Welcoming Remarks by Dr. Hilda Rosselli, Dean
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WOU Global Migration and Education Conference
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Today we are gathered in the tradition of academia to thoughtfully and civilly discuss an issue that is tearing away at the fabric of our country, dividing people across political lines and threatening to ignore the very dream that fueled the architects of this very country.

I applaud those who made today’s event possible: most notably, Dr. Patricio Ortiz who joined our campus this fall and immediately began planning today’s conference. Dr. Ortiz’s interdisciplinary design of today’s presentations by both WOU and local community members constitute the basis for the best type of solution, that which is derived from sharing of ideas and perspectives. In that spirit, I share my own perspective for a moment.

Perhaps as a break from turkey leftovers and holiday commercials, many of us may have found ourselves reflecting on the original Thanksgiving. One in which a group of religious dissidents successfully survived death defying travel conditions, severe weather, communication barriers with the local inhabitants, struggling harvests, death and disease, and homesickness. Maybe we actually thought about the similarity between the challenges faced by the Pilgrims and those faced by today’s immigrants.

Although popular history would have us believe in charming images of bountiful tables, smiling Native Americans, and a general amiable atmosphere, perhaps we thought about the fate of the original Native Americans who had no choice concerning their new neighbors and the grueling cost they ultimately paid for trusting a government that grew greedy and devious in its quest for land and power.

Or maybe for one moment, while gathered with family, we recognized some cultural tradition that we’ve retained from our ancestors. Courageous people who may have arrived in the United States through the gates of Ellis Island, the shackles of slavery, as stowaways, or boundary crossers. Perhaps we thought for a moment about the similarity between the motivations of our ancestors and the motivations in the heart of immigrants today.

Or perhaps we read or witnessed the irony surrounding this nation’s recent steps to grant citizenship to hundreds of immigrant soldiers currently serving this country—I mean after all they have been willing to give their lives for America.
Or perhaps some of us witnessed or read some of the comments made by Nicolas Sarkozy, the President of France when he recently addressed Congress, an address from which I quote...

From the very beginning, the American dream meant proving to all mankind that freedom, justice, human rights and democracy were no utopia but were rather the most realistic policy there is and the most likely to improve the fate of each and every person.

America did not tell the millions of men and women who came from every country in the world and who—with their hands, their intelligence and their heart—built the greatest nation in the world: "Come, and everything will be given to you." She said: "Come, and the only limits to what you'll be able to achieve will be your own courage and your own talent." America embodies this extraordinary ability to grant each and every person a second chance.

For these reasons and because I believe in the power of education as the most important key to individual success, I feel a moral obligation to support efforts on behalf of thousands of immigrant children and teens who are currently denied financial support to continue their post-secondary education and whose dreams may be squelched unless we find a solution. I do so for these potential students as well as all the teachers who helped them achieve the college bound academic skills necessary to continue an educational journey.

In that spirit, I welcome you all to today’s conference and thank you all for being with us to participate in what will mostly likely continue to grow into an even larger event that encompasses both local and national speakers and which hopefully will educate and further positive steps that impact the future for thousands of immigrants who still seek the American Dream.

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