Mr. Chancellor, I’m honoured to introduce Dr. Vandana Shiva, physicist, food security expert, ecofeminist, activist, and staunch promoter of true biocultural sustainability. Born and raised, and living in India, she can, however, rightfully be named a citizen of the world.

Dr. Shiva is an outstanding scholar and activist who has, singlehandedly, changed the way many of us think about our food systems and environments. For me, personally, it is a thrill to be able to stand here today and speak about her accomplishments and her spirit. Trained in academic traditions and molded by life experience, she has used her talents as analyst and communicator to focus world attention on some of the destructive aspects of consumerism, industrialization and globalization.

A gifted and prolific author, she has published hundreds of articles and papers in leading scientific and technical journals, as well as over a dozen hard-hitting books, including Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India; Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge; Stolen Harvest: the Hijacking of the Global Food Supply, and Monocultures of the Mind. She has contributed substantially to our understanding of intellectual property rights, bioethics, deforestation and biodiversity loss, and has challenged predominant thinking on food production, biotechnology and genetic engineering. Always, she has championed the rights of local small-scale farmers and villagers in the face of large corporations, and the importance of maintaining crop diversity, local land races and productive, sustainable agroecosystems in the face of large-scale monocultures.

Vandana Shiva was born in 1952 in Dehradun, the capital of the state of Uttarakhand, India. In the 1970s she participated in the modern Chipko movement, together with a group of committed villagers from her home state, mainly women, who successfully saved valued local forests from being cut down simply by hugging the trees. (Chipko is the Hindi word for embrace). Today, the term “tree hugger” is still applied to those who value standing forests and oppose large-scale logging.

Dr. Shiva has a strong connection with Canada. She received her post-graduate education in the philosophy of science at the University of Guelph and her PhD in philosophy at the University of Western Ontario. In 1982 she established the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology to support environmental activism. In 1987 she founded the women-led NGO called Navdanya (“nine seeds”), centred in New Delhi, with seed banks and organic farms spread across India, and is currently its executive director. This organization is a women-centred movement to protect biological
and cultural diversity. It is actively involved in recognizing and rejuvenating Indigenous knowledge and cultures. It has established community seed banks across India, preserving over 5,000 varieties of rice, wheat and other produce. The organization has trained over 5 million farmers in seed sovereignty, food sovereignty—the right and freedom of people to access healthy, affordable food of their own choice—and sustainable agriculture, and helped establish the largest direct marketing, fair trade organic network in India, one which is emulated in many other places.

Like Gandhi before her, Vandana has argued for the rights of ordinary farmers and for the wisdom of many traditional practices in the face of the overwhelming influences of the “Green Revolution” and, as she says, the “hijacking” of global food production by large scale corporations.

Dr. Shiva first visited our university in 1996, when she participated in a conference organized by the Humanities Centre. Many of us remember her from that time, and she continues to be closely connected with our faculty and students through her writings, which are frequently assigned as readings in numerous courses.

She is also renowned to those involved in the Slow Food Movement, and has for many years been a board member and leader for Slow Food International, an organization dedicated to promoting the cultural and social values of food and food sustainability. I had the pleasure, in 2005, of attending a memorable Slow Food symposium on women’s roles in sustainable food production that Dr. Shiva co-facilitated with Anishenabe traditional food champion, Winona Laduke. In this event, they brought together key Indigenous women food producers from all over the world, including some from British Columbia First Nations communities, to discuss the issues they face over environmental destruction, globalization and loss of traditional foods. She serves on the boards of many other leading organizations including the World Future Council and the International Forum on Globalization.

Among Dr. Shiva’s many awards are the Right Livelihood Award in 1993, the Order of the Golden Ark, Global 500 Award of the UN, Earth Day International Award, the Lennon Ono Grant for Peace, and the Sydney Peace Prize 2010. In 2011, she received the Calgary Peace Prize from the Consortium for Peace Studies at the University of Calgary. Dr. Shiva has been named an environmental hero by Time Magazine and has been called one of the five most powerful communicators in Asia by Asiaweek Magazine.

The Right Livelihood Award of 1993 acknowledged her [I quote] “...pioneering insights into the social and environmental costs of the dominant development process, and her ability to work with and for local people and communities in the articulation and implementation of alternatives.” Outspoken in the media, Vandana Shiva has appeared in dozens of documentaries, and numerous articles have been written about her and her work. She is fearless and relentless when it comes to confronting some of the individuals and companies that are causing cultural and biological erosion.

Vandana Shiva’s work and her contributions align strikingly with many of the goals and objectives of our university, highlighting the fundamental connection between human rights and environmental protection. She offers insights into some of the most critical problems we face today, on the effects of industrialization and climate change on the poorest and most populous nations and on vulnerable
habitats and species. She practices non-violence, promotes democracy, peace and local economic self-reliance.

For all of her fame, she is a very personable and down-to-earth woman, easy to talk to, and endowed with a wonderful sense of humour. She is a role model for many of us, inspiring us to achieve our own potentials and never to be afraid of speaking out.

As we move into this contentious and uncertain era of rapid global climate change and inequality, she and her work give us hope. If we work hard enough, if we all stand up to injustice, if we do our best to speak for those who do not have a voice, if we think about the well-being of future generations, each one of us can make a difference. Inspired by her leadership, her strength and her grace, we at the University of Victoria can find, collectively, a positive and effective direction for our journey into the future.

Mr. Chancellor, it is a very great privilege to present to you and to this convocation, this remarkable humanitarian, brilliant communicator, and revered educator, Dr. Vandana Shiva, for the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.

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