

Occasional Address
Royal Exhibition Building, 6 December 2018, 11.00am

Dr James Smith

Director-General, International Livestock Research Institute, Nairobi, Kenya

Presiding Chancellor, Jane Hansen
Presiding Vice Chancellor, Professor Liz Sonenberg
Dean Fazakerley, members of the Faculty and the University Council,
Graduands, families and friends
Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for the warm introduction.
Thank you for the recognition and tremendous honour you have bestowed on me today.

That this has come from one of the finest Veterinary and Agricultural Faculties in the world—and indeed, from one of the finest universities in the world, makes me and my wife Charmaine (sitting in the audience) feel extremely proud and privileged.

Graduands, It is said that ‘life is measured in moments not minutes’ and your conferment will be one of those moments --one of those times in your life that you will remember years and decades from now. I am delighted to be a part of it.

This marks an enormous achievement for all of you and soon, if not already, you will be giving careful thought to what next! I am hopeful that you will be considering your role as Citizens --not only as Australians, or of your respective national origins --but also your role as ‘citizens of the world’ and the rich opportunities before you there.

We understand—we cannot help but understand—whether we like it or not, that we all are citizens of a *globalized* world. And that means at least two things for well-educated citizens like you – I add well-educated, because the privilege of a fine university education brings with it responsibilities to apply your talents, not only for the benefit of yourselves but also for the benefit of others.

First, a citizen of the world acknowledges that the world is made up of far more than any one nation, any one perspective, any single tribe or creed or color or orientation or ideology.

I make this patently obvious point because it seems that there is a sort of nationalistic fervor sweeping the world and with it, the torching of the ‘global village’ ideal and a return to attitudes and prejudices, that I thought we had long overcome.

Second, it means that as interconnected citizens --we must act on it.
The great religious and moral traditions of the world have long insisted that humanity is linked. An Australian aboriginal saying reminds us that for all our differences we share basic values, feelings, rights and hopes: “We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home.”
These sayings and many more, from cultures and religions the world over, recognize in the most emphatic way that humanity is of one kind.

But here’s the difference. In the past, that used to be a moral precept, an ideal, an aspiration. Today the idea that we are all interconnected is not just metaphorically true. It is *literally* true.

The challenges we face—the challenges that will dominate your future—are interconnected -- international in their very nature: Climate change, global pandemics, hunger, poverty, refugee and immigrant flows, trade and economic development.

These problems aren't going away. And if we are going to solve them, then we will have to embrace, not retreat from (as many seem to be doing these days). We must work together as a global whole, across boundaries of race, religion, gender, economies and nations. It's not romanticism to say that the world is a global village. It's the simple truth—one that we neglect at our peril.

You have heard and seen something of my background already. To explain what drives my attitude to this subject that I have broached with you, I must tell you a little more about me. I come from a poor nation (Guyana) where I was born to parents of limited means and who phenotypically span the color spectrum. My birth was well before Guyana gained its independence and in those days society was strictly ordered along colour and class structures. Given the Mendelian results of phenotypes of seven boys in the family, I was not eligible to emerge on the national much less the international stage –yet here I am because my parents saw to it that I got a good education. Perhaps you have had your own difficult path or a much easier one –but don't take your education for granted.

When I graduated, my instincts and curiosity led me to explore development-oriented agricultural work. From positions in the national agricultural systems of Guyana and the Caribbean, to the Canadian international development agency to the World Bank and to the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), where I now serve as its director general. Every journey into it took me deeper and deeper into this world, along with an increasing conviction that a global perspective and global action is imperative.

My current institute, ILRI, conducts livestock research 'with the end in mind' – addressing through high-level science those very global challenges I mentioned earlier - climate change, global pandemics, hunger, poverty, refugee and immigrant flows, economic development. We collaborate with major researchers around the world, including with faculty at this University. Our work at ILRI aims to make a difference in the lives of around one billion people who in one way or another rely on livestock – something I'm sure rings true in this nation that understands the roles of animal and animal products. We like to summarise our mission as 'better lives through livestock.'

I have found that joining up livestock agriculture with international development challenges and opportunities, through great research is one of the most exciting things you can do, and a great way to contribute to some of the world's biggest challenges and opportunities. For those of you graduating with law degrees, don't be lulled into thinking that this is only about the Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences. Today's agriculture challenges and opportunities include negotiating complex trade and intellectual property arrangements, as well as international treaties and protocols for plant and animal genetic resources, among others.

I felt compelled to give you that background because it brings together two strands of the case I am trying to make –the immense value of the education you have received and the case for playing a role as global citizens.

But there is a third strand of my narrative that makes me especially pleased to be here in Australia, a country that has produced so many of the world's great agricultural scientists: People like **Derek Tribe (who helped create ILRI's predecessor)**, **John Vercoe (a former Board chair of ILRI)**, and **John Dillon (distinguished agricultural economist)** all of whom made immense contributions to the world of global agricultural development and to ILRI in particular –and many of them to me personally

And I must mention two more who are important to both our institutions at this time:

- Professor **John Lindsay Falvey**, a former dean here at the University of Melbourne, who is the chairman of the board at the International Livestock Research Institute, or ILRI, where I work;
- and the Nobel-prize winning immunologist Professor **Peter Doherty**, ILRI's patron and past board member, who is also on the faculty here at the University of Melbourne.

A quick scan of LinkedIn finds that at least 13 graduates or professors of the University of Melbourne have worked for ILRI in the past.

But you don't have to travel overseas to make a difference (although I hope some of you will – and even come to ILRI). You can contribute from home. For all its problems, globalization also presents a unique set of opportunities that have the potential to contribute to economic growth, poverty alleviation, food security and overall increases in welfare, more so now than at any time in human history. You can decide to be part of that!

The point is this: You have received a great education here at the University of Melbourne, and the world is your oyster. You can focus on making money, or becoming a politician, scientist, veterinarian, farmer, teacher, lawyer or anything you wish. But in addition to the superb knowledge, technical and scientific skills you have honed here at Melbourne, I hope your education and the examples of Australians who have gone before you, have given you something else: A perspective, an understanding that I hope you will take with you throughout your life, wherever you may go and whatever you may end up doing. And that perspective is simply this: For all our real or perceived differences, we are in this together—all of us.

Citation for Doctor of Agricultural Science (honoris causa)

Dr James Wilson, "Jimmy", Smith is an animal scientist and research manager, known internationally for his leadership in livestock research.

Born in Guyana, Dr Smith obtained his BSc from Tuskegee University, Alabama and his MSc and PhD from the University of Illinois. Thereafter, he worked in positions that have contributed towards improved wellbeing for hundreds of millions of people in poor nations.

As a Principal Policy Adviser for sustainable agriculture in the Canadian International Development Agency, Dr Smith's role as Ministerial Adviser was instrumental in the restoration of agriculture as a priority sector for Canadian International Development Agency's investment in agriculture and towards meeting the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

As Senior Manager of the World Bank's portfolio on Livestock, Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr Smith repositioned the institution's investments around three pillars: livestock as a pathway out of poverty; livestock and the environment; and livestock human-ecosystem health. This has become the global standard for allocating financing for livestock development.

Dr Smith is currently Director-General of the International Livestock Research Institute, ILRI, in Nairobi, Kenya -- the world's premier international livestock research Institute. Here Dr Smith has refocused the role of the Institute and worked to integrate universities and advanced research institutes from developed nations, including Australia, into coordinated global research teams to address issues including animal and human nutrition, antimicrobial resistance and zoonotic diseases.

In all his senior roles in different organizations he has been responsible for significantly increased investment for agricultural and consequently human development and has made important contributions to agricultural research in developing countries.

Chancellor, I present to you **DR JAMES WILSON SMITH**, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Agricultural Science, *honoris causa*.