

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

SPEECH BY DR. VIJOO RATTANSI, OGW, CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING THE 68th GRADUATION

CEREMONY HELD VIRTUALLY ON FRIDAY DECEMBER 16, 2022 AT 8:00 A.M.

Hon. Ezekiel Machogu, Cabinet Secretary in charge of Education

Dr. Beatrice Inyangala, Principal Secretary State Department for Higher Education and Research

Chairperson of University of Nairobi Council, Prof. Miriam Were

Members of the University Council

Our Vice Chancellor, Prof. Stephen Kiama

Chancellor colleagues present

Chair of the University of Nairobi Alumni Association, Mr. Isaac Awuondo

Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Heads of Missions

Distinguished Partners

University staff

All graduands

Visitors joining us from around the globe

All protocols observed,

Good morning?

Allow me to extend a very warm welcome to you all and, specifically, to the 68th Graduation Congregation of the University of Nairobi. For those joining us physically, I take this opportunity to encourage you to feel at home.

Ladies and gentlemen, in a years’ time, our beloved country will mark sixty years of independence from colonial rule. At the dawn of independence, the citizens of the new republic looked to the future with hope. It was the aspiration of every citizen that in place of the long and bitter freedom struggle, independent Kenya would be one indivisible and prosperous nation; a nation whose collective labour will insulate her future generations from poverty, ignorance and disease. Our gathering today, in a sense, invites us to reflect upon our dreams at independence and the contribution of academia to our homeland’s socio-economic-development keeping in mind that education is the spine of any nation.

Ernest Agyemang Yeboah, a Ghanaian teacher and author, opines that the better the education, the better the nation and the mediocre the education, the mediocre the nation! A good nation is good because of how education has shaped the perspective and understanding of the populace. Indeed, an educated population is essential to a nation’s prosperity.

I am therefore delighted and to note with satisfaction, that as a nation we as have decided to relook at our education system in light of our founding aspirations, values and ideals. While independence freed us from physical captivity and slavery, it is education that will open our eyes to a golden new world, setting us free from the bondage of self-doubt and limitation.

Five score years ago, our university was founded. Over the years, we have made a significant contribution to Kenya’s development through supply of skilled human resource. In good measure, we have witnessed the mixed bag of independent nation’s successes and failures: fivefold growth in our population, growth of our Gross Domestic Product and poverty levels alike, fall in child mortality rates, adoption of revolutionary innovation and technology, universal primary education, clamour for multipartyism, geographic and financial inequalities etc. We have witnessed it all. It is therefore only natural that we as a University, like the nation at large, have reached a point of reflection where we are asking ourselves how and why we do the things that we do and what skills, competence and resources we need to fulfil our mission and better contribute to Kenya’s socio-economic and political development over the next 50 years!

Whilst we consider and implement reforms to serve this university into the future, I enjoin the Council and the management to entrench unity of purpose. In managing change, synergy of efforts towards a common goal is of cardinal importance. Working at cross purposes will only subvert the change that you all aspire to and make it impossible to achieve your set objectives.

Additionally, we must never depart from our ideals of a caring university. We must endeavour to create or co-create an environment that fosters “*good vibes” ...*one in which all our people are treated with due care, thought, diligence, gentleness, civility, wisdom, utmost respect and a humane face. Traditional people management practices that have no place in the future must yield ground to those that deliver equity and justice to all. Let us jointly strive towards openness, transparency, and predictability in personnel mobility. We must ensure that all who toil faithfully are rewarded, not at the expense of others, but in addition to others. Similarly, those who contribute the least to the success of the joint enterprise ought to be flagged for remedial action.

Ladies and gentlemen, over the past eight years we have enjoyed relative peace and tranquility at the University of Nairobi. Sometimes when we strip away the cover of time-induced amnesia, we narrow down to the bone-truth…lessons that we have drawn over time that have somehow been buried under heaps and days of our lives. The truth is we must never forget how far we have come and how we are faring compared to our peer universities. We must remember the days gone by when insubordination was openly traded and where tribalism was a matter of concern; we must not forget the days when sanity flew out of the window and confusion reigned. We must never forget!

Given our history, I am constrained to remind us of the need to uphold university hierarchy, separation of powers, division of labour and respective office mandates. Our stakeholders expect that the Chancellor will always have due regard for her appointing authority, the Council and all persons appointed to serve under the Council’s authority. It follows therefrom that management is expected to respect its appointing authority, the Council, which in turn under the leadership of its Chair must be seen to hold both the Chancellor, the management and the entire university fraternity in high esteem and embody servant leadership. Ultimately, institutions stand when governance stands and collapse when governance fails. Everyone has space and a role to play in our university; let us therefore render our respective duties conscientiously and with utmost good faith!

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me now to address our graduands.

Graduands, permit me in all humility to say that we celebrate you!

Each of you shall shortly transition from student to graduate, an act which bestows upon *thee* great responsibility for man and country alike. You will soon assume new status as role models and paragons of virtue. Society will look up to you for leadership, stewardship, and solutions. These are responsibilities that must not be taken lightly and should be discharged with the greatest degree of dexterity and humility. I beseech thee not to let the world down!

The path that you have chosen is yours to make your mark in the world. We therefore send you out, not to extinguish your light, but that in lighting other candles, you may be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

We send you out to the world of work and economic gain as a true reflection of our university. This university has been hewn painstakingly on the back of thousands of resolute men and women committed to our vision and mission. Thousands of your forebearers have partaken in this rite of passage, a symbol of achievement from your wee freshmen days to accomplished professionals of today.

Your skills and professionalism will undoubtedly serve the country well in delivery of the government’s bottom-up economic model including the planned irrigation of 3 million acres of land, construction of 100 dams for the same purpose, construction of the proposed High Grands Falls Dam, the Nairobi Railways City and affordable housing programmes. As we evolve towards an innovation-based economy, there is room for nurturing innovative ideas and to tap into various funding opportunities in Kenya *(such as the Hustler Fund)* and across the world to turn your dreams into reality. In this regard, I also with to implore the government to consider the University of Nairobi as a valuable partner and skilled resource provider towards realization of their various development initiatives.

As you go out into the world, may the words of George Saunders abide with you,

**“Do all the other things, the ambitious things - travel, get rich, get famous, innovate, lead, fall in love, make and lose fortunes…but as you do, to the extent that you can, err in the direction of kindness.”**

Finally, allow me to bid you farewell by borrowing the words of the Holy Bible,

**“whatsoever things are true,**

**whatsoever things are noble,**

**whatsoever things are just,**

**whatsoever things are pure,**

**whatsoever things are lovely,**

**whatsoever things are of good report,**

**if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things”**

I pray that in the college of life as in the university, you will all graduate with honors.

I wish you well and God’s abundant grace and blessings!

As I conclude, allow me to appreciate and thank most sincerely our government, partners and donors, parents, guardians, members of staff, alumni and all who have made this day possible. Your unqualified support has invaluably contributed to the success of today’s graduands.

With those remarks, I take this opportunity to wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous year 2023.

*Asanteni sana na Mola awabariki.*