**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**VICTORIA SAUCEDO**

Ladies and gentlemen, family and friends, faculty, administrators, distinguished guests, and, of course, my fellow graduates, it is an honor to stand before you today as I, and my fellow classmates, find ourselves on the threshold of the next chapter of our lives. We’ve worked hard, we’ve planned harder, and along the way, if we have been vigilant, observant, and willing to adapt, we’ve had a glimpse of what awaits us. As we leave this school, we shed some layers of the cocoons that have defined our lives up to now. Throughout the educational process, we have had opportunities to grow through lessons and connections. Along the way, we’ve had life altering experiences... and these have been just a preview of what is in store for us as we open our eyes and begin to breathe in the global vista that we will inherit.

There is a line in a poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, that teaches us, “I am part of all that I have met.” Every day, these words speak to me, and with each experience, the message resonates more deeply. While we, as graduates, may appear, superficially, as eager, young, vital kids, somewhat naive, eternally optimistic, we have been watching.... studying... and beginning to distinguish the effects and influences on our lives so far. In my short time here, at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (**Name the school**) I have been blessed with opportunities.... the kind that have expanded my empathy and encouraged the realization that I .... that **WE**... are all part of an integral, interdependent global community. While I come from a small town in Ghana, against all... or most odds... I have allowed curiosity and conscience to forge a path.... one that defies the legacy and limits I should have traditionally accepted.

I some ways, I have been a dreamer. I’ve spent my youth determined to encourage and build a stronger community for my peers... for the future. I spent time teaching English to school children in Krobo village, building classrooms, visiting students in boarding schools, all with the intent of shining a light on the importance of education and connection, especially for young girls. When people asked me what I wanted to be “when I grow up,” I would respond that I wanted to be a neurosurgeon, not even realizing that, to someone of my background, even the thought of that concept would have been impossible five or ten years earlier.... but somewhere... somehow...through the crevices of ignorance.... the light hit me. Because of that... and the people around me who encouraged that light, I have discovered my purpose and passion. More than democracy dies in darkness. It’s time for all of us to discover our light.

No matter where in the world we find ourselves, we are placed here to learn.... to ask questions... to find solutions... to connect... to find and share our common ground. My quest... and my questioning... would never have been possible without the incredible, unconditional support of my parents, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, who placed their own lives on hold for eighteen years so that I might have the incredible opportunities that life has presented. They ignited that flame.... and that fire continues to be fanned thanks to others I have met that have become irreplaceable, essential parts of me. Probably the person most influential in my life has been a woman named Lolis. She was my mentor when, in November of 2018, I served an internship at the United Nations. One day, Lolis took me to the 9/11 Memorial in Lower Manhattan.... she pulled me aside... and in the still... quiet... overwhelmingly powerful atmosphere of that tribute, she said to me, “You are going to be the reason that events like 9/11 do not happen again.” In my short life, I’ve seen a lot... and I’ve questioned more.... remember... I am from a small town in Ghana... the odds were..and in many ways, are... stacked against me. “How could I, Victoria Saucedo, with one singular voice, make such a difference in this world??” And then I realized, that’s the **ONLY WAY** change happens.... step by step.

So here we are, here I am, and from here my fellow graduates and I move forward. Life has been incredible so far. I started in a small African village, I’ve dreamt big... even when I may not have been aware of what those dreams meant to those that dared not imagine, and through it all, I have searched to find a way to contribute to a world that includes everyone. I have traveled to many places... even at such a young age. I have seen the absolute worst parts and the most beautiful parts of the world. The one thing I am sure of is that with education, curiosity, and commitment, we will all come to understand that we are **global citizens**... that we have the ability to dream, the wherewithal to dare to make those dreams **reality**... and we have to accept the responsibility to look out for one another as we build a stronger, more informed future. We are about to inherit history. No matter where I go... no matter what challenges I may face, no matter the limits the establishment may try to impose.... I will have my mantra that inspired the light that continues to guide me... “When I grow up, I want to be a neurosurgeon.” Congratulations to my fellow graduates... Thank you!!