

**Speech by Her Excellency Margaret Kenyatta, First Lady of the Republic of Kenya,
during the Graduation Ceremony of the Aga Khan Academy,
Mombasa, Kenya - 21 May 2016**



Thank you all for the warm welcome and for the gracious invitation to be part of such an important annual event in this institution.

I'm so pleased to be here.

Graduating Class of 2016, Congratulations!!

You've made it! Your dedication, years of hard work, hours and hours of study and private persistence have finally paid off.

You've come to the end of a highly demanding high school career and you've done so with poise and excellence.

I'm truly amazed at the success and potential of this class: you've gained admissions to some of the world's most reputable universities, including Yale, Johns Hopkins, NYU, McGill and University of Toronto. Many of you have received exceptional levels of financial aid to attend such schools. As a class, you've received more than \$4.5 million worth of scholarships! That is impressive.

All 68 of you have finished well, and you all deserve absolutely every accolade you receive today, and I add mine: well done!!

Parents and guardians of these children, I imagine you must be very, very proud. From one parent to another, congratulations! Undoubtedly, we wouldn't be celebrating today if it weren't for your unfailing encouragement and steady support to this class.

Teachers and faculty—this year group's successes are undeniably yours as well. We honour your diverse investments in this dynamic class.

Ultimately, the success of any child, any student, and any class truly takes the support of a village. Today, I congratulate the village that is Aga Khan Academy for work well done! And I can personally say how proud His Highness and family are of you too.

I have watched all three of my now adult children sit in the very same position you're in right now. So I know that closing one chapter of life, and broaching the beginning of another can bring a mixed bag of feelings: anticipation and anxiety, excitement, elation and uncertainty. You are at the nexus of big changes. Soon, you'll be in University—more independent, less exposed to the scrutiny of your parents and teachers.

Many of you will be thousands of miles away; scattered everywhere from South Africa to Singapore, from the United States to the United Arab Emirates, from the United Kingdom to Canada. You all have a lot of new choices to make—and those choices will determine your

destiny. That can be a daunting reality and at some point, you might wonder whether you were really ready for such a brave new world.

Today, I want to encourage you because I believe that you are ready. I believe you're ready for the ups and downs that lie ahead of you—the difficult choices, and demanding workloads, the peculiar challenges, and unprecedented successes. The hard work, the hiccups, the heartbreaks and the happiness that, hopefully, the future holds for all of you.

And I believe you're ready, not just because you can successfully tackle maths, or memorise history, or analyse poetry; not because you can dissect creatures, or effectively explain chemical reactions—although all of these things are incredibly important and you've proved you can do them well.

But I believe you're ready for the future, for the rest of life, because of all the other things you have learned here.

You've been privileged to be part of a school—and surrounded by faculty—that has invested not just in molding your minds, but in inspiring your hearts, too. Here, you've been taught to think critically, and act compassionately. You've learned to read diligently and live responsibly. You've been encouraged to create, collaborate, and embrace curiosity. You've been taught to live with diverse people, and treat all people with dignity and respect. Here, you've learned to serve through service clubs like CanCare, AniCare and Interact Club. In short, you've been taught to leverage your talents not just for personal success, but to build a better world.

Unfortunately, our world has many challenges and as young adults you will face painful and pressing problems to deal with. There are issues that need addressing; people that need loving; communities that need serving, problems that need solving.

And you'll have a choice how you will deal with that. You could be indifferent or apathetic, but I believe this school and your parents have taught you better than that. I believe Aga Khan Academy has taught you that the plight of others is important; and that the problems around us, ultimately, affect all of us, and that because you've been given so much, you must give that much more back to the world.

I believe you've been prepared to do just that—to give MUCH. That will be, in part, by contributing your gifts and brilliant minds to the world: by making biomedical discoveries that change lives, or designing rockets for space, or coding incredible websites or standing for justice as lawyers or treating the sick as doctors —or carrying out whatever your preferred career path will be, and doing so with excellence.

But it will also mean much more than that, too. It will mean being reliable friends, and faithful family, and upstanding, engaged citizens. It will mean choosing to stand for something, and not being morally apathetic. It will mean being kind and patient, considerate and honest. It will mean following your conscience and being willing to stand for what's right, even when what's right isn't necessarily popular.

That's the kind of person, your school, mentors, parents and guardians all have been trying to mold you to be. And that's the kind of person the world needs you to be – young adults working in the service of noble goals held by compassionate and caring hearts.

And that's what I want you to do as you go out into the world. Wherever you go, whatever you choose to do—. I am convinced that as each of you goes on to shine your light in whatever little corner of the planet you'll find yourselves in, our world will be a much brighter, and much better place.

My personal request to you is that you come back home and shine here!

Thank you for your attention.

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