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ORT GRADUATES IN ARGENTINA AND URUGUAY READY TO TAKE ON THE WORLD

Venues in Buenos Aires and Montevideo were bursting at the seams as they hosted graduation ceremonies for ORT students.

In Buenos Aires, more than 6,000 people packed the Luna Park Stadium to applaud the 773 teenagers graduating from ORT Argentina's high schools. And in Montevideo, 1,200 people attended ORT Uruguay University's second ceremony of the year - the city's largest venue not having the capacity to host all its 370 graduates, plus friends and family, in one go.

But the celebration of academic achievement was only one feature of the events; at both, emphasis was placed on the graduates' future social contributions and ethical resolve.

"Today you carry with you an important asset which is not only the possibility of rising socially from having joined those few who have a higher education but also a responsibility, which is more important, of taking the knowledge you have acquired and making your talents available to society - your contract with society," ORT Argentina President Guillermo Feldberg said in his address.

"If we manage to ensure that ethics and dignity and the advance of freedom are incorporated in the actions of each and every one of you we will have succeeded in our most important objective."

There is little doubt among the teaching staff that the alumni have the moral fibre to succeed professionally and personally in the adult world.

"The world gets more complicated, more difficult, and more competitive from one day to the next," said ORT Argentina's Director of Studies, Luis Perez, after the ceremony. "But we work to give them the confidence to deal with it. Students have told us what they want and what they will do and I think they will provide us with a lot of good news in the future."

This year has seen the opening of ORT Argentina's new, four-storey science and technology building. The \$5 million building has added 6,000 square meters to ORT Argentina's Almagro campus, which will be able to increase its enrolment to 2,800 next year as a result. Now, ways of increasing the capacity at the Belgrano campus are being discussed in order to reduce the long waiting list of people anxious to be a part of future graduation ceremonies.

At 70 years of age, ORT Uruguay is as vital and vigorous as any of its graduates. Now regularly ranked as one of the world's best 500 universities, it started life as a technical school to help Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. In 1996, it became the first educational institution in Uruguay to be certified as a private university and it is now the country's largest private university with about 11,000 students distributed among five faculties and institutes.

In a passionate and inspirational speech, the university's Rector, Dr Jorge Grunberg, urged graduates at the second graduation ceremony for 2012 to apply not only their excellent academic qualifications but also the values which underpin an ORT education.

"The measure of your success in life is not simply the sum total of your professional achievements - though I'm sure there will be many of those; it is your behaviour as individuals and your contribution to society ... You can, with your values, by your example, by your moral influence, promote a more dynamic, more entrepreneurial, more ambitious and more generous society," Dr Grunberg said.

"Graduation is an important time because it is a measure of our inner strength, our resilience. For many of you graduation is your first major personal achievement. Today you are all legitimately proud of having taken a step up on your career. But this should not just be a higher professional level; it should also be a new level of maturity and personal responsibility. Always remember that we live in a society and our welfare is intimately tied to that of our fellow citizens. Remember that a society's progress is not sustainable when people are excluded from opportunities to build a better life."

Dr Grunberg said ORT Uruguay's mission had remained constant throughout the momentous changes that had swept the world since it was founded in 1942.

"We are a private institution with a public mission: to expand educational opportunities for Uruguayans," he said. "In Judaism the concept of philanthropy is transformative; it is not aimed at keeping the poor at a subsistence level but to enable people to become autonomous. Thus the highest form of philanthropy is to equip people for work. And that is the historic spirit of ORT: enabling people to realise their personal autonomy by providing them with a practical education - because there is no worse form of dependence than ignorance ... As the Talmud says: 'We have it on tradition that no one is poor save he who lacks knowledge.'"

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ORT Argentina celebrates another successful year preparing young people for an increasingly challenging adult world.