

2017 LL.M. Speaker: Gonzalo D.V. Go III '17 LL.M.

Distinguished guests, members of the faculty, proud parents, family, friends, and fellow graduates:

The Columbia Law School LL.M. Class of 2017 is made up of 313 remarkable men and women with diverse backgrounds from around the world. We came here to become better versions of ourselves, to learn from global legal experts, and to explore New York City. Our bunch has been unique right from the start. We gave ourselves a head start by eagerly meeting as a class three days before the official orientation to share stories, meet new friends—and learn to pronounce each other's names. The class selfie we took at the end of that night was foretelling of the wonderful year ahead of us.

Armed with our official CLS t-shirts, backpacks, and mobile app, we took in a barrage of information during Orientation. We located both Big Warren and Little Warren, and quickly learned which Warren offers the free coffee and cookies. We were side-by-side as we all absorbed an array of acronyms—GLS, ISSO, OPT, IAL, LRW, OCS, SJI, MPRE, UBE, and the Notorious RBG—which would be central to our lives during the coming months.

Then came the add/drop period, when we found ourselves listed (and waitlisted) in classes taught by renowned professors we had only read about before arriving. While balancing our challenging course loads, we still managed to find time to explore the city, go museum hopping, do pro bono work, mingle and make new friends, be amused (and concerned) by alternative facts, and grab some precious extra sleep during the last few weeks before final exams.

Throughout all these milestones, the Office of Graduate Legal Studies always helped lead us to reason. Thank you Dean Polo, Jill, Marissa, Megan, and Jennifer, for constantly being available to answer our questions and address our apprehensions. And today, after having successfully submitted our LL.M. papers, and satisfied the rigorous requirements of our professors—and this prestigious school—we are ready to receive our diplomas and make history!

Thank you, too, to our parents, partners, sponsors, siblings, children, professors, administrators, and staff. You made this experience possible and, hands down, amazing. My overflowing gratitude goes to my parents, Winston and Marilyn. Your sacrifices put meaning in everything I have; and as always, you are my moral compass as I consider the opportunities ahead.

We are one as a community, but we thrived this year because we are individually driven. Each one of us has our own stories to tell—of home, of our struggles, of our different nations. We all came here for different reasons, with different views, and different agendas. But therein lies the beauty of our Columbia Law School experience. Our individual friendships helped us broaden our minds—and in doing so, we never lost ourselves. Columbia Law School provided us with safe spaces to unmask our fears, to discuss and neutralize our biases and prejudices, and to be sensitive to what it is like to be on the opposite side of the fence on any given issue without losing our own convictions and principles.

We now pack our bags and go our separate ways. We take with us not only the profound learnings of this year, but also a renewed sense of intellectual hunger and passion for truth. We will champion transparency, justice, diversity, and inclusiveness. Equipped with the privilege of a Columbia degree, we serve as potent instruments to improve our communities by enhancing human rights and common decency. We take on the task of dispelling oppressive distinctions based on nationality, color, ethnicity, gender, creed, disability, and socioeconomic background. Let us stand proud and build a global community where everyone is welcome, valued, supported, and celebrated.

Together with my fellow LL.M. classmates, we bid goodbye for now to Morningside Heights and to one another. Let us remain connected, forever a community of colleagues and friends. May the support of family and friends, respect of peers, and admiration of the people we lead, always be enough to propel us to the highest peaks, leaving no one behind.

Congratulations Class of 2017; and as we traditionally say in the Philippines, Mabuhay po tayong lahat! ("May we all live fully!")

