



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

**SPEECH BY DR. JOSEPH BARRAGE WANJUI, CBS
CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI ON THE
OCCASION OF THE 41ST GRADUATION CEREMONY
ON FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 18, 2009 AT THE
CHANCELLOR'S COURT**

**Minister for Higher Education, Science and
Technology, Hon. Dr. Sally Kosgei**

**Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Higher
Education, Science and Technology, Prof. Crispus
Kiamba**

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

Vice-Chancellor, Prof. George Magoha

Council Members

Deputy Vice-Chancellors

College Principals

**Deans and Directors of Faculties, Schools and
Institutes**

Parents and Guardians

Graduands

Students and Staff

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I extend my special greetings and best wishes to all of you gathered here today to celebrate the 41st Graduation of our great institution, the University of Nairobi. This is a momentous occasion for the graduands, their parents, teachers and the entire University community because it symbolizes the successful conclusion of a long and challenging journey to academic excellence. I congratulate all the graduands, the proud parents, teachers and indeed the entire University of Nairobi fraternity on your achievement. Well done.

Ladies and Gentlemen when I was appointed Chancellor by H.E. the President, Hon. Mwai Kibaki, I considered it a great honour to have been given a responsibility that was previously exercised by the Head of State. Secondly, in the University of Nairobi I saw a great institution with immense potential which for various reasons had not been fully exploited. To me therefore this was both a challenge and an opportunity to contribute to the development of a national institution that had served the country well over the years and could do much better if properly managed.

Having spent most of my working life in the private sector, I noted, on examining the set-up at the University, that most of the fundamentals of a successful organization were in place. It was however quite clear that it would be necessary to change the mindset of both students and staff if the University was to achieve its goal of becoming a world-class institution of higher learning.

Our reform programme which was received with considerable apprehension began with the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor competitively. This decision was informed by the realization that the previous practice of appointing University heads politically constrained their freedom considerably thereby undermining their autonomy and ability to

make independent decisions. I am pleased to note that this practice has since been adopted by other Public Universities and contributed to strengthening of these institutions.

The Vice-Chancellor under the guidance of Council now has a strong team of committed managers recruited in a similar manner who have worked tirelessly to change the face of the University.

During my recent tour of the various University campuses, I was impressed by the general cleanliness of the University, and the number of new projects that have come up and the old ones that have been completed. I am particularly pleased to note that

most of these projects have been initiated and completed using internally generated funds.

The strengthening of our physical infrastructure has enhanced our capacity to admit more young people in need of higher education. With a student population of over 46,000 students, we are easily the largest university in the region. This is without doubt a major contribution to the development of our country.

As we congratulate the University for opening up access to enable more of our young people to acquire higher education, care must be taken to ensure that high standards are maintained.

By changing the governance structure of the University to allow student participation, the students now have an avenue for expressing their needs and contributing to decision making. The peace and tranquility that currently characterizes the University has not gone unnoticed. Three years ago, the then Senator Obama, now President of the United States, visited the University because it was viewed as a credible institution of higher learning. Last month the University hosted the US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton who in her letter to the Chancellor stated and I quote: “I want to express my deep gratitude for the hospitality that you extended to me and the entire U.S. delegation at the University of Nairobi. It was an honor to visit Kenya’s most

prestigious institution of higher learning, and I very much enjoyed my dialogue with Kenya's youth and civil society leaders". Ladies and Gentlement, what other evidence is needed to confirm that the University of Nairobi has matured and is on the world map?

As Chancellor, I am extremely proud of our University and the role it is playing in the development of the country. The progress that has been achieved so far would not have been possible without our students, staff and all the stakeholders working together. Our private sector partners in particular should be commended for having faith in us. Corporate leaders who only a few years ago would have been extremely reluctant to set foot on campus

nowadays can sit down with students to exchange ideas over a cup of tea. Indeed many of them attend our evening classes as Module II students. In this regard, I wish to thank Barclays Bank for endowing a chair in the School of Business which will help to strengthen our academic programmes.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the University of Nairobi as the premier institution of higher learning in the country has a critical role to play in the development of the nation through teaching and research. The country is currently experiencing one of the most severe droughts in recent memory. This is having a negative effect on our economy and our people. Experts have attributed the drought situation to the global problem of climate change. There is however

evidence to suggest that it has been exacerbated by the unsustainable manner in which we have been using our natural resources especially forests.

It is my considered opinion that the University of Nairobi has the necessary intellectual capacity to assist the government to address many challenges that affect the development of our country. The College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences for example, should be at the forefront in the development of proposals on how to address the problem of food scarcity. Our engineers should help us to come up with alternative energy sources that are affordable and environmentally friendly. Our scientists at Chiromo should be spearheading the campaign to increase availability of water to our

people for both domestic use and other purposes. The list is endless.

Indeed by virtue of being the oldest and largest institution of higher learning, the University of Nairobi has the challenge and opportunity to provide academic leadership. The real problems facing the country need real solutions. The country looks up to the University as one of the key sources of practical solutions.

If the millennium development goals and vision 2030 are to be realized, then we need radical transformation from the 'nchi ya kitu kidogo' inhabited by 'watu wadogo' (as Eric Wainaina puts it),

to an African Tiger. To do this we need to slay the dragon of corruption. The dragon can only be slain if we are willing and able to walk the talk.

I am happy to note that University has demonstrated its commitment to good corporate governance by the way it has utilized the limited resources at its disposal. The public declaration that the University is a corruption-free zone is a strong pointer to the University's preferred future. We are proud to report that even Secretary Clinton took note and commended the University for its declared position on corruption.

As a nation, we must say 'no' to the 'nchi ya kitu kidogo' and say 'yes' to 'nchi ya watu wangwana'. It

is only then that “Tutajivunia kuwa Wakenya”. It is encouraging to note that the University has embarked on the right path. The challenge therefore is on sustainability and building on the gains already made.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the young men and women before you are among the best, they have been trained in the best institution of higher learning by the best scholars in this region. They have successfully completed their studies and are ready to join the labour market. Let us make use of their skills and energy to develop our beloved country.

In concluding, I wish to thank the government for continuing to support the University. I also would

like to thank our students and staff for doing us proud by restoring the good name of our University. To the parents and guardians, I salute you for the enormous sacrifice you have had to make to see your children through the University. As to the graduands, I note you are well prepared to face the world. But I remind you of the words of Napoleon Hill who observed that: “The world has the habit of making room for the man whose words and actions show that he knows where he is going”.

Thank you and best wishes to you all.