



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

**SPEECH BY DR. VIJOO RATTANSI, OGW, CHANCELLOR OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING THE 52nd GRADUATION
CEREMONY HELD ON FRIDAY DECEMBER 5, 2014 AT THE
CHANCELLOR'S COURT AT 9.00 A.M.**

- **The Cabinet Secretary, Prof. Jacob Kaimenyi**
- **The Chairman of Council, Dr. Idle Farah Omar**
- **Vice-Chancellor, Prof. George Magoha**
- **Vice-Chancellor, Designate, Prof. Peter Mbithi**
- **Your Excellencies the Ambassadors & High Commissioners**
- **Chancellors from other Universities**
- **University Staff**
- **Graduands**
- **Students**
- **Parents and guardians**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

My elder sister and I were walking downtown Los Angeles one evening when we were drawn by the blare of a beautiful tune. Across the cacophony of hoots, cackles and noise, we followed the source of the music and we came to a middle aged man playing his banjo. Suddenly, as if on cue, the music stopped. “I am sorry we have closed”, said the man. “How can you close when we have come all this way just to listen to you play your music?” asked my sister. “Is it true, that you have only come here to listen to my music? Then I will play some music for you!” he said. He then proceeded to unpack his banjo and delight us with the elegance of his composition. When he was done, we all clapped and said “Well done!” He walked over to us, stretched out his hand and shook ours. He then presented us with a disc saying, “Here, take this. You will hear me forever!” He then packed up his banjo and left, not even accepting a single cent from us.

The moral of this personal encounter ladies and gentlemen, is the proof that the deepest yearning of the human heart is for recognition - for honour! It is for this reason that we are gathered here today; to honour our graduates for their gallant efforts, our respective families for forgoing various comforts to support our quest for education, our faculty and staff for sticking with them, our management for keeping the eagle's eye and training our collective efforts on the prize and finally, to salute and celebrate Prof. George Magoha, our Vice Chancellor for the last ten years.

It is said that it is always difficult to honour our everyday heroes. Allow me a few minutes to pay special tribute to Prof. George Magoha with whom I have enjoyed an excellent working relationship. I have heard from some of his close friends and associates that once, as a student at Starehe Boys' School, Prof. Magoha sneaked out of school on a borrowed bicycle. On

his return, he ironically ran into the legendary crime buster, the late Patrick Shaw. Shaw reversed his Volvo onto the bicycle destroying it beyond repair. We are grateful that the bike did not survive! From this date thence, Prof. Magoha focused on his studies that set him on the trajectory to success. He went on to become a top surgeon and an alumnus of the University of Lagos, Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital. Prof. Magoha has been a towering giant in this institution over the last 26 years.

Appointed in 2005 under the new regime, he, like a master craftsman, went on to weave together a team that has diligently worked on restoring the University to her past glory. He and his team have surmounted many challenges. The University of Nairobi stands tall amongst the elite league of universities in Kenya boasting of the coveted ISO accreditation. Our Research portfolio now exceeds KES. 4

billion up from just KES 350,000 million when Prof Magoha became Vice Chancellor. University enrollment is at 79, 000 students up from 30,000 just a few years ago. More than half of all the university alumni have graduated under his term, 90,915 out of 165,335. Together with his team, Prof. Magoha has managed to minimize upheavals in the University thus ensuring an uninterrupted and predictable academic calendar. During his tenure, various infrastructural projects have been initiated, expanded or completed, the flagship of which will be the University of Nairobi Towers, a 22 storey building which when completed will illuminate the western skies of the City. In addition, the University's webometric ranking has improved consistently from position 4,046th in the world at the advent of the global rankings, to position 907th and 7th currently, on the continent

Prof. Magoha, I know the path to success is neither rosy nor decked in gold; sometimes we lose our friends, sometimes we create enemies, sometimes the path we walk seems too long to stay on course, yet with all its drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a path worth taking. Your presence here today speaks volumes on how we as a people can impact positively on our respective spheres of influence. Your wise counsel will always be missed. We wish you well in your future endeavors. Ladies and gentlemen, may we all appreciate our Vice Chancellor by way of a standing ovation and thunderous applause? *(Moja! Mbili! Tatu!- may use the MC)*

Prof. Magoha's successor set the bar very high. The shoes to be fitted into at the helm of this University are huge. As with any succession process, egos are bound to be bruised, emotions stirred, feelings hurt and friendships endangered. It is expected that bitterness and a sense of loss may be upon some of us. But

I want to encourage you, because we all work for a common good, the good of self, country and universe. I invite us all to work as a team under the newly appointed Vice Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbithi, as Together Everyone Achieves More. Ultimately, the *reward of a thing well done is having done it.* Prof. Mbithi has over the last 31 years rendered loyal and selfless service to the University. He has honed his skills under Professor Magoha's wings. It is now time to fly the nest and take wing with us. Prof. Mbithi, welcome aboard and I am sure you can count on the university fraternity and all her friends for support.

I am happy to note the growth of our research portfolio. It is a fitting tribute to the true purpose of a university's existence, research and knowledge advancement. Universities the world over, exist to provide solutions to the everyday problems afflicting humanity. We are no different. It is in this vein that I

reiterate my appeal, made earlier this year, to review our march to sustainability and to look at solutions beyond module 2 if we are to continue serving our true mission for existence. We must engage our brilliant brains from the business school who are our university family, to help the management unlock these entrepreneurial solutions. If we do this, we will not only attract the best brains to our shores but also, grow our very own talents that, will in turn, be future leaders in research and innovation.

Graduates, this country is in need of heroes. Each of you is a shining little star. Every night the sky is lit not by a single star but by a galaxy of tiny little sparks from the stars. Let those sparks come from each and every one you. Be the hero, be the light that your country needs.

Today we send a seven thousand - strong man army into the world. We affirm that all of you have fulfilled the requirements for which degrees you will be conferred with. Sir Winston Churchill's words ring true of your journey through University: "Never give in, never give in! Never! Never! Never – in nothing great or small, large or petty! Never give in except to the conviction of honour and good sense!"

You therefore are sufficient in every sense of the word. Let no one make you feel inadequate. Let no one make you believe you can't do it. Let no one make you doubt yourself.

Graduates of the School of Health Sciences, the health landscape is shifting rapidly. The days of guaranteed employment are long gone. Some of you will take your Hippocratic Oath this afternoon. For you and others here with you, please remember the wisdom of those words... that you

will not be ashamed to say you know not, that you will remember there is an art to medicine as well as a science and that you will prevent disease whenever you can. I am aware that there is no single course in entrepreneurship in your curricula; a situation that I hope will change for the benefit for future graduates. That notwithstanding, I invite you to pool your resources however little. I have read of the story of Dr. Allan Soita, a young visionary who is changing the face of medical care in Narok, and that of Dr. Sam Nthenya, the proprietor of Nairobi Women's Hospital, whose dream is changing the care of women and victims of gender violence.

Graduates of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, your country needs you. Remember Dr. Julius Kipng'etich, a master strategist and his turnaround of the Kenya Wildlife Service into a functional institution. Somewhere, I read of the "godfather of investment banking" Mr. Jimnah Mbaru and his

37 page CV that documents his business sojourn and exploits in transforming Africa.

What I am saying graduates is that you should dare to dream! Dare to be different! Settle not for the ordinary! Why settle for good if better is possible? Be masters of your craft. Make a difference for humanity by discovering the first HIV vaccine. Make a difference for humanity in Africa by crafting the first working strategy for sustained peace in the Horn of Africa. Make a difference for your country by becoming the first African on the moon. Make a difference for yourself, your children and grandchildren in Kenya and anywhere on the face of the globe that they may choose to call home.

All of these are within your reach but only if you dare to dream.

It is my hope that like the three wise men you will follow the star from the East and onto the Promised Land of fulfilled dreams. Doing so will afford many the opportunity to eke a decent living and go a long way in easing the burden of unemployment and underemployment. Like Dr. Ben Carson you have, individually, been gifted the 3Hs: the head, the heart and the hand. Put them into in all that you do and verily I say unto thee, you will be the hallmarks of accomplished citizens. Your success, though an intensely personal experience, will be our pride and joy. The next generation depends on you, do not disappoint them.

After all is said and done, your alma mater needs you. Around the globe, great universities are sustained by the generous contributions of their alumni. In 2013 for example, real estate tycoon and Stanford alumnus, John Arrillaga, gifted a record \$151 million to his alma mater. We cannot all gift our alma

mater with millions or even thousands of shillings but we can invest our skills, our time, our resources and energy, however little. Find time to join the Alumni Association and together let us build a University that is truly world class, whose legacy our children can build onto.

Finally graduates, the future with all its promises is at hand! Remember these 21 words from the Scottish philosopher, Thomas Carlyle,

"Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand."

Keep raising your bar and when you get too comfortable, move on to an audience that demands more of you. Live honestly. Honour all men. Keep close your family and friends. They will greatly enrich your life's journey; to celebrate with during good times such as today and to turn to for understanding, advice,

love and comfort in tough times. Take a picture, take a selfie...celebrate! Take pride in your achievements. As your teachers, parents, guardians, spouses and children, we are honoured to celebrate with you.

May you all have a blessed Jamhuri day, a happy festive season and all of life's happy tidings today and in the days to come.