



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

**SPEECH BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR, PROF. GEORGE
A.O. MAGOHA DURING THE 37TH GRADUATION
CEREMONY AT THE CHANCELLOR'S COURT ON
FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 7, 2007**

The Chancellor, University of Nairobi, Dr. Joseph

Barrage Wanjui

Minister for Education, Hon. Prof. George Saitoti

Chancellors of sister universities

Chairman, University of Nairobi Council, Mr. John

Simba

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Prof.

Karega Mutahi

Members of the University of Nairobi Council

Vice-Chancellors of our sister universities

Deputy Vice-Chancellors, University of Nairobi

Principals of Colleges

Deans and Directors

Chairmen and Heads of Departments

Parents/Guardians

Graduands

Members of staff

Students

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to warmly welcome you all to the University of Nairobi and to the 37th Graduation Ceremony. I would like to congratulate all the graduands for your remarkable achievement and also thank your parents, guardians, lecturers and all those who contributed to the successful completion of your studies.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, this is the first of two graduation ceremonies to be held this year. The graduands before you are drawn from four Colleges – College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, College of

Architecture and Engineering, College of Biological and Physical Sciences and College of Education and External Studies. The other two colleges – College of Health Sciences and College of Humanities and Social Sciences will hold their graduation on 7 December 2007

The University of Nairobi is the only institution of higher learning in Kenya which holds two graduation ceremonies in one year. We have had to do this because the nature of our academic programmes is such that some of the students end up completing their studies much earlier than their counterparts in the

other colleges. Making such students wait until everyone completed their studies was found to be wasteful and might have caused some of them to miss employment opportunities. Besides, the increased number of students who are now graduating from our University every year makes organizing a single graduation event a logistical nightmare.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, you have always challenged us to play our rightful role in society by using our intellectual and other resources to transform the University of Nairobi into a centre of academic

excellence comparable to the best in the world. I want to assure you that we are fully committed to reforming this University to make it a more effective vehicle for our country's development. This commitment is clearly outlined in our vision which is to be "a World-Class University and a community of scholars committed to the promotion of academic achievement and excellence in research as an embodiment of the aspirations of the Kenyan people and the global community".

According to the most recent ranking of world universities, the University of Nairobi is the top university in Kenya. At position 23 in Africa, it is second to Dar es Salaam at position 21. The other major university in East Africa, Makerere has dropped to position 53. The only other public universities in Kenya ranked among the top 100 universities in Africa are Egerton University at position 29, Moi University at position 71 and Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology at position 97. The private universities in Kenya which were ranked among the top 100 in Africa include Strathmore University at position

37, and United States International University at position 93.

Though a general indicator of our current standing, the above ranking is not satisfactory. We intend to move the University of Nairobi to a single digit within two (2) years in the short term.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the young men and women before you are a quality product because the University of Nairobi admits the best students whenever the selection is done. With over 400 academic programmes

and 1,500 academic staff, we are an institution with a proud tradition of leadership in academic excellence. As I speak to you today, a number of the graduands have already been admitted to top international universities like Cambridge to undertake postgraduate studies. This goes to show that contrary to the skeptics, our academic standards are still high.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, the University is doing everything possible to ensure that our academic standards remain high. We have not only improved the physical infrastructure through rehabilitation of run-down

buildings and completion of the stalled projects but also continued to strengthen our ICT resources by establishing and equipping computer laboratories for both students and staff. These developments will help to maximize students and staff productivity, enhance teaching and learning and improve quality of research.

In addition to the above, the University is in the process of finalizing a research policy whose objective is to streamline research and research-led teaching as primary responsibilities of academic staff.

The quality of both undergraduate and graduate teaching is greatly enhanced by active participation of teachers in investigation, research, and other creative work in fields related to those they are teaching. It is for that reason that the University has come up with a policy which requires academic staff to have Ph.D. or equivalent qualifications and research projects that result in publications before they are considered for promotion. We are not going to compromise on this issue because any university worth its salt must operate in an environment that fosters creativity so as to enable the pursuit of knowledge and its preservation

and propagation, the search for truth, and contribute to fuller understanding of the world in which we live and in so doing make us better informed, better adjusted and more useful members of the society.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our academic staff who are to be awarded Ph.D. Degrees this morning and encourage the others to emulate them. The University has set aside over Kshs.100 million for research and is willing to give staff doing their Ph.Ds the support they require to complete their studies.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, many of our academic staff are involved in very important research activities. Among them is today's Mace bearer, Prof. Elizabeth Ngugi of the Department of Community Health, College of Health Sciences who single handedly has attracted US Dollars 2.3 million (Kshs.150 million) in research funds. I would like to challenge other researchers to emulate her.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, the University of Nairobi has been at the forefront of initiating reforms in accordance with the government public sector reform programme. The

reforms we have instituted over the last three years are geared towards achieving our vision and mission as spelt out in our strategic plan. In that regard, the University has adopted Results Based Management (RBM) as a tool for effective management which culminated in the recent launch of the Rapid Results Initiative (RRI).

All these reforms are informed by the realization that the modern customer has become increasingly choosy, given the availability of other quality competitive options. The University like any other modern

organization is now required to conform to international quality management systems in order to offer competitive services to its clients.

To ensure that we provide quality service to our customers, the University management enlisted the services of the Kenya Bureau of Standards to develop, design and implement a training programme to enable us attain ISO certification in quality management by the end of this year. This together with the other reforms alluded earlier will contribute towards making

us a leader in academic excellence in the region and beyond

The University of Nairobi has continued to play a leading role in expanding access to higher education by initiating new programmes geared towards meeting the needs of the market including the hugely successful Module II Programmes. In this regard, I would like to thank most sincerely the government through the Ministry of Education for its continued support, and in particular for allowing us to take over the former Kenya

Science Teachers College and Kenya Polytechnic which is now a constituent college of the University.

The transfer of Kenya Science to the University of Nairobi will enable us to admit an extra 180 Bachelor of Education (Science) students starting from October 2007.

I wish to assure the government that this facility will be utilized to the fullest to expand access of university education for Kenyans. I have been further assured by the Principal, College of Biological and Physical

Sciences, Prof. Lucy Irungu, and the Director, School of Computing and Informatics Dr. Catherine Getao, that they are in final stages of developing B.Ed. Computer Science, soon to be forwarded to Senate for approval and mounted at Kenya Science Teachers College.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, the success we are celebrating today would not have been possible without the support of our key stakeholders – parents, guardians, international collaborators, and Kenyans in general. I wish to thank parents and guardians in particular for believing in us. You have ensured that we have a steady

flow of customers, paid fees in time and corrected us whenever we go wrong. We are your servants; please continue to remind us whenever we appear to forget. Through our Service Charter, the University of Nairobi has undertaken to give you quality timely services. Do not settle for less.

Allow me Mr. Chancellor Sir, to state here that the recent Transparency International Kenya report on the Kenya Bribery Index 2007 which placed public colleges and universities at position three nationally has nothing to do with the University of Nairobi. This was

indeed confirmed by Transparency International Kenya officials when they met the University of Nairobi Management Committee appointed to investigate the matter. The Committee is expected to submit its report to the Vice-Chancellor in the next four weeks. In the meantime, I wish to reiterate that corruption at the University has reduced significantly since I took over as Vice-Chancellor. This is because we have put systems in place defining very clear and transparent processes which are results oriented with timeliness. We shall not tolerate any form of corruption which shall be dealt with ruthlessly and with surgical

precision. After all, this University is for the first time being run by three surgeons at the top, an Urological Surgeon, Veterinary Surgeon and Dental Surgeon.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, when you were appointed Chancellor four years ago, one of your biggest concerns was the poor public image of the University which largely emanated from the indiscipline of some students which led to numerous riots and frequent closures of the University. As I stand before you, I am happy to say that our students have done us proud. Through constructive engagement with their

leadership, the students now appreciate the importance of dialogue in resolving disputes whenever they arise. They have been patient and shown maturity in dealing with the administration and the public. Well done!

Recently when some activists who were protesting the police decision to arrest their colleagues attempted to block State House Road, it was our students and not police who removed the barricades and restored the free flow of traffic. This is indeed true leadership worthy of emulating.

Let me take this opportunity to assure our students that the University management will continue working with them to ensure that the glory of this great institution is restored.

The University administration recognizes the right of students to participate in elections like the other Kenyans particularly as voters. You should however guard against politicians who may want to misuse you for their own selfish ends. The University, as I have said in the past is apolitical; it has no political opinion as an institution. Students must therefore avoid using

the name of the University to promote partisan interests. The University administration will do everything possible to keep politics and anything else likely to disrupt our academic programmes.

May I therefore take this opportunity to thank the incumbent politicians and political aspirants for keeping politics out of the University so far. Parents, students and other stakeholders want and appreciate a clear university calendar so that they can plan. Mr. Chancellor Sir, we have given this calendar for the third year running and will continue to do so without

fear or favour. Defeat or retreat is not in our vocabulary.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, the positive changes we are witnessing at the University are as a result of the total support I have received from the University community since my appointment. In particular, I wish to recognize and commend my principal assistants, Prof. Jacob Kaimenyi, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (AA) and Prof. Peter Mbithi, Deputy Vice-chancellor (A&F) for their continued support and more significantly for keeping up with my pace.

I further wish to recognize all College Principals for scoring very good in their performance contract evaluation for the year 2006/2007. I would like to mention in particular, Prof. Henry Wangutusi Mutoro, Principal, College of Education and External Studies for emerging best overall performer with a mean score of 2.141 and Prof. Lucy Irungu, Principal, College of Biological and Physical Sciences for being number two (2) overall with a mean score of 2.145.

With regard to fundraising through appropriation in Aid, I wish to recognize Prof. Isaac Mbeche, Principal,

College of Humanities and Social Sciences and Prof. Isaac Kibwage, Principal, College of Health Sciences for raising Kshs.1.6 billion and Kshs.1.1 billion respectively.

The other departments which have performed extremely well are Estates and Finance. In this regard, I wish to recognize Mrs. Sarah W. Ngugi, Estates Manager for the sustained efforts towards cost reduction which saw her pursue and receive a government grant of Kshs.74 million to settle the accumulated water bills. Secondly, Mr. Peter Busienei,

Deputy Finance Officer for his efforts in cost reduction by saving the University tens of millions of shillings through the introduction of the power factor, fuel card and rationalization of the management of Motor Vehicles University wide.

The University also continues to benefit from the support of our external friends and partners. In particular, I would like to thank the Gandhi Smarak Nithi Fund and the Rattansi Educational Trust for supporting our academic programmes. I wish to challenge industry to follow their good example by

setting aside 1% of their profits to support university education in the country.

Last but not least, let me thank you most sincerely, Mr. Chancellor Sir, and the Chairman of Council, Mr. John Simba for the support I have received from both of you since my appointment as Vice-chancellor on 5th January 2005. It is your very clear vision and direction that has enabled the University management to achieve success that we are celebrating today.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, during this 37th Graduation Ceremony for the four Colleges, namely the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, College of Architecture and Engineering, College of Biological and Physical Sciences, and College of Education and External Studies, 3351 students will be awarded degrees and diplomas. These comprise 14 Doctor of Philosophy graduates, 265 Masters graduates and 82 Postgraduate Diploma graduates, 2239 Bachelors Degree graduates and 752 undergraduate Diploma graduates.

These young men and women are winners. The journey they embarked on several years back has been both long and arduous. That they have been able to reach the end is highly commendable. Let me therefore once again congratulate our graduands for doing us proud. As you enter a new phase in your lives, we are confident that you will be able to improve yourselves and serve your community and country well.

Thank you.