



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

**SPEECH BY DR. VIJOO RATTANSI, OGW,
CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
NAIROBI, DURING THE 63rd GRADUATION
CEREMONY HELD VIRTUALLY ON FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER 25, 2020 AT 8:00 A.M.**

**Cabinet Secretary Ministry of Education,
Prof. George Magoha**

**Your Excellences the Ambassadors and High
Commissioners**

Chair of Council, Prof. Julia Ojiambo

Council Members present

Vice-Chancellor Prof. Stephen Kiama

University staff

Parents and guardians

Distinguished guests from across the globe

Our graduands

All protocols observed

Greetings and a very warm welcome to the University of Nairobi's 63rd graduation ceremony.

At the very onset, allow me to extend a heartfelt appreciation to you all for sparing your time and joining us on this auspicious occasion where we celebrate the achievements of our 63rd graduation cohort. This graduation is a historical moment for our university and will be recounted in the annals of history as the first virtual graduation ceremony of the University of Nairobi.

Allow me therefore to congratulate you all on being part of this historic day that may yet be a watershed moment in the conduct of our graduation business.

Over the last few years, our university has grappled with many changes. Since 2014 for example, we have twice witnessed a change of guard in the Vice Chancellor's position. Over the same period, a couple of Deputy Vice Chancellors have retired, and a new crop of valiant soldiers succeeded them. With every change, the university has been bruised and scathed.

Indeed, there have been many a Shakespearean moment when it's had to take the current when it served its ventures and ridden safely to shore. Thankfully, for all the hardships and beatings endured, the university, like an anvil, still stands. She continues to be the embodiment of the enduring spirit of sacrifice and dedication, qualities deftly ingrained in the university anthem.

Religions of the world instruct that there is time and chance for everything. Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes, for example, records that there is a time and a season for every activity under the sun:

**a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to scatter stones and a time to
gather them,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time for war and a time for peace**

Appreciating the indisputable wisdom of the Ecclesiastes passage, we reach the informed conclusion that the only constant in life is change. In providing for elections, democracies around recognize the inevitability of change. Similarly, in retirement of top generals, succession injects a new breath of life to the windmills of change. In mortal terms, when you stop changing, you cease to exist.

In recent times, COVID-19 pandemic has become the single greatest agent of change. It has changed the way we work and how we socialize, how we celebrate life and loss of it, how we worship, how we travel, how we live and of most relevance to us today, how we deliver our teaching and training mission. Our virtual graduation is testament to the power of adversity to impact our daily operations and existence.

As a university we must stay the course of recalibration and meaningful change, not as an option but as a necessity for survival. I therefore call on all staff of our university to support our leadership so that we may reap the benefits of a more responsive, efficient and effective university system.

I recognize that change is not an easy thing for human beings to embrace. Indeed, when the winds of change blow, some will build walls but many more will build windmills to ride it.

Let us be careful that our resistance to change does not lend us to trading short term gains for long term pain. In the words of Bill Clinton, the price of doing the same old thing is far higher than the price of change.

The largest constituent that this university serves is our student community. Regrettably, one of the complaints I hear once too often from parents, guardians and/or students is that far too many of our students who are eligible to graduate are failing to do so in good time for want of judicious and efficacious supervision.

Complaints of unavailable supervisors who are either abroad or missing altogether are far too many; complaints of inaccurate, dishonest, incomplete or time-barred feedback from the office holders that support the students to graduate on time are many and so are those of calls going unanswered. Graduate ready students are therefore missing countless time-sensitive opportunities here and abroad. Those who have suffered this will concur that it is a very painful thing. Let us be bold enough to own up to our mistakes, correct them for good and improve our transition rates.

Let each of us hold sacred and deliver the duties for which we have been engaged. On my part, I am ready and willing to confer degrees any day should the Vice Chancellor and Council be persuaded that the number of such students is of such scale and magnitude as to warrant another graduation.

I want to thank and appreciate our Council under the able leadership of Prof. Julia Ojiambo for taking and carrying the mantle for change.

As the Chair of Council noted, there's a confluence of purpose between the recommendations of the Visitation Panel, the wisdom of the Council Strategic Plan, the prescriptions of the University Strategic Plan and the vision of the Vice Chancellor. Despite this, I must warn the Council and the Vice Chancellor that change is often lonesome path. Be as it may, be armoured with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place and the gospel of peace and verily I say to thee, your voyage shall not be in vain.

Stay strong so that when winter comes round and asks what you were doing all

summer, you will have an impeccable account to render.

I want to thank and congratulate our graduands of the day.

We hope that we have moulded you into wholesome men and women rich in character, grit, stamina, resilience and mental presence to withstand whatever curveballs life throws at you.

Amidst the anxiety that has gripped the world and the economic vagaries that the

COVID-19 pandemic has visited on the economies of nations, you have given us a reason to celebrate. You have fought the good fight worthy of today's celebration.

Undoubtedly, over the past 9 months the world's labour market has changed in ways we couldn't fathom at the turn of the year. History is replete with stories of success despite the great economic depressions, success despite health pandemics, success despite wars and the energy crisis of the 70s.

In the rapidly changing world that we live in, the wind of opportunities attending each change of tide blows in many

directions...including yours. To borrow the words of William Arthur Ward, “adversity causes some men to break; others to break records.” I pray that you will not only adapt to cope but adapt to win and in so doing be counted amongst the record breakers.

To our staff who have remained faithful to our great mission of providing quality university education and training and embodying the aspirations of the Kenyan

people and the global community, I wish to thank you most sincerely. I know many of you are contributing in ingenious ways towards supporting our virtual learning systems, processes and platforms. I am grateful that even though you have encountered challenges along the way, you have kept up your unfailing commitment, dedication and enthusiasm to the collective cause that we pursue.

I am sure as the system's hiccups are being addressed, efforts towards improving your work environment will bear fruit and future generations of our scholars will receive

nothing short of the best service. Once again, thank you very much.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank our donors, sponsors and benefactors starting with the Government of Kenya. Thank you for walking this dream with us, the dream of delivering a better educated citizen so we can all build a better world; a world defined by the human ideals of truth and goodness.

As we partake in today's graduation ceremony, I am aware that we have lost some of our staff to the vagaries of the COVID-19 pandemic and other conditions. I wish to take

this moment to commiserate and condole with their families and to invite us all to observe a moment of silence in their honour.

Thank you.

May we continue to observe the health guidelines and protocols as issued by the government from time to time, maintaining personal hygiene by washing our hands

regularly with soap and water, keeping social distance and observing coughing etiquette.

May the Almighty bless you all most abundantly.

Asanteni sana.