

Massachusetts School of Law Commencement Address

Remarks by [Ronald K. Noble](#), INTERPOL Secretary General
Andover, Mass. – 5 June 2009

Dean of the Massachusetts School of Law,
Professor Lawrence Velvel,
Distinguished members of the faculty and administration,
Dear graduates of the Class of 2009,
Dear guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

Let me begin by thanking Dean Velvel and Professor Sullivan for their kind invitation to speak here today. It is truly an honor to have been asked to share in this event and the 20th anniversary of the Massachusetts School of Law.

Since it is a day for milestones, please allow me to share some of my own.

Professionally speaking, thirty years ago, I began my legal studies at Stanford Law School. Twenty years ago, I became a professor at NYU Law School and started teaching bright students such as you. Ten years ago, I was selected as the first American nominee to serve as the Secretary General of INTERPOL.

On a more personal note, this year my parents will celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary, and my brother James and his extraordinary wife Cindy their 20th. This is the year that my 17 year-old niece Veronica made first team all state in basketball and my 7 year-old nephew James sent Flat Stanley to visit INTERPOL Headquarters for the first time in history.

Of special significance today is my mother's 84th birthday, and I am so thankful that all of you decided to graduate on her birthday! We will have a great joint celebration.

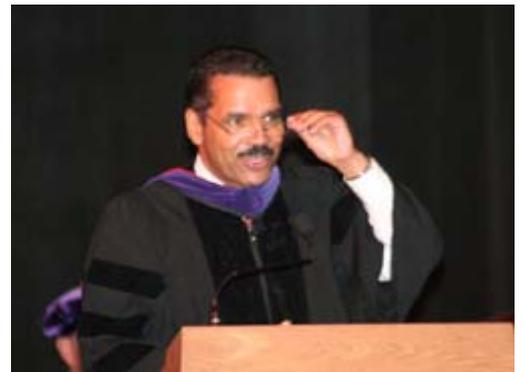
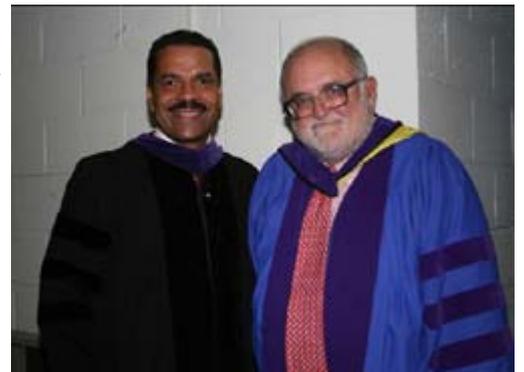
But, Dean Velvel, members of the faculty and administration, and parents, family members, loved ones and friends of graduates of the Massachusetts Law School Class of 2009, the most important milestone of all is what brings us together today.

Yes, today we have gathered to witness and to celebrate this great achievement of these talented, bright and hardworking students as they close one momentous chapter of their lives and open another.

So, (those of you who can) please stand and join me in congratulating the Massachusetts School of Law Class of 2009 on this their very special day.



Law graduates with INTERPOL Secretary General Noble, also pictured below with the Dean of the Massachusetts School of Law, Professor Lawrence Velvel.



Thank you.

The law school experience is so powerful that I can still remember sitting where you are now. Whenever I do, I think about how blessed I have been, and I feel compelled to express my undying gratitude to my parents, brother and the rest of my family. Without them, I never would have made it.

I am sure that you feel the same way; so Graduates of the Class of 2009, for those of you who are able, please rise to thank your family, friends and loved ones for all that they have done and sacrificed for you.

I can also never forget my Dean at Stanford, who admitted me to law school and the law professors I studied under who believed in me, who pushed me and who accepted nothing less than my best. They invested in me when I had nothing to offer them in return.

To my fellow professors seated with me on this stage I say, your work is rarely appreciated and acknowledged enough, but I assure you that the lessons you have taught your students and the impact you have had on their thinking will stay with them forever.

For me – and for you the graduates here today – without the collective support of our families, loved ones, closest friends, and deans, professors and administrators, I would not be standing where I am today and you would not be seated where you are! Never forget to whom you owe your thanks.

Admittedly, much has changed since I graduated from law school and addressed my graduating class in 1982.

Back then, I told my classmates that they should make sure they enjoyed and appreciated their families and the pleasures of life as they embarked on their individual professional journeys. I told them that there was more to life than worrying about passing the bar exam, making partner, becoming successful and working long hours.

Back then we had no idea what the world had in store for us. The global threat of terrorism and the power of the Internet were inconceivable concepts back then. Today, they are part of our every day lives.

Fortunately for me, though the world has changed immensely since then, the principles, beliefs, ethics and skills drilled into me by my parents, teachers, professors and mentors have guided me throughout my life. They have been timeless and universal in their application.

The same should be true for all of you! You also sit here today as the products of your environment. You are here both because of your individual achievement and because of the love, support and sacrifices of those who came before you and those who are with you today. Timeless and important principles have become an integral part of your lives both before and during your time at MSL.

So, let us reflect on where we gather today; where you received this unique opportunity to learn.

There could be no more appropriate place than the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for such a groundbreaking institution as the Massachusetts School of Law to be founded.

Ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem. The motto of this great state: "By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under liberty."

It was this fertile ground that gave us the nation's first public library, the first public school and the first college; that gave the world both the first telephone and the first e-mail message.

This state also gave us revolutionaries who laid the groundwork for our nation's independence;

statesmen who conceived the ideals and values on which our democracy was founded; bold thinkers like Susan B. Anthony and John F. Kennedy who pushed our country in new but necessary directions.

Following this line of impressive and historic firsts, the Massachusetts School of Law is a true pioneer in the field of legal education. With tuition fees less than half the average for New England law schools and an admissions process that refuses to view applicants as simple scores on a standardized test, the school has for two decades led the charge to force open the doors of the legal profession to those for whom they have traditionally been closed: first-generation lawyers, the underprivileged, recent immigrants, women and people of color. In other words, anyone with dreams of becoming a lawyer, with intellect, drive and commitment, could find a place here to live that dream.

Indeed, for many of you, this school has made a career in law possible where it was not before.

We must be very thankful, for it is exactly your perspectives, your voices, that the legal profession needs most. It should not and cannot be one reserved only for the wealthy, the well-connected, or those who perform well on standardized tests.

As graduates of this institution, you will go on to become professors and state senators, prosecutors, defense attorneys and innovators in business, just like those who have come before you, including my older, smarter and very protective brother from the Class of 1997.

But wait! Just in case you thought you were finally home-free, do not forget that you begin this journey with a debt – I know, this is a most terrifying word in the English language to use during this difficult economic period in which we find ourselves – but the debt of which I speak is not financial, and it is one that you can repay with dignity and honor.

I already spoke about the debt of thanks that you owe your family, loved ones and closest friends.

Now let me turn to your debt in becoming lawyers.

You owe your Dean, Professor Velvel, who was considered a maverick way before that term became popular.

He has been called “a modern-day crusader” and “one of the most influential people in legal education over the past 15 years,” for leading his own version of the Boston Tea Party in the name of law school reform. It is thanks to him – his strict adherence to principle, his commitment to lifelong learning – that the Massachusetts School of Law remains open and inclusive.

You owe the professors on this stage with me who could have taught anywhere but chose this school because of the principles for which it stands and the opportunities that it provides. They have given you the hands-on knowledge and tools necessary to fulfill the promises you have made to yourselves, to your families and to your chosen profession.

In a clear sign of the strong bond between student and school, I see that several graduates of this institution have returned to teach here, including Assistant Professor Al Puller, who spent 27 years with the Massachusetts State Police and graduated in 2004, and Assistant Professor Paula Colby-Clements, who also serves as your Director of Admissions and graduated in 1997.

You also owe your fellow graduates who have both inspired you and been inspired by you:

1. Like Victoria Dickinson, whose mother was one of the founders of the Massachusetts School of Law. I am told that Victoria used to roller-skate around the Dundee Office Park where the school was once located, but today sits among you as the valedictorian of this graduating class.
2. Like Anne Hemingway, who has been actively involved in the law school and in the community despite being a busy student and a single mother.

3. Like the eight police officers who are graduating alongside you, including one who commuted all the way from Connecticut to attend this school. For the eight of you, I have a special gift from INTERPOL, so please find me after these festivities.

There are 150 of you graduating today. Unfortunately, I cannot recognize each of you by name because time does not permit me. But there are 150 unique and compelling narratives in this audience. You are single parents. You are mid-career professionals changing courses. You come from right here in Massachusetts or as far away as England, Jamaica, Slovakia and Ukraine.

The diversity of experience and backgrounds that you brought to this law school will serve you well on the road ahead. You will see when you go toe-to-toe with graduates of other schools just how well you have been prepared here at MSL.

But, you already know this don't you. For the third straight year, the top advocate award for the Thurgood Marshall Mock Trial Competition for the Northeast Region went to a Massachusetts School of Law student, Allen Woodward, who beat a student from a school over in Cambridge – the name of which I cannot recall.

So you, all of you, have no reason to wonder how good you can be; you already know it!

My dear graduates, one of your dreams has now been realized, but many more dreams await you.

Nothing can stop you! I promise you that if you work hard, if you are honest and if you are not afraid to admit from time to time that you have made a mistake, then you can achieve anything that you wish!

I remember when I started my own personal journey in law I never imagined I would someday have the awesome responsibility of overseeing a global police organization serving 187 countries whose mission is to keep as many of you as safe as possible.

In my eight and a half years as Secretary General, I have visited 127 of these countries. Their legal systems, cultures, philosophies and processes are as diverse as the faces I see before me.

And yet, I have seen a common denominator in every country I have visited. There exists a universal bond – one of love for family and country.

Unfortunately, the rule of law is not as firmly rooted in all countries as it should be. But this is the basic prerequisite for everything that we hope for, for everything that first attracted you to the legal profession.

The rule of law must not be allowed to discriminate against any individual or group. It must not be allowed to engage in a double standard between any majority and any minority.

INTERPOL's Constitution requires us to conduct all of our activities based on the same principles that I learned growing up and studying law in America. It prohibits us from becoming involved in any matter of a racial, religious, military or political nature.

At INTERPOL, we are also bound by our belief in the rule of law and by our deep respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For an example of what can happen in the absence of the rule of law, we can look at the situation in the Gulf of Aden, where pirates in the waters near Somalia continue to threaten countries throughout the world, either directly through hijackings or indirectly through higher social and economic costs.

You will recall the case two months ago involving the hijacking of the Maersk Alabama, whose heroic

captain, a graduate of the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, was ultimately freed by Navy Seals. The sole surviving suspect was brought to the United States by the US law enforcement to be tried for his crimes.

INTERPOL offers a similar form of support to track down terrorists, murderers, rapists, organized crime figures, human traffickers and a whole host of others who pose a danger to you at home or abroad. Right now as I speak to you INTERPOL's National Central Bureaus, our Command and Coordination Center and staff from our headquarters as well in our offices worldwide are working to keep dangerous criminals from harming you. That is what we do each and every day.

We nonetheless recognize that security is not merely preventing, investigating or prosecuting crime. Think about sustainable development, social stability and economic growth – security in these areas is not possible if society fails to apply and enforce the rule of law.

Whether you become judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, legal scholars, professors, or political or business leaders, you, too, have a stake in making sure the rule of law takes root and flourishes.

Dear Graduates,

I hope in years to come you keep in mind the words of President Abraham Lincoln, who said: "Let reverence for the law be breathed by every American mother to each babe. Let it be taught in schools, in seminaries and in colleges. Let it be written in primers, spelling books and in almanacs. Let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls and enforced in courts of justice. Let it become the political religion of the nation and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor of all sexes and tongues and colors and condition sacrifice unceasingly upon its altar."

I welcome you, the graduates of the Massachusetts School of Law Class of 2009, to the start of a remarkable journey, one you embark on at a time of extraordinary challenges in an increasingly unstable world but one wherein the same principles and support structures that brought you to this point will serve you well.

Yes, the challenges before you and all of us can be met. I know deep down that we will prevail. I believe that the good in the many will always conquer the evil in the few.

Just as doors that were once closed have been opened for you, I urge you to never forget where you came from. It has always been and will always be one of your greatest strengths.

You have benefited from a most precious gift -- an excellent legal education. Now you must take this gift and help those who cannot help themselves. You must fight for those **without** voices, and you must fight ethically and honestly for those **with** voices.

That you chose to study law in the first place and that you chose to undertake your studies at this institution shows that you are already well-prepared for this role.

It shows that you are willing to take risks; that you have chosen hard wins over easy gains; that you have made short-term sacrifices for long-term rewards.

Your commitment and dedication have carried you through many late nights studying, through many tough classes, papers and exams, and through many missed times with your loved ones. They have brought you to the very spot where you find yourself today.

This is the moment you have been preparing for your whole lives, regardless of when you chose to enter this profession, whether right out of college or after years in the workforce.

You have chosen the law – walk tall/sit tall – you have earned this privilege, this right. But remember

that the best is still ahead; it has always been so and it will always be so.

Let me close with a thought to keep in mind when things in your life seem almost too much to handle, when 24 hours in a day seem not to be enough, please remember the **“The Mayonnaise Jar of Life and Two cups of coffee.”** The true author is unknown, but the lesson is as valuable today as when I spoke to my graduating class at Stanford almost 30 years ago.

“A professor stood before his philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly, he picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous “yes”.

The professor then produced two cups of coffee from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space between the sand. The students laughed.

“Now,” said the professor, as the laughter subsided, “ I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life.

The golf balls are the important things in life: Your family, your children, your loved ones, your health, your beliefs, your friends, and your favorite passions - things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, and your car.

The sand is everything else, the small stuff.

“If you put the sand into the jar first,” he continued, “there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness.

Spend time with your family; take your spouse out to dinner; tell him or her how much they are loved; take care of your health. There will always be time to check your email; send a text message; watch television or repair some broken item.

Take care of the golf balls first; the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand.”

One of the students raised her hand and inquired what the coffee represented. The professor smiled. “I’m glad you asked. It just goes to show you that no matter how full your life may seem, there’s always room for a couple of cups of coffee with a loved one or a friend.”

My dear Graduates of the Class of 2009 please take good care of yourselves, your reputations, your family and your country!

Godspeed on your journey.

Thank you!