

The Path Ahead
Ron Moffatt's WLM Plenary Speech
January 26, 2007

Good evening and welcome. What a wonderful feeling it is to look around this room and see so many good people gathered together to advance a mission that unites us all in so many positive ways, filling our days and lives with so much purpose and commitment; and then, when we least expect it, offering us that ephemeral sense of doing something good that helps heal our world. A night like tonight brings great hope.

To those of you who have returned to WLM to again pay homage to our work as fundamental to fostering peace, security, and well-being in our world, I am delighted to be rejoining you in such a warm homecoming. To those of you who are new to our mid-winter's night tradition of renewal and resolve, I offer a special welcome. I trust you will find this weekend a memorable beginning as you embark on a path that can truly help us build that better world we all dream about.

2006 was a record year for NAFSA and our 9,400+ members. More volunteers than ever got involved; and their success in advancing our field and meeting the professional needs of our members can only be attributed to the collaborative spirit of so many talented leaders like you who beheld a common vision, focused your energies, and applied your talents to the many challenges before you. To each of you who jumped into the fray, thank you and congratulations. I'm happy to report, and you'll be glad to hear, even greater challenges await us in 2007! So, please join me in making sure your seat belts are securely fastened.

Looking around this room and seeing the power of our potential to meet those challenges is a bit overwhelming at first glance. Look around you for a moment and marvel at the breadth and depth of all the knowledge and experience assembled here tonight. Look around again and marvel at all the different perspectives and aspirations that we embody. Now, combine that abundance with the level of achievement that each one has accomplished thus far in advancing our profession, and you can begin to appreciate the magnitude of the vast collective resource we offer our field and our association. Now imagine, if you will, what good we could do together that we can't do alone. That's the overwhelming part.

Even though we come from many diverse origins, each of us brings to our work the same heart space that promises a better tomorrow, a promise that awakens us each morning, lifts us from our field of dreams, and compels us forward in countless acts of faith. I think I speak for each of us when I say, "*International education is that promise, NAFSA nurtures that heart space, and all of us are the faithful actors.*" I feel fortunate to be in the midst of so much hope, conviction and goodwill as we plan our next steps in shaping our global future. Thank you for shining your light on the path ahead, and with your indulgence, I would like to briefly share a few reflections on where that path might take us in 2007.

I first glimpsed the path some 35 years ago in a small Kenyan village called Tumutumu when I stood in a thatched hut called a classroom, looked about for books and desks that did not exist, confronted scores of friendly, hungry, penetrating eyes, and slowly began the process of learning how to see what life looks like from non-western, non-privileged perspectives. I lived in East Africa as a volunteer teacher, writer, and neophyte global nomad for two years and I doubt any period in my life has had a more profound impact on shaping my worldview or directing my moral compass. A door opened and a new consciousness began transforming my inner landscape in ways that still resonate today, fueling a lifelong quest for creating greater compassion and justice in a world desperately needing more of both.

I am sure each of you has your own story of cross cultural discovery and transformation, and now, as I look around and see so many fellow dreamers, believers and doers gathered together, I feel compelled to offer one more act of faith - a somber homily with a hopeful ending. Some of you may remember some of these reflections from last WLM, and if so, perhaps like me, you'll wistfully reflect that they ring even more true now than they did then.

As veteran international educators, no one knows better than you how rapidly our world is changing and how profoundly those changes impact our lives on a moment-to-moment basis. Because we work in a field so inextricably connected to the relentless advance of globalization, change is our constant companion, and coping with change becomes our collective challenge. As those changes grow increasingly interconnected across cultures, they become increasingly confounding, and the issues that ensue can assume staggering proportions that soon boggle the mind, jar the soul, and turn our hearts to stone. And from an ever growing menu of global issues that imperil our collective future, three "synapse rattlers" top my richter scale of moral conundrums that we, as cohabitants of our Earth community, can no longer afford to avoid:

First, what hope for justice can we find in a world where half our human family, over three billion people, live on less than two dollars a day, and half of those live on less than \$1 a day¹? What does justice mean when the combined wealth of the world's 712 billionaires exceeds the combined gross domestic product of the world's 150 poorest countries?² Imagine a world where 100 families have 100 bags of rice to share for their survival - in terms of global economic distribution in 2006, 2 families got to share 50 bags while 50 families got to share one bag.³ Now imagine what a more just world might look like and what path we need to take to get there.

Second, what hope for peace can we find in a world where global military spending exceeds \$1.2 trillion annually.⁴ What does peace mean when the world's largest arms dealer accounts for more than half of that amount by operating 702 bases in 131 countries, plus another 6,000+ installations⁵ in a land called home? Imagine a world where just one day of US military spending could provide 60,000 Fulbright fellowships a year, 10 times the current number⁶. One day in 2006 = \$1.5 billion⁷. Now imagine what a more non-violent world might look like and what path we need to take to get there!

And third, what hope for sustainability can we find in a world where the race to the bottom is driven by economic policies that champion unlimited growth, induce hyper consumption, generate obscene waste, and accelerate environmental devastation? What does sustainability mean when the triumph of entrenched greed over empirical truth allows the world's most powerful politicians to debunk global warming in favor of energy policies that ensure the advent of Apocalypse now? Imagine a world where everyone consumed as much as the average American in 2006; we would need three additional Earth size planets to supply the necessary resources and accommodate the residual wastes⁸. Now imagine what a less materialistic, more sustainable world might look like and what path we need to take to get there!

These are the conundrums that frame the three moral imperatives of our times - reducing economic disparities, resolving conflicts non-violently, and adopting sustainable life-styles - and how well we respond as a global community to these challenges in the next five-to-ten years could change the future of our planet more profoundly than any other period in history. *Preserving the planet for our children and grandchildren speaks to our deepest aspirations, no matter what culture, religion, or ideology we embrace or espouse.*⁹ As the daunting social, political, and environmental costs of globalization continue to escalate and imperil our collective survival, we must learn how to foster and connect institutions, organizations and communities so we can generate global solutions for global problems.

The hopeful promise of such a global community is its capacity to connect people and institutions in collaborations that transcend the myopic legacies of competing forces advancing short-term self-interests. Imagine for a moment, a transnational civil society that prepares and inspires a whole new generation of global citizens who look at global issues systemically and envision new paradigms that foster synergistic and holistic approaches to creating sustainable environments and human security for all.

As international educators shaping our global future, we share a compelling responsibility and a unique power to envision possibilities commensurate with the challenges we face. We must act now to foster and connect learning communities that will create a more just, compassionate and sustainable world for all. We must prepare tomorrow's leaders to create a global civil society wherein perspectives are exchanged in pursuit of understanding, aspirations are transformed into deeds that enrich the human spirit, borders become invisible, nations become people, common ground is nurtured, partnerships flourish and goodwill prevails.

Therein lies our hope for the future – this is the promise of international education - and NAFSA is the organization that kindles that hope and lights the path ahead. This promise is not some far away utopia. As NAFSA leaders, we have the ability to actualize this promise of international education, and it can begin right here, right now with addressing what I call our "*3 Leadership Challenges For A World of Rapid Change.*"

1. Empower Our Members

We must strengthen our professional development programs and services to help our members more effectively manage an accelerating confluence of global forces, circumstances, and players directly impacting every aspect of our field and profession. If we aspire to prepare and inspire global citizens, we first must be prepared and inspired as global citizens.

2. Transform Our Institutions

We must create collaborative synergies and innovative partnerships, both on and off campus, that will foster learning communities across borders and beyond comfort zones in order to optimize the acquisition of global competencies and prepare global-ready graduates for a workforce that will only grow increasingly interconnected and cross-cultural.

3. Heal Our World

We must successfully advance favorable public policies through systems and institutions that all too often champion short-term self-interests which inherently run counter to the solutions necessary to solve long-term global issues. Our public policies must strengthen both the perception and the reality of our shared organizational values - that our work is fundamental to fostering peace, security, and well-being in our world and that international education plays a central role in preparing global citizens who will transcend competing short term interests and nurture a harmonic global civil society based on synergistic partnerships and creative collaborations.

That's it - these are our three leadership challenges for 2007 - empower our members, transform our institutions, and heal our world. And for those of you who, like me, may sometimes wonder - how can we possibly do this, how can one person, or one community, or one organization, possibly make a difference with such huge issues on a global scale, allow me to remind you of the hummingbird that Wangari Maathai described in Montreal last May. Like the hummingbird putting out the wild fire with tiny drops of water, "*We each must do what we can.*"

Or as Bono so fervently cajoles us in his appeals to end global poverty, "*Because we can, we must. Because we can, we must. Amen.*" So tonight let's begin to address our leadership challenges for 2007. We are creating NAFSA's history every day through the work we do; now is the time for us to shape NAFSA's future as well. I invite you to act on two propositions during the remainder of our time together this weekend:

First, begin thinking strategically about the role NAFSA can play in advancing the promise of international education. Remember that strategic thinking involves ‘the what’ while operational thinking involves ‘the how.’ At its highest level, it’s a question of defining our vision. What do we want NAFSA to accomplish in the future? Toward what end is all our work directed? On Sunday morning we will have an opportunity to help shape NAFSA’s vision when we focus on reframing the Strategic Plan. You will be asked to identify strategic opportunities that can best move us toward our vision; to identify not only what we do well – what are the core competencies that establish our leadership reputation in the field? - but what else might we want to do well – what new competencies might we want to develop to advance our leadership? So this weekend please remain mindful that as we envision the future, we must think Pan NAFSA, we must think strategically, and we must think of our three leadership challenges.

Second proposition, if you have not already done so, begin securing NAFSA’s financial future. Much of our incredible success as the world’s leading association of international educators is derived from the revenue streams we generate. Membership fees only account for 30% of our revenue base; so we must generate all the rest from other sources. And like everything else in our organization, it’s up to the leadership to make sure we have sufficient resources to meet all our goals and objectives, both now and in the future. Financial stewardship is one of the key elements of leadership that all too often gets overlooked, or perceived as something that someone else is supposed to do. Not so. It’s up to each of us as leaders to make sure that our fund drives are successful, that our conferences are profitable, that our business partners are benefiting from their investment in us, that we spend wisely and balance budgets prudently. It’s important to understand that financial stewardship requires everyone’s involvement; it’s not about someone else doing it; it’s about us, each of us, doing it.

And finally, I would like to close on a personal note about meeting Wangari Maathai last May. In many ways it was one of those magical, ephemeral moments we least expect. Within a matter of seconds we realized that the very first tree she planted when launching her Greenbelt Movement in 1977 was in Tumutumu, just outside the same thatched hut of a classroom that launched my journey five years earlier. Imagine our delight in discovering the roots of our subsequent life paths shared the same common ground.

And tonight, looking around this room, I see a far more profound confluence of life paths finding common ground right here, right now - in our roles as NAFSA leaders - and from this common ground emerges a clear and enduring realization: by doing what we can, and doing it together, we become the indomitable force for good that empowers our members, transforms our institutions, and heals our world. Go ahead, look around this room, and see for yourself where the path ahead might take us; and when that happens, when we realize what good we can do together, “*the stone in our breast dissolves; we take heart once more*”¹⁰. A night like tonight brings great hope. Thank you.

1. Anup Shah: *Poverty Stats and Facts*.

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2. Arundathi Roy; *2004 Sydney Peace Prize Acceptance Speech*. Data updated for 2006.

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3. Aaron Glantz; *Richest 2 Percent Own Half the World's Wealth*.

<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/1222-04.htm>

4. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. *Trends in Military Spending*.

http://www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_trends.html

5. Chalmers Johnson; *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*.
<http://www.americanempireproject.com/johnson/index.asp>
 6. Anup Shah, *Arms Trade and World Military Spending*.
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 7. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs; Fulbright Program.
<http://exchanges.state.gov/education/fulbright/about.htm>
 8. Bo Ekman, *Man and His Endangered Home*.
<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=8225>
 9. John Sloboda; *Saving The Planet and Ourselves: The Way To Global Security*.
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 10. Daniel Berrigan; *Trial of the Catonsville Nine*. 1970.
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