



ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ ΝΙΑΡΧΟΣ  
STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION

It's nice to gather here today as we are getting closer and closer to the dream we all have for the Agora materializing in all shapes and forms, in spirit, in vision, and having its actual home here in the heart of the Johns Hopkins Homewood campus.

I remember growing up in Athens, Greece, and visiting the actual Agora near the Acropolis, and I also remember not realizing at that time the importance and significance of the space itself, not only in the old times but also in our current times.

And here we are today, after many discussions in the last few years between Ron Daniels and myself, taking place on both sides of the Atlantic, trying to figure out how do we, as a global society, manage to come out of this polarizing ugly reality we all live in, and then over a glass of wine and some pretzels starting to talk about the idea of what is today the Hopkins SNF Agora, and after discussing about some initial funding needs, how he managed to inspire us to a \$150 million contribution I will never remember, but that's Ron!

We all know what we are going through as a global society nowadays, and I believe we all agree that action, positive action, is needed. But I get a similar sense to how I took for granted in my younger days the significance of the Agora to how we seem to unfortunately take a lot of things for granted today.

Every time I visit or see a picture of the Statue of Liberty in New York, I can't help but make the emotional link of the flame being a live reminder of the values and vision of democracy as we knew it in the old world, having been transferred to the new world, to a world where the United States of America—itsself not perfect, as democracy itself is many times not perfect—is the leader of the free world and as such carries the responsibility of safeguarding the values of democracy at large and inspiring others to join together to safeguard it and to help it evolve and adjust to the new realities we are all faced by.

Educational institutions like Johns Hopkins are in the position to lead us in this effort of making our world a better place for all. Initiatives like the Agora, focusing on what may seem like simple notions of civic engagement and civil discourse, can hopefully contribute to such causes in a significant way. But we have to make sure we are not complacent, we take nothing for granted, and we try to collectively inspire leaders of all life's 'denominations' to trust our vision and mission so that what we can offer becomes relevant, just, productive, and effective.

I would like to thank Hahrie Hahn and the whole extended Agora team, our SNF team, Ron Daniels and my colleagues at the Agora's Board of Overseers, and the whole academic Hopkins community for embracing and empowering the Hopkins SNF Agora in its effort to contribute to strengthening our democracy, in letter and in spirit, and not only here at home, at Homewood campus, but also try to take Agora's vision and mission to the world at large. Thank you.