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*The following speech was delivered during Frankfurt International School's 54<sup>th</sup> Graduation Ceremony, which took place in the Stroth Center on Friday, 5 June 2020.*

FIS graduates, family members, and to all of you who are virtually joining us from near and far to commemorate this special event, welcome to the 54<sup>th</sup> Graduation Ceremony of Frankfurt International School.

Can you believe we are all here? On this day, let's take nothing for granted, be filled with gratitude, and be all "in" for this very special moment. *The world is watching – right now, right here, and this is a turning point for all of us. This graduation, like no other, represents the hope of those from around the GLOBE that we are turning a corner. And while it may be hard to fully grasp in this moment, we are! You are!*

I don't know about you, but if someone told me we were all going to play a special role in history, some pretty cool things would come to mind. Maybe one of you would have made a monumental discovery that future generations would refer to as the "FIS Principle." Or possibly I would be recruited to lead the first International Space School orbiting Earth. Hitting or kicking the ball over the fence would have a whole new meaning.

And yet, without any of us having seen it coming, we all have become an active part of history as we've been pulled into this pandemic of historic proportions. It is not the celebratory occasion of a World Cup or Olympics, but future generations will look back and remember this year when we were all put to the test. This year when millions have become ill and hundreds of thousands have lost their lives because of an invisible menace called Covid-19.

Thankfully, no one in our immediate FIS community has been lost during this pandemic. And yet, no generation of FIS graduates has had so much taken away from them while at the same time so much has been asked of them. Taken from you has been a horde of trips, plays, recitals, sports competitions

and, I would guess, perhaps a few romances that were also put on hold during the quarantine.

And while many of these critical Grade 12 events and exchanges with friends came to an abrupt stop, the academic work did not. In fact, I know some of you have shared that the work became even more intense during the quarantine, as if you were trudging through a desert with no oasis on the horizon. It would have been understandable if some of you decided to simply give up, to throw in the towel and say that too much was being asked of you, but not a single one of you did. Not one.

Like many of you watching this graduation, I am also here as a parent. My son is soon to join his sister as an FIS alum. And like your parents, I also struggle with the reality that we are about to send you out into a world that continues to pose many uncertainties. In the history of our school, no graduating class has had such uncertainty awaiting them. And yet, I have no doubt you will discover that it is times of uncertainty when we have the greatest opportunity to impact the lives of others.

Now, before you think I've stolen this speech used by a Headmaster of a Medieval School during the Black Plague, let me tell you why, above all the other emotions that I feel during this momentous time, I am still filled with hope and optimism.

As your Head of School, I have been a follower and a fan of the Class of 2020. I have been in the audience watching your performances, in the stands watching your games, and reviewing all aspects of your academics, service and leadership with a keen interest. I am going to tell you something you likely already know: You are an amazingly gifted group of young women and men, possibly the most accomplished class in the history of our school.

Look around you. You come from many nations, speak many languages, have exceptional talents in arts, sciences, tech, and humanities. But your true genius is not measured by the IB, SAT, scholarships or impressive university admissions. It has already been measured in the way you have supported one another during this crisis, helping each other learn and grow and even smile during the most difficult of days.

You have had an abundance of classes while at FIS but I would argue that three of the most valuable lessons you have learned have occurred primarily in your final year and have taken place outside of the classroom.

The first is not to take things for granted. How could you take things for granted when the most basic rights have been taken from you, like breathing without a mask, travelling when and where you like, and spending time just hanging out with friends. Once these simple pleasures have been taken from you and you understand they are not a right but a gift, you never take them for granted again.

The second lesson is born from the first: the importance of expressing your gratitude. When we realize how interdependent we all are, how much we rely on one another for our health and happiness, we naturally find ourselves showing our appreciation for the helpful actions of others. This goes beyond the polite “Thank You” that is an ingrained habit. It is something much deeper that recognizes our connectedness, a common thread that runs through us all that makes no one truly a stranger.

Finally, by not taking things for granted and being filled with a sense of gratitude, you have had a glimpse of that most valuable lesson of all: To live in the moment. *Carpe Diem* – “to seize the day” – may have been only a trite phrase before you went through the challenges you’ve endured, but I believe your class has been taught by the uncertainty of the future that we cannot waste the present; each day is indeed precious.

Yes, the Class of 2020 is not only talented and capable, I believe you have also become wise beyond your years. So go ahead and let loose a bit and give yourself some applause for making it to this day.

So...99.9% of the world’s schools will not have an opportunity to hold an in-person graduation ceremony this year. Some of you may remember an email I sent on a Friday night in early April. I wrote with a promise that I would do everything in my power to make your graduation a special one which included you and your parents. As your Head of School I am so happy to have kept that promise, and am filled with gratitude for those who have helped make that promise be realized. Today’s event could not have happened without the help of an amazing team, including our Hausmiesters, Pete Sinclair, Bryne Stothard, Christiane Storm, Abel Chaves, Rick Steenbock, John Switzer,

Sebastian Bruch, our FIS Crisis Team, and of course the amazing *Gesundheitsamt Hochtaunuskreis* (Health Officials)!

But there are two members of our FIS community who deserve special recognition for helping make today's ceremony a reality. Who else on earth could get the local Health Officials on site at Frankfurt International School in the midst of a pandemic to examine our plan to host one of the largest events in Germany – and one of the only live graduations in the world? Patricia Dange, whose daughter graduated from FIS in 2015, and Vera Tiers. This “dynamic duo” really was the key to making this event happen. Thank you Patricia and Vera.

I know those of you wearing caps and gowns see yourselves as the capable young adults that you are, but be patient with your parents because there are times like this when we want to visit the memories of when you were a child.

For me, within the graduate in a cap and gown, I still can see a small boy who found the baseball bat was almost too heavy to swing as the helmet kept slipping down over his eyes. When the size of a ball dwarfed his small hand and a throw from home to second base bounced a few times before finally arriving.

Other parents may see a graduate who is now a gifted musician and performer but once struggled to hold the violin to her chin while it squeaked and screeched. Some moms and dads may think back to the days when their child refused to talk in front of strangers and now is at ease speaking at a podium or acting on a stage. Still others may tear up as they see their graduate heading off to study law after breaking all the laws of their home as a child, or aiming to become a teacher after discovering in these later years of education that school really *is* cool.

So graduates, be patient with your parents because sometimes we will have double vision, remembering the child you were and seeing the capable adult you've become at the same time. Both visions are reasons for a parent's love and pride.

In closing, to all of our graduates here today, I say these final, simple words. Thank you. Thank you for making your school and your parents so very proud. As you all leave for the next stage of your journey, I have no doubt

your parents will remind you that, if you grow weary, or if you just need some a dose of family, you can always trust that your home will be there for you.

And I will say the same on behalf of FIS. You will always be part of the FIS family across the world and we will always here to welcome you back and celebrate the success that undoubtedly awaits you.

And speaking of an FIS welcome, it is my honor to introduce you to today's commencement speaker.

Dr. Till Wahnbaeck is the founder and CEO of IMPACC, an NGO dedicated to creating green jobs through innovative business models for disadvantaged people in fragile states around the world. Prior to that, he was the CEO of Welthungerhilfe, the World Hunger Relief organisation, which focuses on reducing hunger in underdeveloped countries. Though born in Germany, Dr Wahnbaeck's schooling and career have taken him to many places around the world. He started out with an IB Diploma from United World College in Italy. His further studies then took him to Freiburg, Oxford and later Harvard Business School. He supported humanitarian projects in many regions of the Middle East and Africa, including Ethiopia, Kenia, Uganda and Tanzania.

When our world is struggling through such a difficult time, I cannot think of a more fitting guest, given Dr. Wahnbaeck's lifetime dedication to making the world a better place.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Till Wahnbaeck.