

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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ADDRESS ON RECEIVING AN HONORARY DOCTORATE  
AT ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY  
Hangzhou, 14 October 2002

*Xie Xie.* Thank you.

Chancellor Zhang,  
President Pan,  
Mr. Vice-Governor,  
Mr. Vice-Minister,  
Distinguished Faculty Members,  
Dear young friends,

*Ni Men Hao!* I am deeply grateful for the honour this university has bestowed on me today. And I am delighted to be in this city, which is legendary for its lakeside beauty and cultural treasures. I now understand why they say, "above us there is heaven, and on earth there is Hangzhou". It must be a wonderfully inspiring place in which to learn.

Institutions of learning such as yours are of tremendous importance to the United Nations. You play a crucial role in instilling a global outlook in young people. You explore new ideas that can advance and inspire the progress of humankind -- and the work of the United Nations. You are catalysts for change, and custodians of the future.

I know that this university, through its broad curriculum and its many partnerships with other universities around the world, will have prepared its students well for the challenges ahead.

Dear young friends,

I am particularly delighted to have this opportunity to speak directly to you -- representatives of China's next generation.

People around the world like to quote what is said to be an old Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times."

But need this be a curse? Can times only be made interesting by turbulence and turmoil? Can there not be good things that would make them interesting? I believe there can -- and I hope that your generation, especially, may find that it is blessed by living in interesting times.

Whatever path you choose to take when you leave this campus, you will enter a world shaped by globalization. What happens in one country affects another. Epidemics, environmental degradation, terrorism challenge us all. Scientific breakthroughs, information technology, economic integration, have the potential to benefit us all.

The biggest challenge facing your generation is to ensure that globalization becomes a force for good -- a force that works not only for the privileged few, but for all humankind.

What China does, and how China fares, will help determine how the world as a whole meets that challenge.

And China is already starting from a position of strength.

Your country has achieved a rate of economic growth that is the envy of almost all other countries.

You are one of the few countries that, at present, are successfully defying the gloomy outlook in the global economy.

You have made progress in reducing poverty -- progress on a scale that is unprecedented in human history.

Through trade and investment, China is building bridges across the globe. With your membership in the World Trade Organization, you have become even more fully engaged in the international community -- opening up new opportunities for economic cooperation.

The Chinese business sector is not only thriving -- it is investing in global citizenship and corporate responsibility. I am delighted that many Chinese companies have entered a partnership with the United Nations through our Global Compact initiative -- a forum promoting the practical application of universal principles on human rights, labour and the environment.

You are playing a pioneering role in technical cooperation with other developing countries, whether through projects abroad or through the generous provision of training here in China. For example, right here in Hangzhou, you are using your regional centre for hydro-power to share with people from other developing countries your valuable expertise in renewable energy.

Friends, the transformation that China has undergone in the recent past has impressed the entire world.

Certainly, huge challenges remain. Somehow, the rural poor must be enabled to share in China's amazing economic growth. The United Nations family in China is working in close partnership with your Government towards that goal -- trying to help reduce disparities between regions, between rich and poor, between men and women -- and so to achieve sustainable development from which all Chinese people - - now and in the future -- can benefit.

In this struggle, China is not alone.

All the world's countries have rallied behind eight distinct Millennium Development Goals -- eight commitments drawn from the Millennium Declaration, which was endorsed by all Member States of the United Nations in September 2000. Ranging from halving extreme poverty to providing universal primary education -- all by the target date of 2015 -- these goals represent a set of simple, powerful, people-centred objectives, based on fundamental human needs, that every man and woman in the street can easily understand and support, from Buenos Aires to Beijing, and from Harare to Hangzhou.

China is already on its way to meeting most of those goals. That is good news not only for China, but for the entire international community. Because of China's size, the way it performs on achieving the Millennium Development Goals will be crucial to how the world as a whole does in reaching them.

But success on some of these goals does not mean there is room for complacency. The fronts on which we fight for development are all inter-related. Failure to rise to the challenge on one front can undermine -- or even destroy -- progress on all the others.

That is certainly true of our pledge to halt, and begin to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.

Experts now agree that HIV/AIDS is the worst epidemic humanity has ever faced. It has spread further, faster and with more catastrophic long-term effects than any other disease. In addition to the appalling human suffering that this entails, the impact of AIDS has become a devastating obstacle to development. Only if we meet the challenge of fighting AIDS can we succeed in our other efforts to build a humane, healthy and equitable world.

I know that this challenge concerns China deeply.

For the truth is that today, China stands on brink of an explosive AIDS epidemic.

Over the past few years, the HIV virus has spread to more and more parts of this country. The epidemic has become a moving target, and is at risk of spinning out of control. So far, most of the infections have happened through unsafe procedures for paid blood collections, or needle-sharing by injecting drug users. But transmission through sex is rapidly gaining momentum.

There is no time to lose if China is to prevent a massive further spread of HIV/AIDS. China is facing a decisive moment. How you deal with this challenge will determine not only the size of the epidemic, but whether you will be able to prevent all the other destruction that AIDS brings in its wake. These range from loss of productive workers to an exponential growth in the numbers of children orphaned by AIDS; from the burden on social services and business to loss of national income. And what happens in China over the next years and decades will also help determine the global impact of the disease.

Clearly, China has everything to gain if it can stem the tide of the AIDS epidemic now, and everything to lose if it fails to do so.

We know from our experience elsewhere that the spread can be turned back. But it cannot be done piecemeal. It requires a coordinated response from all sectors of society.

- It requires leadership at every level.
- It requires breaking the silence and stigma that surrounds the disease.
- And it requires young people like you to be at the forefront of the struggle.

The leadership shown by your national Government needs to take hold at every level. Provincial leaders, local leaders union leaders, women's leaders -- all need to take up the cause. All need to spread the message that AIDS is a problem with a solution.

Speaking openly about the epidemic is the first step to winning the fight against it. Silence is death. People need to know that they can be tested without shame; that if they are infected, they will be treated; that if they fall ill, they can live safe from discrimination.

And, as we have learnt from the fight against AIDS across the world, young people are the key.

By giving you the support you need, we can empower you to protect yourselves against the virus.

By giving you honest and straightforward information, we can break the circle of silence across all society.

By creating effective campaigns for education and prevention, we can turn young people's enthusiasm, drive, and dreams for the future into powerful tools for tackling the epidemic.

There are already some wonderful examples of that here in China. Take the HIV/AIDS prevention project started by the Red Cross in Yunnan six years ago. It has trained hundreds of young people as peer educators, and they, in turn, have gone on to educate more than 15,000 others. These young people's understanding of AIDS, and their awareness of how to protect themselves, has then been passed on to their friends and families.

Or look at the concert held for World AIDS Day in Beijing two years ago, which was organized jointly by the Student Association of the People's University and the China Family Planning Association. The concert was attended by more than two thousand students, and thousands more were reached through their peers,

through awareness campaigns and through media coverage. Then, on World AIDS Day last year, an even larger audience was reached when a concert was televised in the entire country, featuring the theme of anti-discrimination and the theme song "Fluttering Red Ribbon". When it comes to shattering the wall of stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, music can be a mighty weapon.

These examples show how young people can lead the fight against AIDS: by coming together to put out the message that confronting AIDS is a point of pride, not a source of shame; by demonstrating that just as the virus can be spread by the actions of just one individual, so the actions of one individual can help to stop it.

The task of spreading that message across China is huge; but young people do not usually shy away from huge challenges. Quite the opposite -- they are drawn to them.

As Secretary-General, I have made the fight against AIDS one of my personal priorities. I am here to promise you that the United Nations family will work with you every step of the way.

And I promise you that we will work with China on all the challenges facing this great country. We are determined to help it realize the tremendous promise it holds. Because China's future is also the future of the world.

Dear friends,

China's achievements have already impressed the whole world -- and none of them would have been possible without the spirit and courage of its young people. To all of you, whatever path you choose after you leave these campus walls, I wish the very best of luck and courage. Go out and make your difference in this world. And make the most of your lives in these interesting times. *Zhu Ni Men Hao Yun.*

Thank you very much.