

School of Foreign Service  
&  
Georgetown University Law Center



*GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY*

Institute for the Study of International Migration  
(ISIM)

*Class of 2026 Commencement*

“Go forth and set the world on fire.”  
– St. Ignatius of Loyola

Alberto Ares, SJ  
May 14, 2026  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC

Dean Hellman, Dr. Donato, Dr. Mayda, Dr. Ferris, distinguished Georgetown professors, graduates, family and guests of graduates, Good Morning.

To the graduating cohort of the Law School and the School of Foreign Service of Georgetown's Graduate Certificate in Refugee, Migration, and Humanitarian Emergencies...**Congratulations!**

You have worked very hard and achieved something demanding and to be proud of – a Jesuit education. But your achievement would not have been possible without your families and loved ones. So, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to them, whose support and sacrifices made this joyful moment possible.

Migration is one of the most polarizing issues of our time. It also is, and will remain, the most defining force shaping our shared human future. At its core, human beings are meant to migrate. We move in search of safety, dignity, and a better life. Yet today, we live in a time when displacement has become one of the important moral issues and

political challenges of our world. Millions of people are forced to leave home because of war, violence, persecution, poverty, or climate change. And when they flee, they often encounter systems that are not built to receive them humanely and that exclude them from society.

I want to speak about two words: **hope and hospitality**.

As your Georgetown education has already taught you, this work will require you to navigate spaces where the law is real, but justice is not always guaranteed; where decisions are shaped not only by principle, but also by politics, lobbyists, and public opinion; and where progress is often slow and uncertain.

In this context, hope matters. I do not mean hope as optimism or sentiment, but hope as a discipline—hope that causes us to live differently. It means staying present when the situation is complex, refusing to become cynical when change is slow, and continuing to believe that human dignity is worth defending even when the outcomes are not immediate.

Let me share some insights I've learned along the way:

First, **stay close to reality.** Do not let your work become abstract.

Policies and legal frameworks matter. But they must remain connected to the lived realities refugees are going through. If you lose that human connection, your work risks becoming more of something that may look polished on paper or even operate efficiently, but fails to ease suffering, address injustice, or uplift our brothers and sisters it was meant to serve.

Second, **learn to navigate complexity without losing clarity.**

You will work in environments where compromise is necessary, which means not every decision will be ideal. But hold on to what matters most in this field, especially with a Jesuit education: the dignity of the person in front of you.

Third, **do not do this work alone.** This is where civil society becomes essential. NGOs, community organizations, legal aid groups, faith-based networks, and grassroots initiatives often carry the work forward when institutions cannot do everything.

And this is where hospitality comes in.

Hospitality is more than just being welcoming and kind. It is a way of “seeing the other.” It means standing beside refugees so that the stigma and fear associated with them disappear. Real transformation begins not from a distance, but in proximity—in choosing to see, to accompany, and to affirm the dignity of every person. It also means shaping policies, laws, and institutions so that they not only become efficient and effective in managing migration but also ensure that people are seen and heard, and that the common good and solidarity are not lost within the system.

Your work will often be measured in cases won, policies shaped, reports written, and agreements negotiated. But do not underestimate the impact of **how** you accomplish your success: Do you remember the names and faces of people you serve? Did you listen to their stories? Do you remember what gives them hope? Because in the end, migration is not only about borders, procedures, and institutions. It is also about people with names, histories, fears, and hopes.

So let me leave you with a simple challenge: **keep hope alive by making hospitality real.**

Do not let the language of systems erase a person's face.

Do not let complexity turn into distance.

Do not let fatigue become cynicism.

Stay close to the people. Listen well. Work with integrity. Build partnerships. Defend their rights with clarity and courage.

This is your task. And it is a meaningful one. In the end, your work is not only about systems that function, but about people who are seen.

So, as you go forward, may you do so with courage, with discernment, and with hope—and may you help build a world where dignity is not only affirmed in principle, but protected in practice.

Graduates...congratulations again and **Hoya Saxa!**