Address by

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Dr. Freida Brown, Vice-Chancellor of the United States International University, Honorable Ministers and Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Deans and Faculty, Graduates of the Year, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply grateful to have been given the honour to deliver this convocation address and to join the distinguished company of those of great rank and eminence who have had the privilege to address the faculty and graduates of this outstanding institution of learning in the past.

I should first of all like to congratulate all of you who are graduating from the United States International University today, an achievement of which each one of you can be proud of, as it is the result of years of hard work and much personal sacrifice on your part and those of your families. But I should also like to remind you that the privilege of receiving your respective degrees also carries with it responsibilities and obligations. The most important of these is that the skills that you have mastered are also applied in service of society and its economic and social development, and by doing so, to promote the progress and development of your respective countries and the welfare of your fellow men and women, the great majority of whom have not had the good fortune to have been granted access to the knowledge which you have been privileged to receive.

They will be looking to you to provide the future leadership, whether in the public or private sector or in academia, to improve their lives, to ease the pain and deprivation of their existence, and provide hope for a better future. It is my sincere hope that you approach this responsibility, since you are a select group – indeed a precious human resource – with a great sense of duty and humility.

For your generation will be challenged to provide that leadership in a rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world, the impact of which is influencing in many ways, no matter where we live and how we live, every aspect of our daily lives and the choices we make. And like during all periods of rapid change, past experience is no guide and there is little certainty nor predictability about the future. This in turn requires that we must learn from each other and cooperate internationally if we are to meet new arising challenges successfully. For periods of change carry with them not only risks and momentary instability, but above all, they carry opportunities which we have to
learn to exploit and use to our advantage whether as individual citizens in the
work place, as institutions and organizations, as societies and as governments, or
as international agencies.

As the head of such an international agency, I am therefore very pleased to
address today the graduates of a university dedicated to international cooperation
and which has been a pioneer in the global exchange of knowledge. We share
many of the same goals and ideals, the most important of which is to find the
ways and means to face the common challenges facing humanity and which will
be transforming and dominating the policy agenda of this century. International
cooperaíon seeks, above all, to promote international inclusion, to provide an
opportunity for all humanity, irrespective of where they live.

What then are some of those mega-trends which are driving change and
transforming the globe, determining to a great degree how we will be living and
working over the coming decades of this new century?

From the point of view of the United Nations and that of my organization,
the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the first of these
forces of transformation is the globalization of markets. Although the impact of
globalization is on the mind and lips of opinion-makers everywhere, what is not
so much appreciated is that it has been modern science based technology that has
been the major force in the dramatic growth of global interdependence and the
interpenetration of societies. It has eroded the traditional insulators of time and
space and has changed humanity’s notion of resource frontiers, taking us into the
darkness of outer space and into the depth of the oceans.

Modern technology has also given us, for the first time in history, a
"world system" and a "global economy", some even are beginning to speak of
a "global village" and its associated "global popular culture". In fact, it can be
demonstrated that the size of the world economy is a function of the state of
technology, and in particular of the possibilities for transport and communication
within its bounds. The "world system" has also given us “global problems”. It
is true that humanity has always known war, hunger, poverty, ecological
disruption and resource scarcities. Until comparatively recently, however, these
were not world problems. They could not become so because there was no
world system to account for their global scope. Today problems are made global
by a world system which, shaped by the forces of science and technology, has
effectively integrated its component parts.
The revolution in communications, information processing and transportation is changing traditional concepts of sovereignty and security in all countries, North and South, and reshaping the environment in which international political and economic relations are perceived, formulated and conducted. The spread and complexity of modern technology is also eroding the power of those charged with decision-making everywhere.

Globalization therefore carries with it both risks and opportunities, but it is also clear that benefiting from globalization, in terms of economic growth and access to the new world market, requires not only consent to the new global rules governing that market place, but also a high-level of technological preparedness and competence. Globalization requires a knowledge-based society. It is the necessary prerequisite for effective integration in the global market, for attracting investment, for accessing information and for generating competitive goods and services. And this will hold true for both the public and the private sector, for, in future, governments will have to be as well-equipped to support their countries' private sectors compete in the global market place and to ensure that they have a place at the table of the world economy.

All this has profound implications for developing countries like Kenya, and for institutions of higher learning and for education policy in general. This is because their role will be as critical to reaching that level of knowledge and technological capacity as will be that of Government, the private sector and international development partners. And all of you in your future occupations, in small or great measure, will also have your own part to play in facing this challenge. What is certain is no matter what line of work you will be involved with, it will require some sort of technology input, whether you are producing goods or offering services.

Apart from knowledge and the technological prerequisites and requirements for effective participation in the global market place of the 21st century, it is also clear that another prerequisite will be the acceptance of a set of global economic rules which are necessary for the system to function well and to benefit the majority. Globalization is work in progress. The challenge facing contemporary society is how to make its economic benefits reach all so that they outweigh the political price that will have to be paid.
For playing by the rules, also means that, in return, developing countries will be allowed to play the game on a level playing field. This will require a collective negotiating process and a public sector that has the capacity and the necessary data and information to support international negotiations in alliance with the domestic private sector. Governments which are not prepared stand to lose out, at least this has been my own experience from my previous work with the United Nations in the area of developing country trade negotiations, especially in the area of market access for the least developed countries. Participation in any market means competition, the better prepared we are for that competition, the more favorable the rules, the better we will all fare in the future. And this will be one of the challenges to you as future leaders, both in the public and the private economic arena.

The second major trend which is transforming the way we live and where we live, what goods and services we will be requiring and producing in future, is urbanization.

In some ways almost unnoticed by many policy makers, urbanization has been changing the face of the developing countries and will continue to do so, especially in Africa and Asia, over the next decades. Populations everywhere are on the move, a phenomenon that cannot be separated from economic change, from the globalization process, from the accompanying technological transformation under way and its impact world-wide.

A century ago, about 160 million people, or 10 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas. Today almost 50 percent or 3 billion people are urbanised. The overall global population growth rate today is one per cent per annum, but urban areas are growing at almost double that rate, which means that the urban population of the world will double again to 6 billion in less than forty years. And almost all of that increase will occur in the developing countries. In fact it is Africa, currently about 37% urban, which has the highest urbanization rate of all the world's regions: It now stands at 4 per cent per year, which means that the population of cities and towns doubles every sixteen years. In fact it is expected that between 1996 and 2020 the urban population of this continent will increase from 229 to 525 million.

The evidence of this population explosion is literally before our eyes: only a few years ago, the area surrounding us on the road to Thika was an open field, now it
is tightly packed with new constructions and sprawling satellite townships. Nairobi is growing at a rate of 5 per cent per year and already 50 per cent of the population lives in unplanned spontaneous settlements. My own city of Dar Es Salaam is growing at a rate of 10 per cent per year, which means, if this rate continues, its population will double in seven years. Africa is being transformed from a continent of villages to a continent dominated by towns and cities. In part this rural to urban flood of humanity, let us not forget, is produced by conflict and civil strife in the rural areas of many African states, and this in turn is another reminder of the severe impact particularly on Africa of the global transformation processes which I referred to before.

The consequences of such lightning growth are self-evident: the urbanization of poverty, the breakdown in basic services and local governments overwhelmed for lack of administrative and financial capacity, among other negative indicators. Especially in Africa, the pace of urbanization has not been matched by equal growth in urban employment opportunities, for this would require very high and sustained levels of economic growth.

This in turn underscores the urgency of addressing the globalization challenge, of opening up to the international economy and to world markets and outside investment under the best possible terms and pre-conditions, so as to accelerate economic growth and job creation in the urban areas. And this strategy will have to be combined with a modernization of the rural sector, for in Africa in particular both city and countryside will have to walk hand in hand on the road towards sustainable development for many decades to come.

If we do not rise to this challenge of building a dynamic modern urban sector, the squalor and misery we see growing all around us will continue, with immeasurable social, economic and environmental consequences. Let us also not forget that poverty is the most fertile breeding ground for disease, for communicable and transmitted pandemics such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

Facing this urban challenge cannot be delayed too long, it will require vision and determination. It will also require creative and responsible entrepreneurship, and I should like to hope that over the past few years many of you graduating in business administration here today have been well prepared for this.

A third and related trend very much in evidence throughout the world today is that of decentralization. It is a direct response to growing integration of the
world economy and rapid urbanization. For today's real-time and quickly moving global economy, speed is a most decisive factor in successful economic decision making. Cities will be the nodal points in a global network of exchange and production of goods and services. Local authorities will need to be empowered through the decentralization of responsibilities to the local level, if they are to pursue local investment opportunities, raise and spend revenues to expand services and to generally raise the quality of life of their inhabitants, as well as the investment climate and operating environment of the private sector.

Clearly, in the increasingly competitive global economy, cities and towns which are well-managed and endowed with sufficient flexibility and decision-making authority will be in the most advantageous position to attract both national and international investment, to grow and to create jobs. Good governance at the city level will therefore be the most essential precondition for local and national economic growth. Cities that are not well-managed will be losing out on opportunities which may never return. Building management capacity for cities must therefore be a new priority for developing country educational institutions, and I believe that institutions like USIU, with their strong focus on management training, are well-positioned to seize this opportunity.

Meeting the challenges of a globalizing and urbanizing world will also require increases in international cooperation to guide and manage these processes, to identify solutions and agree on common priorities and to exchange experience and best practice. Especially in the case of globalization there is an urgent need to build new international institutional frameworks to facilitate the process and maximize its positive impact. This is where the United Nations comes in and that is one of the things it does best, in fact one would expect that globalization will increase the responsibilities of the UN system as the primary inter-governmental machinery for cooperation. Indeed globalization will undoubtedly lead to a more rather than less organization at the international level.

The United Nations has been rising to this challenge over the past decade, beginning with a series of international conferences and agreements on the ways and means to meet the global challenges of the coming century. One result of this process of international consultations has been the World Trade Organisation to provide the architecture for the new world economy and the new global market
place. Another outcome was the commitments undertaken by the international community to respond to the urbanization of the globe at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996. The global plan of action that emerged from it is the Habitat Agenda, for which my organization is the custodian with the responsibility to mobilize the UN system, Government at all levels and civil society partners around the Agenda’s two goals: adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world.

To this end, we at Habitat have launched global campaigns to serve as vehicles to gather support and as frameworks for specific activities we have launched with our partners to support local authorities and national governments to face the urban challenge. In East Africa and right here in Kenya, this has included programmes and projects to strengthen local governance, to address urban poverty, to improve delivery of basic services and urban security, and, under the patronage of His Excellency, the President of Kenya, a new initiative for urban slum upgrading in Nairobi, which will be part of the “Cities without Slums” initiative endorsed by World Leaders in the Millennium Declaration at the UN in New York last Fall.

But the key to success in facing the challenges of the 21st Century, especially those of globalization and urbanization, is not the work of one single agency or international organization, country or corporation, but partnership and cooperation among and between all levels of government and society and its component parts, between the public and the private sector. It is a challenge for each one of us.

Certainly here the role of education and educational institutions will be critical for success as we move into a knowledge and urban-based economy integrated into global markets. Educational institutions will need to provide the trained human resources, the global transfer of knowledge and the introduction of new technologies and their application so as to support sustained economic growth and job creation here in Kenya and elsewhere in the developing world. Institutions of higher learning, such as USIU, will be particularly challenged. However, I am confident that based on past performance, you and your sister institutions will rise to the occasion, ever conscious of the fact that in the final analysis development is a state of mind and that the quality of social and economic progress is directly related to the quality of a given country’s educational system.
Let me end by emphasizing that the USIU, is one of the "best practices" in promoting international education within a broad framework of cultural diversity. It must be congratulated, to have had the vision and foresight to decentralize training from the Main Campus in San Diego, California to Nairobi-Kenya and to Mexico-City.

I believe that all of today's graduates have been privileged indeed to receive the best possible preparation to face the challenges of what will be I am sure an eventful century at such an esteemed global institution of learning. I hope that this experience has prepared you, each in your own way to make an outstanding contribution to the betterment of society in your lifetime. The future in our "global village" promises great hope and reward, provided we all "play our part". Once again, congratulations for your hard work. May God's blessing be with you as you embark on your careers.