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***New York Times* Bestselling Author, Humanitarian Greg Mortenson Addresses President's Convocation**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Education is more than a way to better an individual, it is a path to peace, said humanitarian Greg Mortenson in his address at the President's Convocation at Illinois Wesleyan University on Wednesday.

Mortenson is the executive director of the Central Asia Institute (CAI), which works to provide education and promote literacy for girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to Mortenson, many people ask if his work building schools and training teachers is about combating terrorism and the Taliban, but he answers that his mission is peace. "Promoting terrorism is really about fear, but promoting peace is based in hope. And the real enemy that we all face is ignorance. Ignorance breeds hatred."

Since 1996, Mortenson and the CAI have constructed more than 400 schools in impoverished rural areas. He detailed his work in the *New York Times* bestselling book *Three Cups of Tea*. The book, which has sold 3 million copies and has been published in 34 countries, was chosen for the 2009 Summer Reading Program for all incoming Illinois Wesleyan first-year students to read and discuss.

"In the book, you tell us when you have one cup of tea you are a stranger, two cups means you are a friend and three cups means you are family," said University President Richard F. Wilson to Mortenson at the Convocation. "In many ways, we feel the same here. When we chose the book, you were a stranger; when we read it, you became a friend; and with your visit, you are family."

During his talk in a packed Westbrook Auditorium, which was broadcast live to an audience in Hansen Student Center, Mortenson encouraged students to become involved with humanitarian efforts around the globe, but only after they use the University's resources to prepare themselves. "People who do good work are strong emotionally, spiritually, academically, and this is the place and the time to build that strength," said Mortenson, who complemented students for their work in Illinois Wesleyan efforts such as Habitat for Humanity, and the Global Medical Brigade. "You cannot go around the world to solve your problems, you have to deal with them here." Once they are ready, he encouraged students to go out into the world. "I think the only way we can really solve poverty is that we have to touch poverty, and smell poverty, and we have to taste poverty, and be with poverty. We can never solve poverty from a think tank in Washington, D.C.," he said.

Mortenson spent the day at Illinois Wesleyan, answering questions of students, community members and the local media before his address at the Convocation. Illinois Wesleyan alumnae and 8th-grade teacher Trish Warner, who graduated in 1989, brought 140 students from Kingsley Junior High in Normal to see Mortenson during an early-morning Q&A session. After reading *Three Cups of Tea*, the students joined the international service-learning organization he started called Pennies for Peace. Students queried Mortenson on everything from his eight days being held captive by the Taliban in 1996 to what the CAI does beyond building schools. "Building a school is not that hard. What takes time is building relationships. It can take years to build the relationships needed for a school to become a reality," said Mortenson, who also noted the CAI is creating women's vocational centers and businesses to help sustain the schools with local funds.

The importance of building relationships is a lesson Mortenson said that he has seen learned by the United States military during its time in Afghanistan. "The military is beginning to listen to the communities," he said. Mortenson, a veteran, has helped set up meetings between the U.S. military leaders and village elders, whom he calls the cornerstone of the Afghan community. His book, *Three Cups of Tea*, is now required reading for many military leaders in Afghanistan.

Those relationships create a lasting bond, said Mortenson. Any school built by the CAI requires an intense commitment by the community. The village must donate the land and labor for the school, while the CAI provides building materials, skilled labor and teacher training and support. The effort ensures the longevity of the school, said Mortenson. "You have to let go and empower the people. When you empower villagers with the responsibilities and decisions of a school, not only do you have a great deal of community buy-in, but the Taliban is reluctant to attack a school when the community is so invested, for fear of angering the villagers," he said.

The Central Asia Institute provides education for more than 51,000 students, with an emphasis on girls' education. When asked why he focuses on girls' education, Mortenson quotes an African proverb, "If you educate a boy, you educate an individual. If you educate a girl, you educate a community," he said. Mortenson explained that areas where women are educated have seen a lower infant mortality rate, a reduction of overpopulation and an improvement in community health. "We can drop bombs or build roads or put in electricity, but unless you educate girls, nothing will change in a society."

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