

UON Chancellor's 53rd Graduation Ceremony Speech

**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI  
SPEECH BY DR. VIJOO RATTANSI, OGW, CHANCELLOR  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING THE 53<sup>rd</sup>  
GRADUATION CEREMONY HELD ON FRIDAY  
SEPTEMBER 4, 2015 AT THE CHANCELLOR'S COURT AT  
8:00 A.M.**

- **The Cabinet Secretary, Education, Science and Technology, Prof. Jacob Kaimenyi**
- **The Chairman of Council, Dr. Idle Farah Omar**
- **Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbithi**
- **Your Excellences the Ambassadors & High Commissioners**
- **Chancellors from other Universities**
- **Members of the University Council**
- **Chairpersons of other University Councils**
- **Vice-Chancellors of Sister Universities**
- **Members of the University Management Board**
- **University of Nairobi Senate**
- **University Staff**
- **Graduands**
- **Students**
- **Parents and guardians**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

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Welcome all to the University of Nairobi!

As I solemnly meditated on my message to this graduating class, my mind drifted to the things read and heard over the last few months about the University of Nairobi. I remember reading a letter allegedly written by one of our students making certain threats if the President of America did not find time to visit us at the University. To see this large gathering here today, 18 of you and more, gives me great encouragement. My heart is lifted in the knowledge that this University is finally raising wholesome men and women with the moral spine to do what is good and right.

This year the University has had its fair share of challenges: a single life has been one too many to have lost in different circumstances. To the parents, guardians and relatives of our fallen brothers and sisters, the memories of your children are still fresh with us. Our hearts are heavily laden with grief. In their memory, we will continue investing towards making University of Nairobi the safest place for all.

We have had days of good press as well as the bad. Just as the winds of fortune were changing for the better, we subjected ourselves to episodes of airing our dirty linen in public. This has exposed us to public ridicule and hurt the brand that so many have laboured for so long to build. I know many of us feel terribly let down. I know many of us would be tempted to condemn the whole lot on account of actions of the few. Yet amidst the noise and haste, good men slaved in the night to get us to where we are today. Actions of such good men should affirm our faith that our better days are now at hand. In all our actions, ladies and gentlemen, let us be conscious and mindful on how these actions can make or break our brand.

Every challenge and every adversity successfully dealt with builds character and better equips us with the tools, skills and ability to conquer future obstacles. So it is with life, that what does not kill you makes you stronger! For all the troubling times that we have endured, our University, as well as current and future students have and will emerge stronger.

As time slowly weans us of our misfortunes, we must inevitably reflect on our leadership within the spheres we influence. While addressing leadership matters, William Arthur Ward's wisdom was instructive: "The mediocre teacher tells; the good teacher explains; the superior teacher demonstrates; the great teacher inspires!"

Those who hold public office must therefore strive to inspire those who look up to them for leadership. We must take up the mantle and wear it well. Let us be humble in thought, word, deed and spirit. Let our actions tell our story. Let humility - that is said to be the mother of giants - be our guiding light; let it be the very solid foundation for our many blessings. Let us seek to leverage our strength to prop up others so that they may stand on their own.

I am greatly inspired every time I read of the successes of our students; innovators and inventors like **Chura**, who continue to blaze the trail in providing solutions to our problems. In days to come they will not only provide graduates of this University with employment opportunities but the country as a whole. They will render services and promote economic growth and in doing so help the government meet sustainable development targets to the benefit of all.

One does not need to aspire to political office to be a leader. You are all leaders in your own right; within family, within the classrooms as well as at the corporate and community levels. This is the sort of leadership that I call you all to; true leadership that fosters new leaders and does not merely create followers. I therefore beseech thee; administrators, lecturers, student and union leaders of every creed; let our actions create a timeless legacy that inspires others to dream more, do more and become more.

Graduands, I congratulate you. I celebrate you. Your earnest academic journey today culminates in your graduation. You graduate from one of the finest universities on the continent. For many of you, this has been more than a home far away from home. Starting this afternoon, you will rightfully be alumni of this University. You will turn a page in your lives. At the break of dawn you will all set out on different paths

that will see you make new friends and shed some old ones. As you celebrate today,

you may be tempted to believe you have made it solely on the strength of your own hard work. The truth cannot be further from that. Your parents, guardians or sponsors have walked with you in this 8-4-4 journey, some sacrificing the last cent they had to sustain you in this University. Spare a moment to thank them for their sacrifices. They remain sterling examples of leadership by sacrifice. To all parents, guardians or sponsors, including the government, let me assure you that every cent invested in these graduates has gone a long way in ensuring that they are equipped with the skills to fish, so that they may never sleep hungry.

Graduands, out here you will most assuredly be confounded with many challenges. I know many of you are worried about the economy. Many of you are worried about how many applications you will have to make before it turns into a credible job prospect. I wish I could tell you not to worry. I wish I could, by the wave of a magic wand, make your lives the proverbial bed of roses. But I am only a mere mortal, not gifted with the ability to play God.

I therefore want you to know that this is part and parcel of life; that it will not be unique to you and many men and women will be addressing challenges like yours. I also want you to know that overcoming obstacles in life is possible but only if like James Todd Smith you take a step back, stay grounded and press on. Sir Richard Branson did it by beating dyslexia to set up a successful global business, Virgin Group; Oprah Winfrey did it by beating teenage abuse to inspire millions around the world, Sir Winston Churchill did it by overcoming a stuttering problem and poor performance in school to become one of the most influential political icons of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. You too can do it! You can create your own opportunity by exploiting the skills you have acquired in this University to solve society's problems for economic reward. You may pull like-minded individuals to access friendly government procurement opportunities. Ultimately, the best survival tool is to make yourself indispensable. As a University we will continue to engage with the industry to narrow the relevance

gap between them and the University. We hope that this engagement will go a long way in securing economic opportunities for most of our graduates, now and in future. UON Chancellor's 53rd Graduation Ceremony Speech

You are equal to the task and any curve balls that the world may throw at you. All you need to do is try! You are today's stars, tomorrow's legends. You are our ambassadors for the future. Let it never be said that you did not play your part. I wish thee well, in all you aspire to do! In a world full of selfish interests, treachery and opportunities for corruption and ill gains, I advise you as the good book does: whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, meditate on these things.

Finally graduands, heed the words of Ms. Goldie Hawn; that "While you continue to walk down that sometimes bumpy road of life, develop the art of laughter and joy. Keep in your backpack of treasures the whole you, the best you. The "you" that won't fear failure, because lessons learned are the only way to grow." If you do this, you will most assuredly go far.

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