



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

**SPEECH BY DR. VIJOO RATTANSI, OGW,
CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
DURING THE 56th GRADUATION CEREMONY HELD
ON FRIDAY DECEMBER 2, 2016 AT THE
CHANCELLOR'S COURT AT 8:00 A.M.**

Your Excellences the Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Dr. Fred Matiang'i, Cabinet Secretary Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

Other Cabinet Secretaries present

Dr. Idle Omar Farah, Chair of Council

Council Members Prof. Peter Mulwa Mbithi, Vice-Chancellor

Chancellors of sister universities

University Staff

Parents and guardians

Distinguished guests and most importantly, graduands,

Good morning!

Welcome to the University of Nairobi.

Let me start by saying what a privilege it is for me to stand here with you to celebrate the great achievements of our graduands. The road, no doubt, has been long and wearying but most of our graduands today met every challenge with a measure of enthusiasm, positive attitude and an undying spirit.

Your crowning moment is at hand and I am humbled to be with you on this happy occasion.

On a day such as today, the joys of the day makes one forget many things. One may forget toiling into the night for weeks on end or the comforts and opportunities forgone to make this day a possibility; one may forget the life lessons of failing an exam, quickly picking oneself up

and recalibrating one's trajectory back onto the path to success.

Parents may momentarily forget the sweat of their brows that transformed barren lands into flourishing farms that sustained many graduands here; they may forget the pain of privation and barely surviving on the breadline. For the married, your spouses will forget the longevity of your absence and the coldness of your side of bed.

Many things will be forgotten but as a graduate you owe yourself a reminder, that the journey is long and no matter the setbacks you encounter on the way, you must stay on course.

Ladies and gentlemen, the late Dr. Martin Luther King discussed the purpose of education in his writings. If education only succeeds in furnishing you with noble ends rather than means to an end or arming you with proper instruments of exploitation so that you can forever trample over the masses, then the purpose of education will have been defeated.

I hope in educating you, to use Martin Luther's words, we have not only given you the power of concentration but also worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. Your country looks up to you for leadership.

The communities that you came from look up to you for inspiration. In the absence of humility and good morals, your achievements, however stellar, will amount to naught.

Graduands, many of you will be called to national duty or leadership at one point or another. I beseech thee to lead by example. As members of faculty or student body, you

may not be happy with some things at the university or in the country but that is no excuse for overt dissonance and sabotage. You can make your point and go your way. Someone somewhere will hear you. This is what tolerance is all about.

At University of Nairobi, we believe in the twin principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Unfettered freedom of individual expression, enquiry and scrutiny by scholars is essential to the mission of education to the extent that that freedom is exercised with accuracy, restraint and is respectful of divergent opinions. Indeed our belief in academic freedom is engraved in the University's logo. The green shield signifies the readiness to support and defend academic freedom in the pursuit of knowledge.

We must therefore consciously guard these freedoms at the University. Curiosity must be tempered with the correct set of facts. The University should steer clear of politicization, not politics as political awareness is a key pillar in knowledge advancement. Institutional autonomy should be encouraged. Ultimately, good governance thrives in an environment free of politicization and vested interests. It is for this reason that I invite the executive to join us in preserving the strictest fidelity to academic freedom and insulating universities from external intrusion or interference that may subjugate education to political interests.

Today also gives us an opportunity to reflect upon the 12 year mission that Dr. Idle Omar Farah completes today. The 56th graduation marks the last graduation presided on by Dr. Idle as Chair of Council. Allow me to pay a special tribute to this Council under his leadership for rendering distinguished and dedicated service to the University. The strength and depth of character in this Council is outstanding. While Dr. Idle's time at the helm of the Council has been marked by huge challenges, he and his

team of wise men and women did not fall short whenever able stewardship was required. As you leave, you can rest assured that the Council left behind will step to the plate and carry the mantle with as great a courage and dexterity as you did. I challenge you to pen your memoirs of this phase of your life and enrich the body of university governance. We wish you only the very best as you transit from the university to your next station.

Finally, let me address myself to the political class wherever you may be in this country. I am acutely aware that the position of Chancellor is apolitical as indeed I am but allow me just a few minutes to share a few words with you.

Most of us have never packed just the bare life's essentials, secured them in a plastic bag, hoisted the plastic bag on our backs, clasped tightly the hands of the small children and the elderly and turned our backs to what we have always called home. Many of us have never left everything we knew including our ancestral heritage and set off for distant shores to escape the vagaries of war and violence. Most of us have never spent days on end with neither food nor shelter and not knowing wherefrom or when that will come. Most of us have never looked to the skies for providence only to be met with sights scrawny vultures ready to pounce on them that fall short in strength and fall prey to nature's insatiable appetite. As we bow on our knees in the silent corners of our houses, let us pray that we will never have to do that.

Let us pray for tolerance, peace and wisdom.

Members of the political class, you wear our golden crown. For that reason, you shoulder the heaviest burden of shepherding all your followers through the straight and narrow. I beseech thee to watch your words. Utter not a word that perpetrates hate or incitement to harm. A whole forest can be set ablaze by a tiny spark of fire,

and the tongue is as dangerous as any fire. Kenya belongs to all of us and remains the beacon of peace in the region. If we burn it down we will have nowhere to go, nowhere to run.

I wish you well in all your future endeavours. Go ye in peace. Whatever your dreams and aspirations, may they come true. Keep curious and keep learning. May the festive season be filled with joy and may the forthcoming general elections be peaceful.

May God bless you all, May He bless the University of Nairobi and May He bless the Nation of Kenya.

Thank you.