

Desra Percaya

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Colleagues and friends, graduates and graduands and their families - today the University will award an honorary doctorate to Dr Desra Percaya who has been Indonesia's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations in New York since 2012. Dr Percaya was born in Malang in 1961, and obtained his Bachelor's degree in Social and Political Sciences from Airlangga University in 1985, a Diploma in Multilateral Negotiation from Geneva University in 1990, a Masters degree from this University in International Studies (Diplomacy) in 1995, and a PhD from Durham University in 2000. Indeed my colleagues would probably like to stress that he was actually a Birmingham doctoral student who simply followed his supervisor to Durham, so this University has some claim to his research career.

He began his diplomatic career with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Indonesia in 1986 and from 1990 to 1994 he was at the Indonesian Mission in Geneva, where had responsibility for human rights and humanitarian affairs. Between 2000 and 2002 he was Special Adviser to the Director General for Political Affairs on Aceh and head of the Human Rights sub directorate, and was heavily involved in the early part of the peace process negotiation that led to the signing of the Aceh peace accord in Helsinki in 2005. From 2003 to 2005 he was Head of Political Affairs at Indonesia's permanent mission to the UN, and from 2005 to 2007 he acted as spokesman and chief of staff for the minister. Serving in these positions he played his role to meet the growing expectations of an aware public on foreign policy issues within the new Indonesian democratic setting. He faced numerous challenging issues first-hand in the dynamic interplay between domestic politics and regional and international developments. From 2007 to 2008 he was the Ministry's spokesman on UN Security Council issues during Indonesia's membership of the Council and was also Chairman of Indonesia's Task Force on the Security Council. Around that time he was also the Director for International Security and Disarmament in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for steering Indonesia's foreign policy on international security, disarmament and weapons of mass destruction, trans -national organised crime and counter terrorism. From 2009 to 2011 he served in Geneva as the Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, the World Trade Organisation and other International organisations. He has been the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the UN in New York since 2012 and serves on a variety of committees including vice president of ECOSOC, Chairman of the First Committee (International Security and Disarmament) and vice chairman of the UN Palestinian committee.

It can be seen that Dr Percaya has had a highly successful diplomatic career for one of the most populous countries in the world, serving both his country and the international community, and has been at the heart of international diplomacy in Geneva and in New York. During that time however he has also taken the time to keep in touch with former lecturers here at Birmingham and has continued to recommend that Indonesian students sponsored by the Foreign ministry come here to study International Diplomacy. My colleagues tell me that each student who arrives brings both greetings and token gifts from Dr Percaya.

Yet through all his obvious success, he still retains much humility. In an e mail response to my colleagues concerning the award of this degree, he wrote

“To be honest, I am very humbled and honoured to be nominated for an honorary doctorate from the University of Birmingham. I was practically speechless and in a state of disbelief in reading your email. I had to read again and again. I had to ask my wife whether this is true or not.”

Dr Percaya, the award of an honorary doctorate is most certainly true, and most certainly well deserved.

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, for a lifetime dedicated to the service of his country and to international diplomacy, I present to you and to the University Dr Desra Percaya, for the degree of Doctor of the University, *honoris causa*.