

Dear Friends, Colleagues, Esteemed Faculty and Administration Members,

For those of you who do not know me - my name is Petr Pesov and I am honoured to be The TAU International Valedictorian, graduating from the MA program in conflict resolution and Mediation. This academic year has not been easy, to say the least. We had lockdowns caused by a pandemic, multiple elections, a war. Maybe a UFO with aliens would help shake things up for a change... But, despite the hardships of the year, I'd say we handled it with class: helping each other, surrounding ourselves with friends and classmates. This, to me, is the key to a successful society and achieving one's individual and collective goals.

What I have seen throughout this past year - truly makes me believe that the people in this room, and others joining us on Zoom, wherever you may be, are all destined towards great accomplishments. We all came to this university with different academic and personal backgrounds and managed to successfully complete a graduate degree throughout a global pandemic. Just like everyone else here - my journey is unique and I wanted to share some of my experiences with you. I lived in Russia and Latvia until I came to Israel and despite being ethnically Jewish, I never connected with that part of my identity. I arrived here four years ago, deciding to pursue an undergraduate degree in psychology and philosophy. It was a remarkable, but tough journey of transition. Despite having studied in an International High School, I was shocked with the amount of different cultures surrounding me: I would get my hair cut from a guy from Mongolia, played basketball with a girl from Angola, had a Palestinian roommate, worked with a Jew from South Africa and an Israeli Arab – to name a few. The fascinating clash of cultures at the university made me the person I am today. I was always very active on campus, I participated in TAU Model of United Nations, interned in one of the leading research institutes and co-founded a start-up among other things. Somehow, with all these connections within Israel, I still felt like there was a connection missing within the international community on campus-a place where all of us from different cultures could get together and discuss various academic topics. In the third year of my undergraduate degree, I co-founded the Youth Innovation Forum, a place that made this connection possible. Fast forward a semester - I decided to stay in this country, having finally re-connected with my Jewish Identity. This was still the ancient times, before the pandemic... I made Aliyah and decided to pursue a Master's degree in Conflict Resolution and a year and a half later I am standing here in front of all of you. The pandemic was a hard blow, but that did not kill my motivation to strive for the goals I set for myself. I will never forget the sleepless nights dedicated to studying and writing papers, the hardships of lockdowns, and

even running to a shelter at 4 AM. But I also won't forget that the journey was truly extraordinary and neither should you. So, this is the central point of my speech. We are all different, we all came here for different reasons and purposes – we are here to notice flaws and make change, wherever we may be. It does not necessarily need to be a big change; we don't need to aspire to be Gandhi or Einstein. Change can come in baby steps and a collective effort.

We are all aware of this world's many shortcomings. We come from 11 different programs where we studied conflict resolution, business, security and diplomacy, environment, emergency and disaster management, government, law and sustainable development, to name a few. It is now our goal as we step out of the student life and into society, to play an intrinsic role in making a difference in the world. We have the tools - TAU made sure of that. Every individual I have met this year sees an issue that needs to be addressed. My advice to them is to pursue this, and make the world a better place, the way you want. Recently, some of the most important people in my life, my dad, Dr. Alexander Pesov, Dr. Boris Mints, President of the Boris Mints Institute for Strategic Policy Solutions to Global Challenges and Prof. Itai Sened, Dean of the faculty of Social Sciences and head of BMI have repeatedly given me similar advice: it is on our generation to eradicate the aforementioned challenges and fix the global and regional agendas to ensure principles of justice and equality in opportunity. Don't be afraid to go out and push boundaries, have a mentality of "think globally but act locally." We are a unique group here. The last group of graduates that had a pandemic under their belt lived 100 years ago! And we got Pfizer to complement our diplomas!

On behalf of all the Conflict Resolution students - I would like to express gratitude to Corey, Yonit and Alex - our director and program coordinators, Dr. Nimrod Rosler, the head of our program as well as all our faculty members. This tough year became much easier through all your continuous help and support. Each and every single one of you have been beacons of hope for us as students and we will be forever thankful for that. I'm sure I speak for everyone here when I say that I can thank their program administrators for all their efforts to run everything so successfully amidst Covid and a war!

And now to my fellow students: to put it in TAU terminology- never stop pursuing the unknown. You have an incredible network of alumni. Use these connections to further your goals and make the world a better and more equal place.

I wish all of you luck and success. Congratulations to the Class of 2021! Thank you.