



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

**REMARKS BY DR VIJOO RATTANSI, OGW,
CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
DURING THE 50TH GRADUATION CEREMONY HELD ON
FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER, 2013 AT THE CHANCELLOR'S
COURT**

The Cabinet Secretary, Prof. Jacob Kaimenyi

Vice-Chancellor, Prof. George Magoha

The Chairman of Council, Dr. Idle Farah Omar

**Your Excellencies the Ambassadors & High
Commissioners**

Chancellors from other Universities

University Staff

Graduands

Students

Parents and guardians

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is said there is always something great about Jubilee Anniversaries... for 50 is the number of years it has taken for a lady to stand here and preside over such an auspicious occasion as today's. 50 years ago the first lot of graduands walked out of this University. 50 years ago the foundation of this nation was laid on the back of a spirited fight for independence. Over the many years of its life, the University of Nairobi has birthed great men and women who have gone on to serve this nation faithfully in all facets of life. I am greatly honored to stand here today, 50 years on, as your Chancellor and share in this refreshing spirit of achievement.

I wish to pay tribute to my illustrious predecessors the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Arap Moi, Mwai Kibaki and more recently Prof. Joseph Wanjui to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude. I wish to recognise the efforts and leadership of the Vice Chancellor Prof. George Magoha and the immediate former University Council Chair Dr. John Simba in the march towards making this institution a greater one.

I also wish to pay a special tribute to my late mentor and husband Dr. Hassanally Rattansi. When I got married I learnt from him a great deal of selfless service and dedication. These qualities have sustained me in walking the family dream of dedicating our lives to the needs of our young aspiring Kenyans in pursuit of excellence in higher education.

In his commencement speech at Syracuse University, George Saunders notes:

“Down through the ages, a traditional form has evolved for this type of speech, which is: Some old fellow, his best years behind him, who,

over the course of his life, has made a series of dreadful mistakes (that would be me), giving heartfelt advice to a group of shining, energetic young people, with all of their best years ahead of them (that would be you). “

I intend to respect that tradition.

I believe in emotional stability for children. As a mother and philanthropist who has interacted with these children for many years, I believe that no child should be denied the opportunity to pursue higher education. Imagine an innocent child reading very hard in school and passing with flying colours and as he (gender sensitive) thinks that he

is guaranteed a place in university, he meets another man called JAB.

This meeting is a meeting of needs... JAB goes on about bed capacity, learning space, teacher-student ratio, etc and goes on to say that based on these reasons, Mary/Joseph cannot join university. I commend JAB for changing the typical story of Mary/Joseph. To this end the University will continue to embrace change.

Learning in Kenya has been largely confined to the brick and mortar walls. We the peoples of the University of Nairobi must therefore break down these barriers of space and time as these will soon

become historical. We should embrace technology with open arms; leverage on IT to deliver a truly first class education and endeavor to provide cutting edge education without borders. Only then can we afford higher education opportunities to all who thirst.

We must remain true to innovation. Steve Jobs said that innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower. Learning and innovation therefore go hand in hand. We can use the university to great effect as a canvas for life changing or process changing solutions. Such solutions not only fit the industry but can transform how we deliver quality, customized and best fit education to all. If we do

this, the Fountain of Knowledge that stands tall facing the University Way shall stand tall forever.

We are often reminded to ensure that our education stays relevant to the market. A healthy partnership with our student's future employers and even competitors is paramount for any institution worth its name. To this end we must remain on course in engaging with the industry players in a symbiotic relationship where we supply well educated labour force and entrepreneurs and the industry rewards them. All our graduands are asking for is a chance!

The University of Nairobi is widely recognised as the premier university of East Africa. It must, therefore, accept and uphold this leadership challenge. One way to do this ladies and gentlemen is to establish centres of excellence. I am delighted that the university has identified one such centre. This centre is the University of Nairobi Institute of Head and Neck Surgical Sciences. This institute will serve both the Kenyan and the larger East and Central African populations. I would like to invite the participation of government, donor community and other well wishers to help see this dream to fruition.

The Gandhi Wing and the Gandhi Memorial Library (now the University Bookshop) as they stand today are a fitting tribute to the support of both the Indian Government and the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi Trust Fund. The fountain of knowledge is a timeless tribute to the efforts of Dr. Yajnik in raising more than £400,000 for the University. The American Wing that currently hosts the engineering block stands courtesy of the International Corporation Administration of the United States of America. In May this year, the ground was broken where a few years thence will stand the Chandaria UON Towers. Over the life of this University, men, women, governments and institutions of goodwill have always joined hands

to ensure its development. Our profound gratitude goes to all the donors who have held our hands to walk this dream. This is the same spirit we need rekindled to see us through the next phase of the institution.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have appealed to the government, donor community and the well wishers. Let me address myself to you, my sons and daughters, the alumni of UON.

I am grateful for your confidence in me and giving me the opportunity to serve. You are the largest resource this university has, far larger than the

government or donor community. You have the knowledge and resources this university requires. You permeate every sector of our nation's economy.

Through the alumni association, you can contribute in cash and in kind to make this institution a sterling example. My office desires to work closely with you. I hope that each of you will take this as a personal challenge to make the University a better place for your children and children's children. Let's together build our own homegrown Havards, Oxfords, Yales, Princetons and the like.

Every man smiling in the streets of Nairobi owes the smile to one person. It may be the wife, it may be the househelp. It may be many others who only our Jimmi Gathu has the courage to mention. It most certainly is the baker or the chef. Graduands, kindly join me in applauding our very diligent and committed faculty with a clap. I am aware that your conditions and terms of service are constantly being reviewed and I beseech you to remain dedicated to your calling and to be open and intellectually honest as difficult issues of service are tackled.

Graduands, we are gathered here today in your honour. You have fought the good fight, you have

kept the faith. I congratulate you all most sincerely.

Some of you will leave here today and join the best blue chip companies in the land; some will leave here today and join the efforts of steadying family businesses; some of you will leave here and found companies that will in future create endless opportunities for our people and contribute to our economy; some of you will become pioneers, take the road not taken and be runaway successes. Yet some of you will go home this evening and sit on your degrees. It is this group that I am very concerned about.

Your parents or guardians seated here today have sacrificed a great deal to see you through school, not so much so because it is their parental duty, but that you may use this opportunity to carve a better future for yourselves. Some have sold their livestock, poultry and even ancestral lands to sustain you here. Some have nothing but the clothes on their backs and the pride of your presence here today. Some have sacrificed their comforts that they may guarantee your comforts. Do not let them down. Do not be discouraged. Do something with your knowledge. You may not have much to begin with but start anyway. You may not get that call for that interview immediately but hope anyway. You may not get

that dream job straight away but you can volunteer your skills. The fulfillment that comes with voluntarism cannot be quantified in monetary terms. Contribute, in any small way, to the socio-economic development of the country. Steer away from bad company for bad company destroys good character.

As I close, I would like to echo the last written words of Dr. William Geoffrey Griffin:

**“This world is full of people who do their duty half-heartedly, grudgingly and poorly.
Don’t be like them.**

Whatever is your duty, do it as fully and perfectly as you possibly can. And when you have finished your duty, go on to spare some time and talent in service for less fortunate people, not for any reward at all, but because it is the right thing to do.

Follow my advice in this and I promise you that your lives will be happy and successful.”

I wish you all a happy 50th Jamhuri Day.

Thank you, God bless you and God bless Kenya.