

Entrance Ceremony Address

My dear students, before I begin, please let me offer my sincere felicitations on your admission. I also extend my heartfelt greetings to your parents and all others concerned, for it is indeed a matter of great joy for me to welcome you all to Sophia University.

Today, you begin a new chapter in your lives as university students, either as undergraduates or in the graduate school, and your hearts no doubt are teeming with varied dreams and aspirations. I urge you all to make the most of the many opportunities that await you.

Your seniors are also engrossed in a wide range of activities. For instance, our students and alumni participated in a variety of ways in the 9th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9), that was held last month in Yokohama.

TICAD is a conference that was initiated by the Government of Japan in 1993, and co-hosted along with the United Nations, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank, and the African Union Commission (AUC). The theme of this summer's conference was "Co-create Innovative Solutions with Africa," and at the venue located in the Minato Mirai district of Yokohama, the slogan, "For Africa, with Africa" was notably displayed. The discussions covered a wide variety of issues relating to the economy, social peace, and stability, and concluded on the final day with the adoption of the Yokohama Declaration.

Sophia University actively joined in TICAD 9, by co-hosting two side events. One was the Model African Union, that was jointly organized with the UNDP and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and here, university students of Japan and Africa, engaged in lively debates. The other was a panel discussion on African education strategies, that was held in cooperation with UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA).

We were delighted to welcome many participants to both events, but what was especially rewarding was to see the active contribution of Sophia University students and alumni, throughout the conference. Our students served as rapporteurs for the Model African Union, as organizers of the event held in cooperation with the JICA, and as interns at the African Development Bank. At the venue, I also met many alumni. They included those who now pursue careers in international cooperation, working either for the JICA or

NGOs, since they had taken part earlier in the “Learning from Africa” study tours, during their student days at Sophia University. I also met some who serve as ambassadors at Japanese diplomatic missions in Africa.

I was deeply impressed to see all of them cherishing their hopes and dreams, and pursuing their endeavors with such enthusiasm. What moved me most was the fact that none of these activities were accepted at someone’s request, or as assignments. Each student voluntarily chose to take on these challenges during the heat of the summer break, to build on their studies at the university, and commit themselves wholeheartedly to what they valued. This indeed is a rare and precious experience, unique to student life.

Fr. Firmansyah of the Catholic Jesuit Center introduced a passage from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, in which Jesus, quoting the Old Testament, says: “Go and learn the meaning of the words.” These words stress the value of grasping the essence of things. They urge us to confront vital queries, such as “Why do we learn?” and “What is the purpose of human life?”

International discussions on the main stage like those at TICAD 9, and declarations evolving from them, are obviously critical. Yet, behind the scenes there are myriad individuals pooling their wisdom, merging variations of opinions, and working resolutely to achieve global collaboration. To see students and alumni freely engage in such efforts with their own ideas and convictions, imbues me with great hope and expectation for the future. It represents a vibrant form of learning, that transcends the classroom. Building on that footing, they face challenges as though they were their own, deciding for themselves as to what they can do, and what actions they need to take in order to bring about change.

At the same time however, this wide-ranging and profound form of learning embodies our university’s educational spirit, namely, “For Others, with Others.” It is a spirit that values not just the sustaining of those who are in favorable situations, but also of walking alongside those of diverse milieus, especially people who are socially sidelined or at risk, and working actively on their behalf.

As you commence your university life, various paths will open before you. I earnestly hope that via these paths your learning gets enriched, and that your time at Sophia turns out into something genuinely outstanding.

My hearty congratulations once again, on your admission to Sophia.

September 21, 2025

Miki Sugimura
President of Sophia University