

“Comments for the SPURS Graduation”

Comments from Hashim Sarkis, Dean of the MIT School of Architecture and Planning at the graduation ceremony for the [Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies](#)

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Dear SPURS Fellows:

When you come to MIT, you bring the world with you. It is not that MIT is not in the world or of the world, but there is another aspect of the world, or conception of it, that is very distinctly yours, and that leaves a significant mark on us when you leave.

When we speak of the world today, we tend to speak of globalization, the idea that there is one large economy sweeping everything and one technology connecting everybody. It is here, dominant, one, big, really big, deal with it. And we are. Much of the research on the world's financial institutions, demographic flows, commerce, urbanization, are all based on this big mammoth thing.

Another conception of the world we struggle with is the international world as a collection of nations, as exclusive spaces where some form of identity dictates politics, culture, economics, and modes of interaction with the world. This world's protocols may have been set by the Bretton Woods organizations but they drag on. They have also organized it into developed and underdeveloped and proposed that technology and its rapid transfer, including the economic packages it comes in, will accelerate the process of development if you only follow the models that we tell you to follow. This is by now an exhausted world which weighs us all down, and which has built into it a conception of the rest of the world that will not go away no matter how developed the rest of this world is. We cannot continue to produce relationships among nations and produce knowledge of this world based on a structure that does not correspond to the problems, and I would say aspirations, at hand.

At MIT, we cannot forget that there is also a planetary world, the geological one, the ecological one, the one that we quantify and measure, the one that is endangered, that we worry about everyday, and for which we look for doubles, twins that exist light years away and about which we invite Matt Damon to speak at our graduation, maybe he can take us there even if in fiction.

But then there is the world you bring with you, the one that is inhabited by human experiences that is there to share, to reflect, to report on how unique experiences produce unique knowledge, but to always work together to make

these unique these experiences add up to larger shared understanding of humanity, to create a framework, a constantly changing framework, like Heraclitus' river, that is receptive to these experiences and respectful of them no matter how far away they come from and no matter how strange. In your world, there are no strangers, or rather, we are all strangers. It is this strangeness that sets the ethics of your coming together, your impact on the faculty and students here, and that ultimately returns you to the world.

As you leave, as you graduate, rest assured that you have left behind part of your world, and that MIT has inched closer to your world. You may have always been citizens of this ecumenal world but you conclude your term here, we let you graduate, because you have succeeded at making us all citizens of your world.

Thanks to you and congratulations to us.