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Graduation Remarks
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Good morning, family, friends, and fellow graduates of 2003. When I began reflecting on the past three years and all that has happened in the world, the U.S., and here at Stanford during our time in Law School, it felt at first as if these three years have been marked primarily by bad news and unfortunate developments. For example, conflicts of interest over war in Iraq have caused a crisis within the international community and the quasi-legal institutions of the UN. Domestically, Bush v. Gore led to an unprecedented open politicization of the Supreme Court; and the longest economic downturn in recent U.S. history is leading to much hardship, including a budget crisis even right here at Stanford. And, last but certainly not least, the events of September 11, 2001 have, among other things, undermined our sense of security in the US.

In the face of so many challenges, I believe that it is especially important not to lose sight of the many positive developments that we have also witnessed during the past three years—and the central role that law and lawyers have played in many of these.

At the international level, for example, in 2001, East Timor held its first democratic election. Voters chose their first popularly elected assembly—lawmakers who have drafted a Constitution and set the stage for an independent democratic society after centuries of oppressive colonial rule and occupation, when law was imposed from above.

Another example: In 2002, we witnessed the end of a bloody civil war in Sierra Leone. More than 50,000 people had been killed and many more tortured in the decade-long war marked by atrocities against civilians. The war ended last year, with the help of the United Nations. And a special tribunal has been established, where international and Sierra Leonian lawyers and judges will hold those who committed war crimes accountable for their heinous actions. Lawyers and legal institutions are thus helping establish a sense of justice—and facilitating reconciliation.

At the national level, in 2001 and 2002, we witnessed a heightened commitment to upholding the U.S. Constitution and its guarantee of due

process—through increased scrutiny of the death penalty. The U.S. justice system has been confronted with a growing number of criminal defendants who were sentenced to death and later exonerated by exculpatory evidence, especially DNA testing. Indeed, the Innocence Project, a clinical program founded at Cardozo Law School, has alone overseen 127 DNA-based exonerations.

Such cases have prompted the governors of Illinois and Maryland, a federal court, and others to reexamine the death penalty, which cuts off defendants' opportunity for exoneration, and may be denying criminal defendants their Constitutional right of due process. An inspiring commitment to confronting potential failures in the U.S. justice system rather than resting comfortably with the status quo.

And even at a micro-level, here at Stanford Law School, we have witnessed highly positive developments. We have continued to beat out Harvard Law School in the U.S. News and World Report rankings. The mandatory mean was raised from a 3.2 to a 3.4. And our classrooms have been beautifully renovated—complete with Mine Sweeper-facilitating wireless connections and thousand-dollar Aeron chairs. Proof that Stanford Law School is indeed a world-class institution in paradise.

But seriously: Even in these challenging times, we have witnessed many developments that give hope—and many in which law and lawyers have played very positive roles. May we go forth as lawyers, looking for our own ways of contributing to hope and progress.