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### Remembrance Scholars Convocation

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*Syracuse University*

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# Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud  
Delivered on Friday, October 24, 2014  
Location: Hendricks Chapel  
Remarks: Remembrance Scholars Convocation

Thank you all who are here to take part in this special service of remembrance. Among the many people who helped planned and organize this year's Remembrance Week, I especially thank our 35 Remembrance Scholars, our 2 Lockerbie Scholars, and Michelle Larrabee of Hendricks Chapel. I also thank our Remembrance Scholar Advisors, Kate Hanson, Kelly Rodoski, and the incomparable Judy O'Rourke. I give thanks today for the presence of family members of those who were on Pan Am 103, and for the honorable guests here today from Scotland.

Twenty-Six years ago, this campus was scarred by a shocking act of terrorism. We lost 270 innocent lives, including 35 students studying abroad through Syracuse University.

I am the new chancellor here. This is my first Remembrance Convocation. I am overwhelmed by the thought, care, decency, humanity, and inspiration that all of you have devoted to this project.

People ask me all the time what is distinctive and good about Syracuse. There are so many things. But now I know that at the top of that list is this: when it comes to our students, Syracuse well remembers, and it remembers well.

This is a happy day, an extraordinary day, because it is a day of grace. To the 35 Syracuse students here today who have been chosen as Remembrance scholars – to the students I watched a few moments ago each place a rose for a student who came before you – I need to explain why this is a happy day, and what I mean by a day of grace.

When you are young, days of grace seem predictable. You expect they will come with life's milestones, like the birth of your first child or a loved one's graduation from school. But I know that some days of grace come at unexpected times and under extraordinary circumstances. Some of them come during your darkest moments, when you feel lost or bewildered, and then a person, even a stranger, reaches out in kindness and compassion and helps you find your way.

I grew up near here in upstate New York, in a very Scottish Presbyterian church. That means the building was austere, and most of the hymns were in a minor key. Our pastor was David Cull. I sang in the choir for many years, and we never sounded as wonderful as the choir here today did.

In listening to the Remembrance Scholars at the Rose Laying, I kept remembering one line from a hymn we sang in that church. "Time like an ever rolling stream bears all her sons away; They fly forgotten as a dream dies at the break of day." That was the saddest lyric I ever sang, and there are days on a college campus it seems accurate, because so often our memory here is so short. We speak often at schools of "living memory", but in fact memories are often short: students graduate; faculty retire; there is always a new wonder or outrage to deflect our attention from what at one time seemed important and indelible. It can lead you to despair that all will be forgotten, including those we love.

But at Syracuse, because of the work of Remembrance Scholars, we will not forget. The many acts of remembrance that students, faculty and staff have engaged in over this past week have taught me that. The roses, the chairs on the quad, the candlelight vigil, the student portraits – they kindle memory and resolve to build a better world out of this great loss.

I say this is a day of grace because of what it has shown us. The legacy of those who were lost resonates and grows here. It resonates in the many acts of kindness that these honored students engage in not just during

Remembrance Week but all year round. It resonates in the lasting friendship and deep sense of connection that Syracuse now has with Lockerbie, Scotland. And it resonates most profoundly in the lives of our Lockerbie and Remembrance Scholars.

It is an amazing thing for a new Chancellor to see. Each student who was on that plane, each year, gives birth to one more amazing, engaged, inspiring, and dedicated Syracuse student. As the years pass, there is a virtual alumni association of scholars for each student on that plane. And that association is made of great students and graduates who are committed to “act forward”, in community service and outstanding achievement, in memory of the student from the plane who they embrace.

The Remembrance Scholarship is about the highest honor on this campus, and it is one that attracts students who embody the best of our University. I congratulate each of you who has been selected, and thank you for undertaking the lifelong responsibility this honor represents. We all thank those who made these scholarships possible – the families of the Victims of Pan Am Flight 103; the Lockerbie Trust, the faculty and staff who mentor the students, and the generous donors who, under the leadership of Syracuse University Board of Trustees Chair Dick Thompson and his wife Jean, have kept this program going all these years.

To this year’s Remembrance and Lockerbie scholars, I thank you for your service. You spent this past week meeting with hundreds of students in classes all across this University. You shared your perspectives on the impact that terrorism and violence have on all of us. You have encouraged your peers to act forward in kindness and compassion. This week, you volunteered at a local homeless shelter; you participated in a panel discussion on the effect of terrorism on small towns like Lockerbie and Shanksville, Pennsylvania; you hosted poetry and music and dance performances to show the talents of Syracuse students.

But your contributions will extend so far beyond just one week. You shine out to everyone in this chapel, and to everyone you will meet, as examples of hope of what can happen when a person is a dedicated scholar committed to being the best and working for good in the world. You will assure that those on Pan Am 103 are remembered for all the good within each of them, by acting in their names. And you will remind us of what we hope for each of our students and graduates: that each of you will take your potential and promise and keep working for better world, even in the face of evil.

On behalf of the entire Syracuse University community, I am therefore pleased to honor you on this very happy day.

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