

Commencement Remarks
Ambassador Whitehead
American International School of Lome Commencement
Thursday, June 11, 2015, 07:10 p.m.
Sarakawa Hotel

Director Afokpa, members of the School Board, teachers, honored guests, parents, and graduating class of twenty-fifteen,

Good evening. Way back in the year 1932, United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave a commencement speech at Ogelthorpe University in Atlanta. President Roosevelt said to the graduating seniors, “As you have viewed this world of which you are about to become a more active part, I have no doubt that you have been impressed by its chaos...” Well, my young friends, all you have to do is turn on the television – or your Smart Phones – to see that the world is a pretty chaotic place. Starting tomorrow, you will have the opportunity to put a little more order in it.

This is the fourth year in a row I have had the privilege of presenting the commencement address for the American International School of Lomé’s senior class. As I said last year, looking out at your teachers and parents gathered here today, I can see them beaming with pride, knowing how hard you have worked in order to be here today. And proud they should be.

Proud because

Having spent the last 31 years of my life as a diplomat and having lived in 11 countries, believe me when I tell you that you should also be proud of the harmony you have achieved by bringing together seven nationalities working towards a common goal. A mini United Nations right here in Lomé. And what a diversity in interests and talents.

These bright youngsters are great athletes – the boys organized two soccer tournaments at AISL and the girls created AISL’s first girl’s soccer team which has already won several matches.

They have interests in the law, business, and fashion design. They are computer wizzes. They are musicians and actors – anyone who saw *The Odyssey*, *The Lion King*, or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will attest to that.

I was especially pleased to learn that the students' curriculum included a mandatory, one-semester Global Issues Course. Many of you participated in the Global Issues Service Summit held in February in Accra. The goal of the summit is to promote initiatives for young people on the African continent to respond to challenges facing our planet. Director Afokpa told me you were enthusiastic, involved, concerned, and creative. Importantly, you created a plan to include yearly AISL attendance at summits, an AISL global issues club, free drinking water at AISL, and a ban on plastic bottles on the school premises.

Well, soon it will be time for you to go your separate ways. Congratulations on your decision to pursue a higher degree of education in countries from here in Africa to North America to Asia. For those of you who will not pursue a degree in the United States, I hope at some later point you will consider doing so. True, I am somewhat biased, but I still believe the United States offers the best quality college education of any country in the world. And, by the way, here at the U.S. Embassy, we have specialists who can help you to identify the right school for you and start the process.

So, before concluding these words of wisdom, I'd like to share with you a quote from an American entrepreneur and one of our greatest inventors. You may have heard of him and the company he co-founded: Steve Jobs, the chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Apple, Inc. Sound familiar? Steve Jobs said, "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition."

Now, facing this chaotic world is going to take a lot of courage on your part. It won't be easy. So, graduating class of 2015 be courageous in your pursuit to learn from the wonders this world has to offer. Be courageous in your struggle to protect our planet Earth for yourselves and

generations to follow. Be courageous to confront injustice and strive to secure justice in whichever part of the world you choose to call home.

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this special day. Congratulations to you all.