



CERIMONIA DI INAUGURAZIONE DELL'ANNO ACCADEMICO 2025-2026
Università degli Studi Roma Tre

Intervento Studentessa IUPALS
Serena Awad

Good morning,

Distinguished Rector, professors, students, and members of the Roma Tre community,

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to **Roma Tre University**, to the Rector, Professor Massimiliano Fiorucci, Professor Elisabetta Bonvino, to the faculty, the staff, and the students who welcomed me with such warmth and generosity.

To the family who opened their home to me and welcomed me with such care, supporting me along this journey, and to my colleagues from Palestine, Maha, Tawfiq, Basma, and Yazeed, each of us carries a different story, a different struggle behind our journey here. Thank you.

Standing here today is something I never imagined would be possible.

My name is Serena Awad. I am from Gaza, Palestine. I was born a refugee, later became displaced, and today I stand here in Rome carrying the same story of displacement across generations, far away from home, not knowing if I will ever be allowed to return and see my family again.

When I applied to Roma Tre and prepared for my admission process, it was during a time when it was, and still is, extremely difficult to leave Gaza.

I was not sitting in a quiet room preparing documents. I was displaced, with no electricity and almost no internet, living through war. But that was not the only battle I was facing. During that time, I was also starving, too weak to stand, after losing fifteen kilograms, spending endless nights in pain, wondering if my body could hold on any longer.

And yet, despite all of that, I still took my admission exam while Israeli tanks were only a few kilometers away, threatening to invade the area.

Somehow, in the middle of that chaos, I submitted my application. I received the admission offer, and the very next day, my house was bombed.

I began attending classes online while waiting for permission to leave Gaza, a long and uncertain

process that felt endless. There were moments when death felt closer than hope, but I never stopped believing that I would make it here.

From displacement camps to the classrooms of Roma Tre, here I am today, still trying to believe that I survived, standing before you, speaking to you, and having passed all my exams in the first semester.

Today I stand here in Rome because of what I can only describe as a miracle. In many ways, Roma Tre became part of the reason I am still alive.

For that, I will always be deeply grateful. But while I stand here today, my heart remains in Gaza.

Before this war, Gaza was known for something many people might not expect. Despite the blockade and decades of oppression, Gaza had one of the highest literacy rates in the world. Education was one of the strongest values in our society. Families believed that education was the one thing that could never be taken from us.

And I saw that belief in the eyes of young children carrying their books in plastic bags, walking toward learning spaces in tents. During that time, I was working as a humanitarian worker responding to emergencies. One moment I will never forget was when a child came to me and said, “This is the first time in a while that I’m standing in line to enter a classroom, even if that classroom is only a tent, instead of standing in line in front of a water truck just to carry water.” That moment has stayed with me ever since.

I saw that same belief in the eyes of university graduates celebrating their graduation on the rubble of destroyed buildings, ceremonies still filled with pride and resilience. Their hope and determination to continue learning became the very thing that gave me strength.

But while that resilience existed, loss was unfolding everywhere.

In the past two years, I have lost almost everything that once made up my life. I lost my home, my neighborhood, my university, and my favorite cafés. I lost the places that held my memories. I also lost more than twenty members of my family. Eleven of my close friends have been killed, and three are still missing.

Life changed in ways I could never have imagined.

But perhaps the hardest part is not only what was lost, it is what it means to continue living here while my city burns every day.

To sit in a classroom, to study, to build a future, while knowing that the place where my life began is still being bombed.

My family is still in Gaza, and every single day there is the possibility that they could be killed. This is the reality many of us carry silently.

So I am learning how to build a future while my past is still being destroyed. And yet, despite all of this, education still gives us something powerful: hope.

It is the hope of my family in Gaza. It is the hope of my friends who encouraged me to continue studying even when everything around us was collapsing. It is also the hope of many young people in Gaza who still dream of classrooms instead of ruins.

Education creates bridges where politics creates walls.

And universities like Roma Tre remind us that knowledge, solidarity, and humanity can cross borders even in the darkest moments.

So today, I stand here not only as a student. I stand here carrying the voices of those who cannot be here.

I dedicate these words to my family, my friends, and my colleagues who are still there, and to those who are no longer with us. To the friends we have lost, and to those who are still missing.

Thank you to Roma Tre for giving me this opportunity, this space, and this hope.

And if Gaza has taught me anything, it is this:

Education is not only a right. For us, it is a way to survive.

Thank you.