

*Commencement 2004
Haigazian University
June 30, 2004*

Welcome & Introductions

This is the celebration of a whole academic year successfully ended. It is a celebration of the class of 2004 that has earned the right of receiving a university degree. I would quickly add, however, that what is to be celebrated above all is the fact that our young men and women have been prepared as well-endowed human resources for the Lebanese and the world community; some as potential business leaders, others as trained educators and teachers, others as social workers, others as lab scientists.

A graduation ceremony is also an occasion for the university to think about its own existence, about its identity, and its hopes. What is it, I have often asked myself during preparations and while making a choice for speaker, (what is it?) we want to convey to those who will attend our ceremony? What impression do we want them to get about ourselves, our programs, our institution? What message will they indirectly get? Should we read to you a wish list regarding the future of the country? Complain about the problems of educational institutions and educational policies in general? Give a report about the university activity? Announce we really have good plans for the future?

Preferably not!

At Haigazian University, what does and should concern us is, among other things:

1. How we can help each valuable young life get a wider and deeper sense of what life is, wider and deeper than the laws require or the students may want to acquire.
2. How we can support each person in their search for truth and knowledge.
3. How we can assist each student to grow in their sense of responsibility and service.
4. How we can evolve as an institution in ways that both keep us true to our values and adjusted to new realities.

It has been very clear to all, since 1955, that these points are not marketing tools, but a result of the tradition of faith we believe in.

Indeed, our hope is that the 50th anniversary next year will be an occasion for a good self-evaluation, thus helping us move beyond jubilee festivities into a rediscovery of our actual strengths and weaknesses. Many of you here are partners in our mission and we share many common values. Each student and each parent, each professor and staff member is also an ally.

Therefore, while congratulating the harvest of 2004 and their families wishing them much blessing in their lives, I welcome you all, politicians, diplomats, officials, and community leaders, into the social partnership that holds us together in accomplishing our educational ministry.

Before I introduce the guest of the day, I would like to welcome among us a former president of Haigazian, Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian, who arrived in Lebanon last night.

Now, our distinguished commencement speaker today is the Personal Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations for Southern Lebanon, the honorable Staffan De Mistura. The natural blend of his dual identities have brought together Italian warmth and Swedish humanitarianism, thus making Mr. De Mistura the appropriate UN person for areas of conflict in the world. Prior to his current Middle Eastern appointment, he has been the Director of the UN Information Center in Rome, and UN representative to Italy, Malta, and the Holy See.

Since 1970 he has been sent where human made or natural disasters have hit nations and countries:

He has been the Regional administrator of the Mitrovica region in Kosovo; the special advisor to the High Commissioner for Refugees on the Kosovo crisis; member of the Security Council Panel on the Humanitarian issue of Iraq; Director of the Division of Public Affairs, UNICEF headquarters; UNICEF Representative in Somalia; Special envoy of the UNICEF to Dubrovnik (Croatia) during the siege of the city; Director of Fundraising and external relations of the UN office of the coordinator for Afghanistan; Director of the World Food Program operations in Sudan; Coordinator of the Air Emergency Relief during the major famine of Ethiopia; Deputy chief of cabinet of FAO; FAO liaison officer at the UN headquarters; he has organized the Emergency relief airdrop on the Chadian villages.

Mr. De Mistura is a graduate of the University of Rome with a degree and postgraduate studies in Political Science and development economics, negotiation techniques and relief logistics.

The name of Mr. De Mistura in the Lebanese consciousness is often related to border violations and Israeli air-strikes. He acts as the objective voice of the UN as much as objectivity is possible in complex situations. But today, he comes to us as a distinguished human being with a rich experience of dedicated service and a special message to us and to the class of 2004.

Mr. De Mistura and Mrs. De Mistura, it is a pleasure to have you at Haigazian University, and it is my honor to invite you to the podium.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome Mr. De Mistura.

*Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian
President*