

**Prepared Remarks on the Occasion of the Closing Ceremony
of the 2005 Yale World Fellows
by Vincent S. Pérez
December 7, 2005**

On behalf of the 2005 World Fellows, we extend our deepest thanks to Yale University, for allowing us to share a part of our lives and for giving each one of us the opportunity to meet 21 extraordinary individuals. I would like to especially thank President Levin for conceiving this program, to Secretary Linda Lorimer for her constant support, to our new Hillhouse Professor Dan Esty for his invaluable guidance and stewardship of the World Fellows Program, and to Kel Ginsberg for making our lives at Yale memorable.

On behalf of the World Fellows, we also wish to thank Sarah, Mia, Daniel and Poppy for all the many ways you have helped us. Thank you so very much!

Finally, we wish to thank our families and loved ones, either those who joined us in New Haven or those who were left behind, for allowing us to take this opportunity. Thank you for your support and understanding.

In less than 24 hours, some of us will be returning to the lives that we suspended for four months. It will not be easy returning home. In fact, I experienced this last week. When we go back, we might hear comments such as *“we missed you so much”* or *“You’re back so soon, has it really been four months?”*

Time Flies while Time Stands Still

A friend once told me: Time flies while time stands still.

It has felt like time has flown since we met on that first day of orientation on August 12.

Yet time stood still while each of us bravely stood in this room to give our individual presentations, when we allowed ourselves to be vulnerable in presenting our personal life journeys.

Time also stood still while we sat perched on the stage at the Sterling Lecture Hall on a Thursday afternoon, when we shared with the Yale community a glimpse of what the world outside America looks like from our own perspectives.

We Came Here for a Variety of Purposes

We joined the World Fellows Program for a variety of purposes.

Some of us came here to seek wisdom. Some came here to seek answers. For me, I came here to find myself.

For those of us who came here to seek answers, we leave Yale asking more questions. For those of us who came here to be understood, we leave Yale understanding others better. For those of us who came here hoping to change the world, the world of Yale may have changed us.

We arrived as 22 individuals with 22 different views of the world. Our views would sometimes converged, sometimes contrasted, and sometimes conflicted.

As time has flown by, our views slowly evolved, as some of us began to see the world from each other's perspectives and we feel as if we are growing into more global citizens.

Gradually, we began to know each other well enough that, we could almost predict what question a particular Fellow would ask in a seminar.

Eventually, we started celebrating each other's successes. We cheered when our colleagues gave memorable presentations at Sterling Library. We applauded when our very own 2005 Fellow panelists spoke during the Return to Yale Forum. We celebrated when Hauwa won the Sakharov Prize last October. Hauwa, we are all proud of you! Congratulations!

Four Ways to Deal with Challenges for the Future

During four months of seminars, we grappled with problems ranging from how to reduce poverty, to promoting international peace, to respect for human rights and respect for the environment. The discussions expanded our horizons and deepened our knowledge.

What do we do with the knowledge we have acquired during the past four months?"

I asked this very same question of a futurist named Wolfgang Grulke, whom I met recently. We discussed the World Fellows Program, and he shared with me how we can cope with the pressing problems of the future. I would like to share with you what Wolfgang shared with me four ways we can deal with these challenges:

1. Given that the world is changing so fast, the knowledge we acquired during the past four months can help us only to some extent, but what is more important are the *Skills* to apply this knowledge; skills such as communication skills, negotiation skills, interpersonal skills.

2. As more and more organizations succeed by becoming smaller, Management capability will become less important. What will be more crucial is *Leadership* – the ability to persuade, the ability to inspire, the ability to share a vision.

3. Since change is happening at a chaotic pace, our past experience can only take us so far, but what will take us further is having the right *Attitude*, including courage, decisiveness and positive thinking.

- Finally, 4. Knowing the right people or hiring the right people may help us towards our goals. But what are more essential are the *Relationships* we nurture.

The Meaning of Fellowship

Let me expand a bit on this last point about *Relationships*.

In many informal get-togethers, we often deliberated on the meaning of the word “world” in “World Fellow”. Perhaps in hindsight, it may be equally significant to focus on the second word “fellow” in “World Fellow”.

You see, for me, one of the attractions of the World Fellows Program is that we were not secluded as solitary scholars, but rather we were part of a select group of fellows participating in an intensive group program.

This allowed us to interact with one another, to learn from one another, to form a fellowship with one another.

My personal wish is that we continue to build on this fellowship we now enjoy among ourselves, and together, that we continue nurturing this precious relationship.

Whatever future we envision for ourselves, the path towards that future will not always be easy. During those difficult times, we truly need to draw on the relationships we have developed here.

I hope we share with one another, not only our future successes, but also our failures, so that we can continue to learn from one another.

The Choices We Make, Not the Chances We Take, Determine our Destiny

As we begin to look forward to our futures, let me ask my colleagues, World Fellows and Associate Fellows, to look at one another, and try to visualize the following possibilities:

- One of us here could some day lead a prominent think-tank, or a people’s organization, or head a political party.
- One of us here could some day become a professor, a senior adviser or international expert on legal, social, health, trade, enforcement or environmental issues.
- One of us here could some day become a multi-millionaire executive, and retire by donating to a good cause...or even donating to the Yale World Fellows Program.
- One of us here could some day become a national celebrity, or write a best-selling autobiography, or
- One of us here could some day run for president.

The choices we make, not the chances we take, determine our destiny. Which future will we choose?

As for me, I am still searching for myself. But I may have found a clue in my search, for at the bottom of an email from a student two weeks ago, was a quote from one of the towering figures of the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi, who once said:

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others”.

So my dear friends, as we embark on a new stage in our lives that will take us closer to our future destiny, as we lose ourselves in the service of others, we can look back with fondness to these four months in Betts House. Four months when we formed relationships for a life-time. Four months when time flew by and yet time stands still in our memory. Thank you!