

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on October 21, 2022

Location: Hendricks Chapel

Remarks: Remembrance Convocation

*Chancellor Syverud was introduced by Associate Provost Chris Johnson*

Good Afternoon.

On behalf of all of us at Syracuse University, I welcome our honored guests and all those gathered here today for this special service. Today we honor this year’s Remembrance Scholars and Lockerbie Scholars.

This is the ninth time I have spoken at this ceremony. I’ve watched nine cohorts of amazing students from all over this university and from Scotland pass through this sacred space. I watched them add their own unique souls to the task of remembering and acting forward in the names and spirits of the 270 people who died on Pan Am 103 and in Lockerbie.

There are more than a few people present who have seen more than nine groups of Remembrance and Lockerbie scholars. Some of you have participated in more than 30 of these events, indeed all the way back to that awful day in December 1988. Some of you were here on this campus on that day, or you were in your homes or offices as you learned what had happened to your friends, your family members, your students, and your community.

I am therefore a relative newcomer to this Remembrance effort, as are all of this year’s Remembrance and Lockerbie Scholars. For nine years, as I have struggled with what to say at this ceremony, I have been repeatedly humbled by what I don’t know, and by what new things I keep learning, about the events of 1988 and the people affected by them.

Just when I think I have fully absorbed the lessons of Lockerbie, something new comes up. I meet a new student, or an old person from Lockerbie, and the complexity of the event and of our human response to it overwhelms me once again.

I want to participate in remembering, but I keep asking how I can rightly remember an event, or a human being, before I fully know and understand. And in honesty, I doubt now I will ever fully know and understand December 21, 1988.

Maybe that is the point. Maybe that is how some of you who were here on December 21, 1988 felt on that day. Maybe even then, the natural reaction was to cry and hope someday to put it behind you, to hope for a time when that day and all it entailed could be forgotten. Maybe on December 21, 1988 some people hoped that, by October 21, 2022, Lockerbie would be a distant memory, and we would all have moved on.

The point is that, we did not move on, forgetting our people and our past. Like a great university at its best, we moved forward, learning from our people and our past and working hard to become more and better. We do not mourn Lockerbie. We embrace that place and its people, and 66 Lockerbie Scholars have since made this place a better University. We do not forget those who died, but we pay forward the best of what they could, and I believe would have, become had they been given that chance.

And we do all this with an honest sense of history and of change. We do all this through the best of this University, which is our students when they are at their best. We do all this through our Remembrance Scholars who we honor today.

To date, we have honored in this ceremony 1,155 Remembrance Scholars. That is a big number. They have made this world a better place in honor of the best potential of the people on that plane and the people of Lockerbie. In honor of lives cut short, they have worked for better lives and a better world.

That is a good thing. It is a thing to remember and to celebrate. It is something unique and it something that makes me proud of what people have achieved at this University. I think it should make all of us more proud than even of a beautiful campus or a school ranking or an undefeated football team. We should be most proud when our people show our values by their actions in the toughest of times. And that is what many of you did when you created the Remembrance and Lockerbie Scholar programs, and that is what the Remembrance and Lockerbie Scholars have worked to do every year since.

To this year’s 35 Remembrance Scholars and 2 Lockerbie Scholars: I thank you for your hard work this year, and for the values you represent. May you continue to work to make this world a better place, not by forgetting the past and moving on, but by understanding the past and learning from it – learning from it the meaning of compassion and of justice and of the complexity that sometimes is involved in truly seeking knowledge.

Thank you.