

MICAD Graduation  
23 January 2009  
Brother Peter Bray, FSC

Good afternoon. I acknowledge our stage party, in particular His Beatitude Patriarch Fouad Twal, our president, members of the Board of Trustees, honoured guests, faculty, those graduating and their families and other guests. Firstly, may I congratulate you who are graduating on reaching this point and being on the edge of an exciting future. This is a special day for you and we join in celebrating this occasion.

This is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on what Bethlehem University does in contributing to Palestinian society. You as graduates have had the privilege of studying in a way that has the potential to make a difference to this society here in Palestine.

The study of International Cooperation and Development is a key to helping you in your current position to make a difference. The situation in which you find yourself is where you can act. The decision to do so is yours. Each of us has the ability to decide what we are going to do. In the last analysis, no one can make us do anything. We are responsible for our actions. What you decide to do with the information you have learned, the skills you have acquired and the contacts you have made has the potential to make a difference to your current organisation or any organisation in the future of which you are a part.

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You are immersed in a difficult world where peace and development are not very obvious. The events of the past few weeks are a tragedy for Palestine with such a senseless loss of life and all of us deplore what has happened in Gaza. Those events have severely impacted on the way Palestine will develop. The restrictions under which you will work are very real and we can't deny that. However, each of us makes decisions within the context where we are.

There are numerous examples of people who have chosen to make a difference in difficult circumstances. There are many on the international scene. We think of Martin Luther King and the people in the Civil Rights movement. It was because of the decisions they made that what happened on Tuesday night with the inauguration of Barack Obama became possible. Others like Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi, but I want to just take two here in Bethlehem.

Both these people were caught up in the consequences of the intifadas yet they made and make decisions that make for a better Palestine.

The first is Daoud Nassar who is a graduate of Bethlehem University. When he couldn't study what he wanted here went to Germany and graduated with a Masters degree there. He has returned to his family property near Bethlehem and has begun to develop a group called "Tent of Nations." This group hopes to alert young people from around the world and here in Palestine to what is happening here. At the same time Daoud wants to create opportunities for "connecting people to their land," and ways of caring for this land so that it can sustain the people living here. He also wants to facilitate positive encounters between young people from different cultures. He has had to face significant challenges as he has tried to do that. He is not allowed to bring electricity or water onto

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the land. On all the hills around him are settlements and he is under threat of eviction and the land being confiscated for more settlements. He is restricted in all sorts of ways in carrying out his dream. However, he is committed to following through on his dream despite the obstacles and he has a spring in his step, a hope in his heart and a joy in his life. Why? Because he has decided to take responsibility for his life and use his knowledge and skills to make a better Palestine.

The second person is Ibrahim Issa whose father was an early graduate from Bethlehem University, but because of the first Intifada Ibrahim was not able to attend. He went to Holland and studied there for eight years getting his bachelor and masters degrees. He returned to Bethlehem to see his sick father in 2000 and then planned to return to Holland to continue with his doctoral studies. His father had some years previously begun a school to teach, students, their families and teachers peaceful way to work together and deal with conflict. However, during Ibrahim's visit in 2000 he found his father was very sick so Ibrahim decided to stay and help with the school and put his doctoral studies on hold. His father died in 2000 and Ibrahim was jailed for a time during the Intifada. When he was released he was confronted with the Israeli army having blocked the road to the school. He worked to find ways around that and still provide for the students. Towards the end of the intifada the Israelis decided the school was to be demolished. Ibrahim fought that and was able to keep the school. Currently, the cafeteria at the school is set to be demolished because the Apartheid wall is planned for that space. At present he is fighting that. In the midst of this he is providing opportunities for teachers in his school and other schools to learn how to deal with conflict in a peaceful way. He has decided that what he can do is going to provide children and adults with other ways of dealing with conflict that using violence. This decision comes despite the

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restrictions he faces and the problems he has. The decision is a commitment to make a better Palestine.

It would be so easy for both of these people to simply give up and say it is too hard. However, they have not and Palestine will be a better place because they have decided to push ahead.

As each of you finishes this period of study, there are many options ahead of you. One thing you could do is find the way where you can make the most money, get the best house and car, be well thought of and be considered important. Another is to leave this place and use your knowledge and skills to get a good position in some other country and look back on Palestine as a place where you came from and which you will occasionally visit. However, I would challenge you to think about how you can use what you have gained through this qualification to make Palestine a better place by what you choose to do here. The challenge for you is to find how you are going to use what you have learned in the places where you work or elsewhere, to make sure Palestine is a better place because you are here. I don't know what that is. Your teachers do not know. The challenge for you is to find out and then commit yourself to follow through. No one can make the choice but you. As you graduate from here, the choice is yours. Our faith, our courage, our strength are not tested when everything is going right. They are tested when things are going poorly. There are challenges before you. I invite you to dream dreams and then have the courage to make them come true. **Dare to believe** that like Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi on the international scene and Daoud and Ibrahim on the local scene, dare to believe that you can make a difference.

Shukran

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