



IMLI GRADUAND DELIVERS THE VALEDICTORY ADDRESS AT THE 32ND GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE INSTITUTE

Ms. Chioma Rosemary Mgbemena (Nigeria) delivered the Valedictory Address on behalf of the graduands during the Institute's 32nd Annual Graduation.



Ms. Chioma Rosemary Mgbemena (Nigeria), who delivered the Valedictory Address

In her address, Ms. Mgbemena noted that the 2021 graduands attended a challenging academic year and, therefore, she was very pleased to acknowledge their presence to celebrate the triumphs, successes, and achievement throughout this journey.

She extended the students' appreciation to many, including the Maltese Government and its people for their hospitality, the numerous donors, IMO for its continued emphasis on the role of shipping in international trade and human existence, particularly at such unprecedented times, the United Nations and the World Health Organisation for their continued efforts in combating the COVID-19 virus. In thanking the Director, Professor David Attard, for his

constant and valued support she referred to him as “... a father and friend to all, who made us love the Sea through his intellectual and visual replication of the law of the Sea.”

She invited her fellow graduands to ensure that the impact of the IMLI training is reflected in their future works. She prompted her colleagues to take active roles in building the national maritime sectors in whatever role they may find themselves. “*I encourage you in whatever capacity to ensure that sustainable maritime policies are developed, IMO and other relevant International Maritime Instruments are ratified and implemented in our various domestic legal frameworks. I also urge us to utilise the opportunities provided through IMLI and other maritime institutions to expand our knowledge and expertise in international maritime law and ocean governance*’, she said.

She saluted her friends for their hard work, perseverance, and challenges throughout the academic programmes and reminded them that ‘*We leave here with pride celebrating this feat we have accomplished and must strive to inspire others. As IMLI graduates and now part of the league of "IMLI Extraordinary gentlemen and women", we are ready to contribute our quota to the development of international maritime law, now and in the future.*’

Reproduced below is the Valedictory Address delivered by Ms. Mgbemena:

**Your Excellency, The Secretary-General of International Maritime Organization (IMO),
The Director, IMO International Maritime Law Institute (IMLI),
The staff of IMLI,
All protocols observed,
My Fellow Graduands,
Distinguished Guests,
Greetings to you all,**

I am honoured to address you on behalf of the class of 2021 and to share our experience during the academic programme. The session has indeed been challenging, and I'm glad we are all present to celebrate our triumphs, successes, and achievement throughout this journey.

We thank the Maltese Government and the beautiful people of Malta for their hospitality, accommodating students from diverse backgrounds and making our stay worthwhile. I can now attest to the beauty of Malta and its people and like other students, I promise to come visiting again!



According to Benjamin Franklin, **"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."** **On this note, we seize this opportunity** to thank all the sponsoring Organisations and Governments that have made it possible for us to benefit from this programme. To study at a prestigious institution such as IMLI is a rare opportunity, the wealth of knowledge is unmatched and unrivalled, thus ensuring that we become an integral part of the International Maritime Community.

We acknowledge our loved ones and family for their support, prayers, patience, and tolerance. I would also like to use this opportunity to extend our sympathy to the loved ones we lost, who would have loved to share this day with us. We will keep making them proud and hold them dear in our hearts till we meet again.

In the words of **Conan O'Brien**, **"You have seen and survived so much, and you've responded with wit, creativity, activism, and a gritty determination to take the reality you've been handed and make it better."** On this note we salute the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) for their continued efforts in combating the COVID-19 virus. COVID-19 brought about challenges in all sectors, and as humans, we have responded with unity shown through global efforts in reducing the impact of the deadly virus.

We also extend our appreciation to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for its continued emphasis on the role of shipping in international trade and human existence, particularly at such unprecedented times. This is reflected in the theme for the 2021 World Maritime Day – "**Seafarers: at the Core of Shipping's Future**", which aims to intensify awareness and draw visibility to the role of seafarers as essential workers now and in the future. We agree that even as onshore workers in the maritime industry, we faced tremendous challenges during these times. Therefore, we must continue to stress on the need for more collaboration and cooperation, as the survival of humanity heavily depends on essential commodities and supplies to different parts of the world through shipping.

Although COVID-19 issues have taken the front row, we must not forget its correlation with maritime safety, security, and the marine environment. The impact on our Seafarers' mental and physical health has a tremendous consequence on maritime safety, security, and the marine environment. Thus, we must continue to strive for better welfare and the recognition of Seafarers as essential workers globally.

Noteworthy also is the need to take assertive steps for more resilient and adaptive responses to climate change as its impact threatens international shipping and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG). Therefore, this is a clarion call for all to push now more than ever for sustainable policies and regulations aimed at the climate change agenda, cleaner oceans and a safer environment for future generations.

Distinguished guests

Leonardo da Vinci once said, "He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may cast." This was my reality for the past ten years. I say this because I was advising the maritime administration without having the requisite theoretical knowledge to advance maritime administration in my country. I wouldn't say it was all in vain, but after my programme at IMLI, I certainly know the difference.

Over the past academic year at IMLI, my colleagues and I have learned a lot.

The comprehensive lectures and specialized courses covering all aspects of public and private international maritime law, legal drafting exercises, the moot court session, presentations,

ocean governance and other emerging issues such as cyber security, BBNJ and autonomous shipping have broadened our knowledge and increased our interest and passion for international maritime law.

I would like to take this moment to appreciate Professor David J. Attard, a father and friend to all, who made us love the Sea through his intellectual and visual replication of the law of the Sea. He also made us comfortable and ensured that all students were adequately catered to and taken care of to the best of the Institute's ability. We also thank Professor Martinez whose wealth of knowledge extends beyond the limits of liability to the law of the sea. He taught us to think that nothing is set in stone, urged us to read and think between the lines through his popular word 'it depends' and encouraged us to compartmentalise while studying.



We recognise Ms. Elda Kazara-Belja, a friend to all with great intellect who taught us with much enthusiasm and passion. She remained the bedrock and support system for all even before we resumed at IMLI. In my opinion, which I believe is shared by all, there was nothing she didn't have the answer(s) to; you just have to ask! We acknowledge Mr. Murat Summer, for always being considerate, thoughtful, and willing to share knowledge and to Dr. Angeles Jimenez for opening our eyes to ocean governance with a passion.

We thank Ms Ramat Jalloh for the exposé into the intricates of the marine environment. Her welcoming spirit ensured that as students we learnt a lot. We also thank Dr. Sanjeet Ruhel for ensuring we gained a lot of knowledge in Maritime security, Mr. Joe Mifsud for making sure we got in and out of Malta safely without stress, Ms. Ivana Riskova for attending to our needs and to Mr. Alexander Scerri, for the constant technical support. To all the administrative staff of the Institute too many to mention, we say, thank you.

We congratulate the Director and staff of IMLI for the successful programme amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The knowledge imparted and your various contributions to our success will no doubt be valued as we begin to set sail.

My fellow graduands,

When we started, we were oblivious to the journey ahead and the amount of hard work required. I recall the advice given at the beginning of the programme to expect a rigorous and intense programme. Little did we know it would be just that! Undertaking our programmes during these times undoubtedly brought about many challenges, but as a famous saying goes - "**A smooth sea never made a skillful sailor.**" Nonetheless, we pulled through as one communal family!

We came from diverse backgrounds and different parts of the world with different expertise and through determination, we integrated and learnt from one another. But I think the most important things that we learnt are teamwork, cooperation, and networking.

Online learning gave us many memories. Some of the experiences we won't forget are how we thrived through long periods of lectures and seminars, trying to get through to some students (that I won't mention) during group assignments, balancing different time zones and the screen appearance of some of our kids at lectures!!

For those that made it to IMLI Campus, I commend you for adhering to all covid guidelines and quarantine rules. I also appreciate your determination as travelling had its challenges. We also note the personal challenges faced by students, remotely and on-campus and congratulate all for their support, assistance and commitment to ensure that we all celebrate today. The camaraderie between students and faculty was indeed commendable.

My fellow graduands,

The IMLI experience, as I fondly call it, was enlightening and transformational. Although I don't deny that it was stressful but was worth it! We came in as strangers, and now we have grown into a family! We bonded, made connections, shared life experiences, had fun whenever we could while keeping safe, learned about new cultures, food, and dance steps. We laughed, cried, and created an envious support system that shall be cherished forever.

I wish we had more time and shared experiences, particularly physical interactions with all students, faculty, visiting fellows, other distinguished guest lecturers, and IMO's educational field trips. We hope that provisions are made to undertake this trip in the nearest future so we can all meet and celebrate.

Although we are very excited to have finally completed our programme, let us not be afraid of what lies ahead as it can only be more incredible things. We have faced it all, conquered and are now ready to set sail. As Martin Luther King said, "**The strongest storms make the best sailors. The strongest games make the best players. Tougher challenges make the best leaders.**" Undoubtedly, IMLI has prepared and given us the tools, knowledge, and network to succeed in our careers. We, therefore, have the capacity of doing more extraordinary things. Therefore, I encourage us never to underestimate the knowledge and network of friends as we all have the potential to inspire each other to greater career heights.

Class of 2021, "**A ship in port is safe. But that's what not ships are built for.**" As IMLI has prepared us, we must ensure that the impact of the training is reflected in our future works. Let us take active roles in building our maritime sectors in whatever role we find ourselves. I encourage you in whatever capacity to ensure that sustainable maritime policies are developed, IMO and other relevant International Maritime Instruments are ratified and implemented in our various domestic legal frameworks. I also urge us to utilise the opportunities provided through IMLI and other maritime institutions to expand our knowledge and expertise in international maritime law and ocean governance.

I take this opportunity to commend our class representative, Dr. Emma Portelli Bonnici, for her leadership, resilience, always being present and willing to help, Ms. Ana Olivert Amado, who created a meeting and knowledge platforms, Dr. Cecilia Hegamin-Younger, who assisted us with Zoom links for our anchor meetings, Mr. Avery Chong for the beautiful masks and

gifts, Lt Cdr. Sanchala Perera and all persons who have one way or another contributed to our success, lest I forget, special shoutout to our Class Legend and MVP, Mr. Charles Gono!

My dear friends, all the hard work, perseverance, and challenges throughout the academic programmes have paid off. We leave here with pride celebrating this feat we have accomplished and must strive to inspire others. As IMLI graduates and now part of the league of "IMLI Extraordinary gentlemen and women", we are ready to contribute our quota to the development of international maritime law, now and in the future.

I celebrate you all and I am proud to have been part of this special class.

Thank you and congratulations, class of 2021!!!

Long live IMLI!

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