

Acceptance remarks  
 Congratulations to 50 Years of John Cabot University (JCU)-  
 Celebrating the Past, Leading the Future

Thank you President Pavoncello, Members of the Board of Trustees, Members of the Faculty and Administration, members of the Alumni Association, and all who helped making these historic 50th anniversary events happen so beautifully, distinguished guests, proud parents and dear JCU Graduates of 2023

Buon Pomeriggio a tutti!

**My deepest thanks** for this prestigious honorary degree. JCU is one of the finest Universities in the world. This is indeed an honor, particularly as it comes during the University's 50th anniversary year!

**Today is a day of joy for you**, the class of 2023, graduating the year of JCU's 50th. My warm congratulations to you from the bottom of my heart. You have been enriched by precious companionship with and affection for your school and classmates forever.

**Just some words to accompany you on your way towards your new life from my last 50 years.** These are exciting and inspiring days for you, as it was for me 50 years ago and after my studies at the Sorbonne and a few months in Chile up to the military coup d'état in September 1973. This resulted in my volunteering to help Chilean refugees arriving in Germany from 1973 on. This experience changed my life completely. Instead of teaching I decided to work in human rights and international justice. First with Amnesty International and the University of Hannover, helping with family reunion and education (as instructor of German as a second language) for Chilean and other refugees and migrants. Then, from 1977 onwards in the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) I served in 16 different missions and from 2007 with Harvard University and other Universities until today.

**\* So volunteering, lifelong learning and enthusiasm bring me to the present day, having been fortunate to realize my dreams and my passions, and being paid to do what I love most, helping others.**

What are some lessons I learned?

**\*Conviction and courage to build bridges between totally opposed interlocutors** as I did then in Chile ten years later as the UNHCR Rep. in 1984/5 when I negotiated and received with the strong support and cooperation of local

human rights organizations, the official confirmation that those persons not in the 'black list' prohibited to return, could re-enter their country having fled after the coup in 1973. This confirmation formally ended the Chilean exile of some 150 000 persons in legal terms.

**\*Creativity and diplomacy**, for finding and implementing solutions as I did in Singapore with the rescue at sea program, when in 1979 I negotiated and obtained from the Belgian Ambassador in Singapore a pool of 200 visas from his country for the Disembarkation Resettlement Offer (DISERO) which helped to save the lives of 67000 Vietnamese boat people.

**Learning to be a good listener**, I closed my mouth and opened my ears, I spoke when I had something to say and to bring to the table as in Honduras in the negotiations, in order avoid a bloodbath of 30 000 Salvadoran refugees who had demonstrated against relocation away from the border, saying "only over our dead bodies."

**\*Passion and persistence to overcome obstacles**, even in the face of adversity and life-threatening situations as during the war in 1989 in Angola for safely bringing some 40 000 Namibian refugees through the firing lines to Luanda and back to Namibia without loss of life to participate in the first ever democratic elections. I just returned from a trip to Namibia and could see for myself that people now live there basically in peace and democracy.

**\* Understand and respect the history and political conditions of people and countries** as I had to in Kazakhstan shortly after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. There, the concept of human rights was not yet well established in the 1990s. Nevertheless, we achieved, in a joint effort with the national authorities and NGO partners minimal standards of the refugee protection and assistance implementation.

**Dear Graduates, you have proven** yourselves as promising young people from all over the world to graduate from this marvelous JCU. You will encounter and help tear down walls in people's minds, that cause ignorance and narrow-mindedness. They exist between family members, as well as between groups within society, between people of all walks of life. Try to view the world through the eyes of others. Respect other people's history, traditions, religion, identity and human rights. Take a moment to stop. Be still. Think. Pause.

**Your future lies in your own hands.** The only limits to your success will be yourselves. You will handle opportunities and confront the risks information technology and artificial intelligence will throw your way. Remember that freedom cannot be taken for granted, that openness and innovations involve risks as much as opportunities. As a JCU graduate you do not want easy challenges.

**I am grateful for the privilege of having been able to work in peace** and without fear or hunger for my last 50 years. However, prosperity and well-being cannot be taken for granted. But JCU equipped you well to find your path for building bridges over troubled waters.

**Dear Graduates of 2023, how you handle these opportunities and challenges** will be largely up to your generation as graduates. You are the ones who will be involved in deciding how to work, communicate, move around, and interact in life. You as individuals, within institutions, governments or private sectors have the power to step up and courageously act so that walls collapse, and dictatorships disappear.

**To summarize:**

- Freedom cannot be taken for granted
- Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere
- Democracy is not a spectator's sport, it is for individuals and governments to support
- Without PEACE and Security neither international nor local development is sustainable

You can find case studies on the before-mentioned country operations in my book on Innovations in Refugee Protection, presented at Harvard University under the title "Refugees are Human Rights Violations made Visible" available also in you tube.

**Therefore, continue to build up your social, emotional, and functional skills.**

My humble personal experience tells me that one can always do something, small or big, with a cool mind and a warm heart.

**Let me end with the well-known words of President John F. Kennedy 60 years ago: 'Do not ask what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country'.** So, as cosmopolitan 'citizens' of the world, perhaps consider asking yourself "what can I do for humanity"? President Kennedy created the Peace Corps for young volunteers to work in concrete assistance projects for peace and understanding in developing countries.

**So, volunteering, hard work, and lifelong learning and studying in areas you are interested in may well get you to do what you love to do for your own good and that of humanity.** Carpe diem ! Thank you. Arrivederci Roma!

Dr. Luise Drüke,

Rome, 15 May 2023, Nobel Peace Prize Certificate Laureate in recognition of devoted refugee service with UNHCR and Fellow of Harvard University's Center for International Affairs

## Conferral of Honorary Degree to Luise Drüke, scholar and practitioner of international relations

Dr. Luise Drüke has more than 40 years of practical experience in national, regional, and international refugee work. For more than three decades Dr. Druke has headed offices and missions of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) in Europe, Southeast Asia and Central Asia, Latin America, and Africa, including major humanitarian operations in Namibia, Honduras, Kazakhstan, and Bulgaria. During and after her work for the United Nations Dr. Druke found the time to lecture at many prestigious universities, including The European Institute, Boston University, the Kennedy School at Harvard, and MIT.

## President Franco Pavoncello confers honorary degree upon Dr. Luise Drüke

President Pavoncello conferred the degree of Doctor of International Affairs honoris causa to Dr. Drüke “for her contributions to the dissemination of knowledge about human rights and refugees matters, and for having led major efforts by the UNHCR in bringing protection and assistance to refugees and other persons in need in many parts of the world.”

In thanking President Pavoncello and JCU for the honor, Dr. Drüke shared the lessons she has learned in her long career. To summarize, she said: ” 1. Freedom cannot be taken for granted. 2. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. 3. Democracy is not a spectator’s sport, it is for individuals and governments to support. 4. Without peace and security neither international nor local development is sustainable.”

Lastly, Dr. Drüke told graduates, “Volunteering, hard work, and lifelong learning and studying in areas you are interested in may well get you to do what you love to do for your own good and that of humanity.”

<https://news.johncabot.edu/2023/05/john-cabot-university-celebrates-the-class-of-2023/>

Berenice O, JCU Director of Communications and Professor of Italian