

**9<sup>TH</sup> CONVOCATION ADDRESS**  
**GUJARAT NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY**

**Hon'ble Justice A. K. Sikri**  
**Judge, Supreme Court of India**

Dr. D.Y Chandrachud, my brother and colleague and Visitor of GNLU, Mr. Justice Anant Dave Acting Chief Justice, Gujarat High Court, Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasama, Education and Law Minister, Shri Pradeepsinh Jadeja, Law Minister for State, Dr. Bimal Patel, GNLU Director, Dr. Thomas Mathew, Registrar, distinguished members of GNLU General Council, Executive Council, Academic Council and Finance Committee and most beloved students and their proud parents, near and dear ones

My heartiest congratulations to the graduating students of the Gujarat National Law University. It is my pleasure to see law students graduate from a prestigious university like Gujarat National Law University. I congratulate Dr, Bimal Patel, Director, Registrar, Faculty and Staff for organising this Convocation. My congratulations to the Visitor, Brother Justice D. Y. Chandrachud, Brother Justice Anant Dave, members of the General Council, Executive Council, Academic Council and the Finance Committee for this convocation.

Students, you are all to be heartily congratulated. Your presence here is proof that you have accomplished a marvellous achievement, the first phase of a remarkable adventure. When you walked through the doors of GNLU most of you did not know what lay in front of you. You found out that there was a lot of work ahead, that you would be burning the midnight oil absorbing books stacked as high as the eye could see. But what you may not have known as you nervously entered the door of your first class, was that you were going to learn a new way of thinking, of observing, indeed of being. A good law university one like GNLU, does that to you. It makes you - indeed, forces you - to challenge your own assumptions, not only about law but about life.

For the last 17 years or so, 12 of school and 5 of law university, you have attended lectures and classes, heard different speakers, learnt from different teachers and professors, you read about various theories - some about life, some about the world we live in, mostly about the way life in this world goes on. You understand now, as perhaps you did not before, how important foundational definitions are to the way we think, the way we act, even the way we feel. Hopefully, you will come away from the experience with a new sense of self-confidence and belief in the law, the courts, and in the importance of your chosen profession. However students, today I am going to refrain from sermonising you. Today, I hope to speak to you not as a judge but as the

member of the legal profession that you are about to join and mostly as your confidante.

Indeed the world today we live in, is a harder, more complex place than when I graduated from University. Civil and human rights have never been more at stake; the planet's continued existence is in jeopardy, democracies are under assault; and the threat from global terrorism is even graver. It is extremely daunting and lawyers will be involved in, in fact needed for all of it. Lawyers along with judges are protectors of democracy. But where do you as new lawyers fit into the picture? My answer to you would be just about everywhere, since you are the ambassadors for social change.

To explain, maybe the best place to start would be with the remarks: "Do the right thing, remember you are needed and are ready". I am not here to give you moralistic sermons. My message to you all is more grounded in the reality of the life you face as working lawyers, now that you are about to leave the confines of the university campus and enter the practical world of the legal profession assuming that is what most of you choose to do.

When I urge you to do the right thing, I am advocating primarily two things. First, that you fully use your legal education, both as lawyers and as citizenas. Doing so will include working hard and embracing the uncertainties you face today, without a script.

Second, in whatever you intend to do, use as your north star -your moral compass which should always be flashing to remind you to do the right thing, as you see it, no matter what the pressures may be to do otherwise.

***Your legal education has prepared you well and now you have to continue to work hard***

There may be many different views that people would have about this profession but I know one to be universal and that is you are going to face numerous challenges. These challenges are going to try and pull you down or restrict you from taking a step forward. However the remote control to conquer them would be in your hands.

I remember when I was a junior lawyer, fresh out of law school, I was put in the spotlight unexpectedly when my senior who was to argue the remainder of a part heard matter was unavailable. The Senior Advocate appearing on the other side had argued for three whole days and on the day when my boss was on his legs in another court, the Senior Advocate wrapped up his arguments within 15 minutes leaving me to pick up the reigns. It was perhaps a shrewd move on his part to wrap up his arguments immediately when he saw that my senior wasn't there in court and only I was present. I knew that in the middle of a part heard matter, I could not ask the judge to wait for my senior. I had no courage to even

ask for an adjournment mindful that it would not be proper. The judge asked me to proceed, now as a recent graduate I could have done one of the two things, I could have pleaded with the judge to grant an adjournment or I could have stood there, let my nerves which had almost crept in get the better of me and give the other side a victory, but I did neither and I thought to myself “I won’t be able to score goals of the shots I don’t take” and with this in my mind I argued the matter as if my life depended on it and ended up scoring a goal by getting a favourable verdict.

Here students, I will advise you three key things, first – Always be prepared. There is a reason why its common parlance to say that there is no substitute to hardwork, because there really isn’t. Secondly – always be willing to take initiative, to grab the opportunity that presents itself before you. You are the reflection of the opportunities you seize and the chances you miss. Make each opportunity count. Thirdly –Patience is key. If you are impatient and let your nerves take over you, your hard work will not show through. When a judge asks you to present the matter, remember to take a deep breath at that time, be patient, remember that you have the tools necessary courtesy of GNLU, all you need is the confidence to then start with your matter.

Students, I think it is also important to remember that Lawyers and Judges are two sides of the same coin, and if we look at it in this light we realise we are a dollar richer. Judges alone are not

enough to bring about justice, they must be supported by a strong independent, courageous and competent bar. The judges are able to pronounce their opinions based on the arguments put forward by the lawyers. You as lawyers will have to be prepared to put your best foot forward so that the judgments are reflective of our society, the need of the hour and importantly justice that ought to be served. All this and more you will have to be prepared for. Judges are not going to make a hasty decision and decide completely based on the way the junior argues, but they look at it as an opportunity given to them to make an argument, young lawyers should grab this opportunity. Like you students discuss your teachers and others, lawyers discuss the judges, judges also discuss lawyers and when a young budding lawyer is eager to argue and learn, this shows through and any judge will always encourage such a lawyer. Remember this is your time, it may be your first time, to make a lasting impression.

Your life as a lawyer will not always be easy. You will not always win. You will at times be frustrated, and even heartbroken. That, too, is part of being a lawyer. You may have heard the stories of these three young lawyers:

- One lost one of his first criminal defence cases, and saw his client executed.
- The second lost a large, civil judgment and nearly saw his client forced into bankruptcy.

- The third young lawyer was himself tried and convicted of treason.

The names of these three young lawyers: Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela. They were all to go on to greatness, but the road was never easy, and they were tested again and again. You will be too. But you have the tools and, I am confident, the sense of purpose and principle to meet every challenge.

Students, whether you realise it or not, even now as you graduate, you have been taught well and absorbed what you need to know to continue to learn and grow and function as a fine and high-minded lawyer throughout your career. GNLU has instilled in you a respect for the rule of law and fundamental fairness that will never leave you and which must, more than ever, be defended against those who would ignore or dilute these pillars of our justice system. You have also been expertly taught here to analyze the facts of any situation and to identify the range of possibly applicable legal principles that must be constantly drawn upon in representing clients.

The thing about convocation speeches is that no one ever remembers them. You won't remember this one. But here is what you may remember, and what I hope you will remember. I want you to remember, how it feels to be sitting here today. I want you

to remember your feelings of achievement and of pride—not just for concluding your studies here, but for the helping others, for the advocacy in which you were involved, for the friendships you made, for the community that, together, you created and preserved. I want you to remember your feelings today of excitement, of confidence in the face of uncertainty, of challenges that remain and of limitless possibilities. Hold it within you and never let it go. Because in the decades to come there may be moments when you will need it. You will have some dark days. You will find yourself lost in unlit places. And when you do, this day—if you hold it close to you—will provide you with a lamp.

***Seize opportunities to lead***

You all are now law graduates, which, means that you will have opportunities for leadership that are available to almost no one else. You will be perched at the very pinnacles of power, counselling some of the most influential people in the world. And when you get there, you will have a choice: you can choose to be either a leader or a lemming.

“A leader is a person of courage and action, with integrity and an independent mind.

A lemming is a small and unattractive rodent that will follow other unattractive rodents off a cliff.” I urge you to choose to be the former.



Always remember that, as a lawyer, you are not an ordinary professional. You are an officer of the court; you are at a position where you must uphold the Constitution; you are bound by strict codes of ethics; and you are part of a storied and still-noble profession and so you have a special responsibility – and also special authority, so do not ever shrink from asserting yourself, proudly and forcefully as a lawyer, when the moment arrives for you to lead rather than go along. You will have these moments probably sooner and more often than you think. And it will be heart-stopping and difficult – It is harder than any exam you’ve ever studied for. But it will be at these instances that you will have the opportunity to prove that you are not a lemming.

As for choosing a particular job, one size doesn’t fit all and one size shouldn’t fit anyone for an entire career. Be open to new opportunities and don’t be afraid to make changes in your career. Seize upon—grab—as many legal slices of life as you can that appeal to you.

Don’t let anyone else’s view of what is a good job or not dictate your choices. Listen to yourself your heart as well as your head and follow that internal voice where and really wherever it leads you.

***Remember to always be students for life***

Many people say that as a lawyer and as a doctor you never stop studying, you are always a student and this is absolutely true. If I

start saying "I'm at the top," and "I already know everything" "I know all the laws, I know all the cases" then I might as well quit, because where can I go from there? What I think about is that I have a responsibility to keep on growing, and to not fall into the trap of repetition. The best way to be a student is to keep asking questions. Nothing you read, no knowledge you get is ever a waste in this profession. So always be a student, it's an art to be a student, to question everything, to keep reading about things, it may not necessarily be about law, it could be about arts and crafts or about the sciences, about the environment, about economics, about technology or even about history and this is the beauty of law because everything is related or finds some relation with law. Legal education isn't over after you leave university. In fact it begins when you start practising. Apart from reading law in the form of text-books and case law etc. I'd advice you young budding professional to devote some time for general reading also.

***The human and the humane – being passionate and empathetic***

My other advice to you students would be to not forget that the law deals with humans and their behaviour so it's important we keep the humane aspect at the heart of our professional practice. While the Human in Law is important, the Humane in Law is indispensable. All the three functions of the phenomena of Constitutional-State with its Legislative, Executive and Judiciary

must work in harmony to take the humane first in which every human gets included. One way to resolve a doubt in case there is a conflict between the humane and human is to keep the collective in front of an individual or holistic in front of the partial, or harmonious over the divisive, or the efficient over the deficient, or long-term over the short-term. You must also not forget that success in this profession comes not only to him who is learned and fully familiar with legal principles and case law but rather to him who has common sense, a knowledge of the human nature, the ability to make the worse appear the better reason.

You will have to sometimes deal with matters where the law isn't in your favour and all you have are some facts. I still remember an incident I would like to share with you all sitting here, when I was a junior lawyer we had engaged Dr. Lakshi Mall Singhvi as a senior to argue a matter for us. The facts were such where we were defending a woman of around 75 years of age who was responsible for managing a school. Her house was in the school premises however, since, the dispute arose concerning the management of the school, the opposite side didn't allow for her to park her car inside the premises and insisted she walk a considerable distance to her car. This wasn't a matter, which could be argued on the basis of law. We thought we would lose the case, then Dr. Singhvi said one line that changed the course of the proceedings and we got the verdict in our favour "Every step that woman takes is a step towards her grave". These were powerful

words. What, Dr. Singhvi said showed empathy and struck an emotional cord with the Judges. He had not decided before hand to say this, but it was his presence of mind.

Law is a passionate field, the parties are passionate about their matter for obvious reasons, the witnesses are passionate when they are put on the stand, in criminal law we popularly say “crime of passion”, now with all this, the lawyers arguing the matter, must also be passionate about law, about their cause. There is a constant clash of personality, which makes this profession rather dramatic, and the ever-fresh zest, which agreed, can be very stimulating, demands for the best that is in a person, one who is empathetic and not sympathetic. When a lawyer argues, he is like an artist, he has to paint the case before the judge. His skills, his talent, his oratory style, his expertise, his passion for the cause, will all help in making the case. You must always remain creative, you must remember that you are here to help the law evolve, you are here to change the profession for the better.

Let me narrate another story. You all must have heard about the great painter and sculptor Michelangelo. He has several masterpieces to his credit. On the top of his life is his work David, which is an eighteen-foot tall statue sculpted in marble in Florence, Italy. The story goes that this mammoth eighteen-foot block of marble had been lying around for several years. Some great artists including Leonardo da Vinci were invited to create something

from the slab of marble. They all looked at it and dismissed it as flawed and worthless. It is Michelangelo who accepted to work on that flawed and worthless piece of marble and went on to create a magnificent work of art. While he was working on David, a little boy asked him as to why he was hitting that rock of marble so hard. He replied ‘young man, there an angel inside that rock. I am setting him free.’

There is a genius inside each one of you. There is a winner inside waiting to be unleashed. In most cases we are just waiting for the right sculptor to come along chisel away at the rock and set the winner inside free. Who is the right sculptor in your case? It is your teachers. It is your University that has strived to provide you with not linear but holistic knowledge. I am happy to place on record that the faculties at the Gujarat National Law University have shown remarkable results on this exercise of wholistic knowledge for all, given the statistics of the Annual Report 2018 of the Gujarat National Law University that I was presented with. The work of **GNLU Research and Publication Division** - with 12 Centers of Excellence, 9 Research Endowments, 3 Endowed Projects from Government of Gujarat to Consultancy and Empirical Analyses, in addition to 3 journals and numerous publications on various contemporary themes are glaring examples of this exercise of interface where inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge is taken up for research. I see in this very healthy trend towards the development of holistic knowledge for

all. A cursory glance of all these show rich blend of public and private laws, general and special laws, doctrinal and empirical methods etc. I must congratulate the Vice Chancellor and all the faculty-members for this distinct achievement.

### **Coextending the Ambience to enhance Legal Sense**

There is yet another aspect about GNLU that I want to share. It is about naming of each class-rooms in the academic halls of both Shishya and Guru Bhavan. Each class-room is named with a value whose qualities in life are eternal inspirations. When I heard about this, I was deeply touched. Values like, sincerity, humility, aspiration, generosity, equality, peace, purity, honesty, justice, balance etc. are given. One may wonder why these things are kept in a law university where class-rooms hold serious legal arguments. I call this exercise a re-contextualization of eternal values of life when justice-debates and legal-arguments in class-rooms take place from morning to evening. If you see the Preamble that is there in the middle of the main building with values of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity, what do they do? These are value-cues that serve the onlookers and passers-by with imagination and inspiration of that value to be imbibed in class-rooms, research and teachings. You should not forget that law and justice though couched in intellectual phrases are more than intellectual understandings. There is a deep emotion and feeling, an existence in itself, a vibration of peace, harmony, compassion and

development that rekindle our aims of life, aims of law and aims of legal profession. This synergy of all kinds is a perfect blend of many things that give law students a fertile foundation to sow and reap great qualities and powers internally to help oneself and externally to help others. Legal education gets fulfilled through this.

Lastly, students I would strongly encourage you to take up hobbies, to meditate and have interests which go beyond the law because while the law is in fact all encompassing and permeates every sphere of life, sometimes only a book of fiction, a few minutes of meditation, a good run, a game of tennis, watching a movie, can provide the clarity, peace and rejuvenate your minds. So remember to take time out for yourselves, for your family, your loved ones, because your profession is a part of your life, albeit an important part, but not your whole life.

The greatest thing about the profession you have chosen is that it will give you opportunity after opportunity to make space for what is just and what is right. I hope you will embrace those opportunities. And I hope you will do something similar for yourselves, in your own lives, beginning right here and right now.

I hope you students remember these lines for years to come...

Always remember, nothing worth having will ever come easy for you,

Dreams don't work unless you do,

There is no point of being at the top from the start, if you didn't ever fail,

Stories are told of the victory after the storm and not of the smooth sail!

And before I finish, I would like to ask one final thing:

That you find a few minutes later today to let your parents and loved-ones know how grateful you are for them and what they have done for you. And that you recognize and appreciate that your law degree is their achievement too. They have literally given you life, and so much more. Now, it is up to you to do right by them and the generations to come by doing the right thing with your new degree, career, and life.

Congratulations, students. Now go do great and good things. You are needed and ready.