SPEECH BY PROF. PETER M.F. MBITHI, VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING THE OCCASION MARKING THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR NON-VIOLENCE ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2017 AT THE UoN TOWERS AUDITORIUM AT 2.30 P.M
The Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, Dr Vijoo Rattansi

Our Chief Guest Ms. Rajni Bakshi, eminent Gandhi Scholar,

Your Excellency the Indian High Commissioner to Kenya, Madam Sanduchitra Durai

Director-General, UNON, Ms Sahle-Work Zewde

Your Excellencies the Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Senior Government officers present,

The University Senate, staff and students of the University of Nairobi

Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen,
Mahatma Gandhi once said that an eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind. Indeed, it is impossible to shake hands with a clenched fist. Therefore, in declining to admit the impression that mankind is so terribly bound to violence, that peace can never become a reality without any form of violence; I take this special opportunity to welcome you to this important occasion.
As the University of Nairobi community, we are deeply honoured to play host to the United Nations International Day of Non-Violence.

The architect of non-violence philosophy, Mahatma Gandhi, believed in achieving social justice and equity through peaceful means. He believed in the conviction that no society, state or any other institution has any worth apart from its role in
contributing to the growth of the individuals of which it is composed. These are the very principles for which the University cherishes, and has closely been associated with.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The University of Nairobi endeavours to be a leader in providing excellence in experiential learning, transformational community outreach, and research
for sustainable environments; all these are hinged under cultures of peace, truth and non-violence.

For us, the deep-seated principles that must inevitably underpin this aim include respect for the integrity of the academic process; respect for human dignity; individual integrity and self-respect; respect for the freedoms and privileges of others; and respect for University authority and its systems.
Mahatma Gandhi was an intensely active personality and accordingly, Gandhism, which is the body of ideas that describes the inspiration, vision and his life work- unendingly inspires many students, all intellectuals across the globe including members of staff, alumni and the larger University of Nairobi Community.
One of the many notable University of Nairobi alumni who contributed significantly towards these principles is the late Prof. Wangari Maathai. She will forever be remembered and celebrated for being the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.
As an internationally renowned Kenyan environmental political activist and Nobel laureate, the University of Nairobi established an ultra-modern green campus for peace and environmental studies in her honour.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to briefly pronounce myself on the relevance of Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence in
Kenya today. If Gandhi were to rise today, what question will he ask our political class today? If he was to visit the University of Nairobi today, what question will he ask the University of Nairobi students who rioted and destroyed public property? What message would Gandhi have for students who in pursuit of their constitutional rights went to the streets and stoned innocent motorists and members of the public?
As a University community, we understand that to become unique, the challenge is to fight the hardest battle beyond anyone’s imagination. These trying moments should act as the ultimate measure of our strengths.

It is a time for internal reflection and time to challenge our values. It is the time to ask what went wrong where?
As a university, I urge you to uphold the universal purpose of non violence by promoting culture of peace, tolerance, understanding and integrity to our institution of learning.

I earnestly urge the participants especially members of the University community to join us in this journey.
I take this opportunity to remind you that you we must not only resist the strong temptation to engage in physical violence but also avoid intellectual violence through propagation of extremist ideologies and partisan interests.

Nelson Mandela once said “Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world”. We are privileged as the University of Nairobi to use our
strategic position, our influence and our ideas to make a change in Kenya today by promoting a culture of peace.

I believe that peace can thrive best in an environment of respect for human dignity, integrity and responsible exercise of freedoms and rights.
Again as Nelson Mandela once said “A good head and a good heart are always formidable combination. But when you add that to a literate tongue or pen, then you have something very special”. My take is that the rights and responsibilities that accompany academic freedom are at the heart of the intellectual purpose of this University.
It is therefore incumbent upon us to resist the pressure to think and conduct ourselves in a formatted manner. We must resist the temptation to give in to popular beliefs and choices without questioning and objectively investigating their real value to society.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to thank the United Nations and the Indian High Commission for choosing the University of Nairobi for the second consecutive year as the ideal place for honouring and championing the principles and values which Gandhi stood for. We are indeed indebted for that.
Your Excellency, the University is ready to host the event again and again in future! We welcome you next year and the years to come.

Finally, Your Excellencies, allow me to acknowledge the cordial and special relationship that the University of Nairobi enjoys with the government and people of India.
We continue to receive a sizeable share of the African Scholarships awarded by the Government of India. The University has trained many PhD and Masters Students under this program and we look forward to more of such opportunities.
With those many remarks I thank you for listening.

Thank you.

PETER M.F MBITHI, PhD, EBS
VICE-CHANCELLOR
AND
PROFESSOR OF VETERINARY SURGERY