



**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
FALL CONVOCATION
October 8 and 9, 2009**

**Convocation Address
By Dr. Louise Arbour**

Former Canadian Supreme Court Justice and UN Human Rights High Commissioner

An honorary Doctor of Laws was conferred on Dr. Louise Arbour during the Faculty Administration and Faculty of Environment ceremony on Friday, October 9, 2009. The following is Dr. Arbour's convocation address.

Mr. President, members of faculty, dear graduates, family and friends. It is customary to begin this kind of address with the appropriate expression of humility and gratitude and I intend to do so with utmost sincerity on both counts. I am indeed very honoured to find myself graduating with you and I'm conscious that I've earned this degree in ways that are not to you considerably less strenuous than what you have been put through in the last

years. In fact, my degree, to a large extent, looks backwards to what I have tried to accomplish over a long period of time. Your degree looks, to some extent, to your more recent past. This event is above all an occasion to rejoice in your accomplishments and to recognize the contributions of members of your family, your friends and your mentors who have supported you all along the way.

But I think your degree also looks forward. It's a call to action, an invitation to you to take on maybe even a mortgage on your conscience. Now, I don't want to suggest that the world should fall on your shoulders, but if you pause to situate yourself on this path, you will have to acknowledge the uniquely privileged position in which your education has placed you. Not only you are going to be able to make a living, to support yourself and your family, but you will also be able to nourish your own intellect and spirit, and even to contribute to the lives of millions of people elsewhere in the world who were born, like you, in nations equal to us in rights and in dignity.

My own career has been full of opportunities and of surprises. I find myself now leading a terrific international non-profit organization, called International Centre for the prevention and resolution of deadly conflicts, after a long career in the public sector internationally.

effect positive change on issues around which there is very little hope for broad-based public mobilization.

I've now agreed to lead Crisis Group, a well-established organization dealing with conflict prevention and resolution through field-based research, analysis, policy prescription and advocacy. I am moving farther away from the law, but I feel closer to a world in constant motion.

In hindsight, in looking back at my career so far, I realize that I have an irresistible—I hope not fatal—attraction to change and novelty, at least as long as change presents a real, personal challenge and an opportunity to be part of something important and forward-looking.

I continue to have great confidence in the possibility for change; change for the better, including deep, profound change that may seem unimaginable until it actually starts happening. I believe that this is what happened in the Canadian legal culture and in the Canadian and Quebec societies in which I grew up. I believe in resilience and in the great mobilizing power of people and of ideas.

I'm sure you do to. I wish you a very fulfilling and surprising career. The world is constantly changing; don't let it change without you.

Thank you very much.