with Members of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Franco Famularo and Rev. Demian Dunkley

They didn't tell us it's going to be easy, and I am not going to tell you it's going to be easy. You, graduates, know that studying and getting this degree wasn't easy, but you have a long way ahead to go. You will face many challenges as a leader. As somebody who is going to work with the public, God chose you to be patient, to have wisdom, and to continuously go after your objective. And our objective is to make a difference, to be a good human being, and work on the concept of humanity.

I really appreciate you being here and you getting this degree, but I would really like to say first of all, thank you to every one of your family for supporting you and to help you to get here. Because again, if we don't have the family together, if we don't have the support of family, if we don't have the encouragement from the family, it would be very hard to accomplish what we are after. Thank you to all the families for being there.

Also remember the pillar is to have your religion. Your religion is a pillar that you can hold on to and it will make you continuously grow and learn. God is the only one that can help you to achieve your success. And for that purpose, again, Mother Moon and Father Moon gave us a great concept. They said that "we are all one family." Family is a very important part of our lives and religions. God can help us to

be supportive of each other, to reach out our hand to the other one who is unreachable.

Today in the world there is war everywhere. In my country it has been 45 years since the war in Afghanistan. You all know what's going on in Afghanistan. You all know that women of Afghanistan are living in a person sort of. They cannot go outside, raise their voice, or go to university. They cannot learn. And you imagine if a mother is not educated, how can their children be educated? A mother is the main source of a family unit. A mother is the one that will support their children, and help their children to grow. And if the mother is not educated, those children have a broken wing. They don't have a strong enough wing to stand up. So we all suffer from that in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, we were sort of flexible. People ask how I manage to work in Afghanistan right now. I really believe that God is helping us. God wants us there as a role model for all our young generation. Yes, life is tough. Yes, we have to take risks, but we are there. We created TV Meraj, an international station. We said, "okay, all our schools are closed, all our universities are closed. All the professors have to go home, especially women. What are we going to do? Young people, what should they do?" We decided to use our media. That is the flexibility that I'm talking about. When things get tough, you get tougher. And getting tougher means that you create something to reach your goal. And we created TV Meraj to broadcast all the curriculum from first grade through 12th grade.

We got thousands of letters from people asking us to start a university, but they don't know how tough it is to raise funds. They don't know how tough it is to survive as an organization. But you know what, they count on us. They counted on us to hold their hand because we promised we were going to help. So we said yes. We developed a curriculum and we set up University Meraj. Meraj means getting to the highest point, reaching to God with knowledge, being humble, and being wise. Right now we have four departments functioning from that university. We have students, young women, sitting home and learning those curriculums. And we got letters from Europe, from the Middle East, from the United States, that those who left Afghanistan are taking those classes from far away.

So you can see that it's not easy, but it's something that we can work on. I am sure with your education, that was very thoughtfully developed, you can do many, many things in this world.

I wish you all the best and I will constantly congratulate you from the bottom of my heart. I want you to be very happy, start strong, and keep going. Don't look back, just go forward. You will reach your point, and with God's will, you will be successful.

Thank you very much.

Congratulations again!