



**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

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**SPEECH DELIVERED BY DR. JOSEPH BARRAGE WANJUI, CBS, CHANCELLOR OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING 35<sup>TH</sup> GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI HELD ON FRIDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER 2006 AT THE  
CHANCELLOR'S COURT**

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**Minister for Education, Science and Technology Hon. Dr. Noah Wekesa**

**Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Prof. Karega Mutahi**

**The Chairman of the University Council, Mr. John Simba**

**Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi, Prof. George Magoha**

**Members of the University of Nairobi Council**

**Vice-Chancellors of other Universities**

**Deputy Vice-Chancellors of the University of Nairobi**

**Principals of Colleges**

**Deans of Faculties and Directors of Institutes and Centres**

**Chairmen and Heads of Departments**

**Graduands**

**Students of University of Nairobi**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

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**I am delighted to be with you today and to preside over the 35<sup>th</sup> Graduation Ceremony of the University of Nairobi. This is an important occasion because it is the time when students who have worked hard are harvesting the fruits of their labour; a time when the professors and lecturers at our University are seeing their results of the good teaching and a time when those who provided financial support towards your education will also realise that their appreciable support was worthwhile. On behalf of the University community and on my own behalf, I congratulate you all on the realisation of the objectives you set yourselves individually and severally.**

**This is the fifth graduation ceremony I am presiding over since my appointment as the Chancellor of this great institution three years ago. I do take pride in what the management team has done in transforming this institution. It is noteworthy that our academic calendar is now predictable, we are holding graduation ceremonies regularly and our students can expect to finish their studies within the stipulated time frame. This is as it should be if we are going to achieve our goal of becoming a centre of excellence and indeed a world class institution of higher learning.**

**Graduands, as we formally release you to the world, it is important to appreciate that the world out there is full of challenges, but there are also opportunities. Whether you succeed or not will depend on what you choose to do for yourself and your community. For too long we privileged educated Africans have complained how we have been marginalised by the rest of the world, how the international community appears to have forgotten us as our people continue to languish in abject poverty. Africa, though the origin of human civilization remains the most backward continent economically and technologically. Indeed, the technological gap between black Africa and the rest of the world is widening.**

**We the educated Africans must avoid the tendency to blame others for our problems if we have to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century global knowledge economy. You, dear graduands are among the privileged few young Kenyans who have had the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills that have been used to transform societies elsewhere. Use those skills to find solutions to Africa's problems, particularly the problem of poverty which afflicts a majority of our people. As we speak today, Ladies and Gentlemen, over 54 per cent of Kenyans live in poverty, surviving on less than one dollar per day. They do not have access to basic services that the people in developed nations take for granted; clean water, sanitation, electricity, schooling and health care.**

**You the graduands represent what I like to refer to as the African leader of today who is ready to confront the challenges of development without expecting sympathy or charity.**

**I remember the rousing reception I received as a young man when I returned home from high school. The people in my village saw me as a symbol of progress and a role model for other young people. Those who had been fortunate enough to attend higher institutions of learning, such as Makerere University, went home in still greater triumph and became instant celebrities. People regarded degree**

holders as the most knowledgeable and most capable members of the community. They were a source of pride for their community who saw them as early inheritors of positions of authority.

Even after many years of independence, an educated person still commands a lot of respect among his people. He remains the flesh-and-blood representation of their highest expectations. The large attendance at this graduation ceremony by your friends and relatives who have travelled long distances attest to this fact today. A young University graduate who is appointed a district officer immediately after graduation without work experience, finds himself readily accepted by older men and women including chiefs, assistant chiefs and headmen who were wielding authority before he was born. In their view, the graduate's degree has licensed him to lead. This belief in education as an end in itself is apparent in how the poorest of parents readily sacrifice their meagre resources for the education of their children. To most people in our society, learning appears to be the only reliable route to better life.

Even during the struggle for independence, education played a critical role. The leaders in combat who often had little education left the ideological leadership of the resistance movement to the educated. Since those times the general view of

**university education has changed very little; our society believes that education moulds, and equips a person to leadership and to lead a good life.**

**Your parents have made enormous sacrifices to see you through the university, they have earned a return on their investment and from it, they deserve quality leadership by quality people. Questions have often been raised whether our educated elite has justified the community's expectations and whether they have been good role models to be emulated by yet another educated generation.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, if we were to consider past events at our institutions of learning, including high school and universities (public), we would for a long time have been justified to conclude that the educated class and its institutions have failed miserably at justifying the public confidence in advanced education. Frequent riots and other acts of indiscipline have in the past led to destruction of private property and closure of the university, severely disrupting academic programmes. These disruptions represent failure by the educated class in this country to provide leadership that is responsible and conscious of Kenya's immediate needs. The educated Kenyans in my opinion have yet to demonstrate either the willingness or capacity to serve as the intellectual pioneers we need.**

**For example, the Lunatic Express as Kenya Railway was earlier referred to was surveyed and built by a few foreign engineers under impossible circumstances over 100 year ago. The Royal Technical College and later University of Nairobi and many other universities around the world have graduated many more Kenyan Engineers in the last hundred years. Yet we have been unable to maintain let alone improve our rail road facilities.**

**This criticism can be levelled at many other institutions we the educated have mismanaged and hence slowed our national growth and development.**

**Many a times our expectations of quality leadership with foresight by our educated elites in our various institutions have been met with poor management, vandalism, distorted morality and abuse of responsibilities bestowed on us by our society. Our trusting, hopeful society has been offered armchair revolutionaries instead of leaders who might justify the burdens many have borne to provide them with education. Members of the educated minority have held society to ransom in order to claim for themselves comfort and ease. They have behaved as though they are owed a high standard of living as compensation for their education, never acknowledging their new acumen was bought by the sweat of others. They seem more concerned about taking from rather than giving to those**

**who laboured in the maize and sugar fields to keep them in lecture halls and laboratories.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, the socio-economic problems facing Kenya are enormous. Only the educated can provide the enlightened leadership that will help to solve these problems. Unless we who are educated resolve to become as worthy as the village elders assumed we were that day we returned home displaying our new diplomas, we will continue to attract – and deserve the criticisms levelled against us: that we have betrayed the confidence and trust of our families, our communities and our country.**

**I am pleased to note, Ladies and Gentleman, that the University of Nairobi is beginning to position itself to play its rightful leadership role in our society. As an institution of higher learning we have undergone major changes since the University was founded in 1956 as the Royal Technical College. These changes have been brought by infusion of a new culture in the system that has yielded results within a short time.**

**From competitive hiring of senior staff, to development of a strategic plan that has enabled the University to progress in a structured and measurable way.**

**Though many areas still require attention I am proud of the progress the University has made so far within a short duration.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, the image of the University counts for all stakeholders but more importantly for those who have passed through it. As noted earlier, the University suffered its share of indiscipline that severely dented its image a few years back. I urge our students to continue embracing dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts with the administration for it is in their interest and that of the institution.**

**The University of Nairobi is relatively well endowed with a solid infrastructure and a strong human resource base incomparable to any university in the region. It is the duty of management and students alike to take advantage of these unique attributes and build the university so that it can grow into one of the best not only in the region but the world as a whole.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, commitment to offering quality service is the only way modern institutions can remain competitive. This year I am happy the University of Nairobi launched its service charter that commits its staff in offering timely,**

**quality service to its customers. I am hopeful that we shall commit ourselves to the charter to ensure that our clientele receive prompt service.**

**I also want to commend the University for taking its share of corporate social responsibility. This year the staff and students of the University of Nairobi heeded the government's call for assistance in fighting famine that affected various parts of the country and contributed more than Kshs 4.1 million towards the national famine relief effort.**

**I am confident that the University of Nairobi will continue to provide leadership in our search of sustained, long-term, and equitable economic growth that creates jobs, reduces poverty, eliminates hunger, and raises the standard of living of our people, including for the most vulnerable sectors and social groups.**

**Finally I would like to congratulate our graduands once again on their distinguished achievement. May the society open up endless opportunities for your success and professional growth.**

**THANK YOU**