

Speech for AusAID Student Farewell

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Thank you Nhan,

When Nhan sent an email to us asking for a volunteer for speech, I was immediately interested. However it was not easy to find good reason: why me? I was trying to find a convincing reason to talk to you and particularly on behalf of you. It was hard, and then I made it up.

Among us all I believe I am the one who spent the longest time in Wollongong. I came here in 2007 as a visiting fellow and started my PhD in 2008. In addition to that I did my master degree in UNSW in Sydney in 2004 to 2006. In total, I have been in this country for more than 8 years.

I want to briefly talk to you about what I have been studying these last eight years: borders issues and try to relate it with friendship, education and change.

I started to learn the law, technology, and methods establishing borders between countries. Borders are important. Then I started to discover interesting phenomena concerning borders. If you are my age or older you know that Berlin Wall fell down in 1989 and in 1990 people started to use the term "borderless world". Borders are no longer important.

In 2010 I went to Monaco for a conference. Thanks to AusAID. After two days eating only pasta and pizza, my Asian stomach started to complain and I needed rice. I asked the organiser and he gave me address of a Thai Restaurant. I checked it on my iPhone: 7 minutes walking. Off I went and had the best meal in the world. Now, this is the interesting part. The day after that I discovered that the restaurant was in France. Seven minutes walk from one country to another: what an experience. You know, we live in Australia 5 hours flight from Sydney, we only reach Perth. So Kenichi Ohmae is true that we live in a borderless world.

However I also visited Pyongyang one day. Yes, North Korea! I went to Panmunjom demilitarised zone. I saw blue buildings settled on two countries: exactly on the border line. I was lucky, allowed to enter the building and it was a negotiating room. I still remember long tables were arranged in such a way in the middle of the room. Some microphones were there some facing north and others facing south. Imagine, the cable was sticky-taped exactly in the middle of the table following the border line. Outside, I could see soldiers were ready with their guns. And this scene is something you see every day. I have been to the most heavily guarded border in the world. 24/7!

Similarly, we have witnessed border disputes in many places: Indonesia and its ten neighbours, India-Pakistan, Bangladesh-Myanmar, Slovenia and Croatia, Thailand-Cambodia, and many others. Simply speaking: in a so-called borderless world, borders do matter and they still dictate! Since then I've always believe that borders are important. That's why I am here, doing a PhD on it :)

To me the world is a completed mosaic. It is one but it is constructed by different pieces and there are borders between those pieces. I see different countries, different ethnicities, different cultures, different people, different religions, and all other differences. This is confirmed by my experience meeting with friends from around the world in a family we call AusAID. This somehow contributes to

the evolution of me seeing the world. The world I used to know was a big one but blank. Maybe because I was intellectually blind. Then I discovered one day that the world is colourful and busy but untouchable to me. I knew there were a lot of things but mysterious.

After my interaction with my AusAID friends, I started seeing dots in different places that I am familiar with. I started to know all of you! We may not know each other personally but somehow I could feel the connection. This is what I call friendship that makes me see the world as a completely different place to live in. A connected world!

Now, I have managed to understand the importance of borders and built global friendship with bright people around the world like you. The question is: what's next?

I imagined myself changing the world when I came to Australia for the first time. I had with me a lot of things in my head. That I would do this and that. However when I went back to Indonesia in 2006 for a short period of time, the situation was different. Honestly, it was not as easy as I imagined. In my subconsciousness, I expected people around me to change, I expected government to change, university management to change. So I could see a better Indonesia. Many things that I used to take for granted were no longer acceptable when I returned from Australia. This is wrong, that is wrong. Somehow it generated frustration.

Then I started to rethink and contemplate. I thought I cannot complain all the time and started to recall the reason why I studied in Australia and why I met bright people like you. The reason is because I am expected to bring the change, not to expect the change from others. This might sound cliché but it was true then, it is true now and I believe it will always be true. With that, I started to DO small things. Surely it did not change the world but it certainly gave new colour to my small environment.

Gandhi is true that we should be the change that we want to see in the world. Or in Obama's language: we are the change that we have been waiting for. With the network that we have, we are now stronger to be the change that we want to see. We are no longer only small dots scattered in different places dictated by borders. We are connected dots!

While connected, we have our own responsibility in our respective countries. That's what borders are for: to define the extent of responsibility. As Robert Frost said in his poem *Mending Wall* "good fence makes good neighbours". Or in the language of Benjamin Franklin "love your neighbour yet don't pull down your hedge". And don't forget, we still live in a village that we are happy to call a Global Village. Thank you!