SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR, PROF. G.A.O. MAGOHA DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF SEMINAR ON “ANCIENT TRADITIONS AND CULTURES: AFRICAN AND HINDU TRADITIONS” ON SATURDAY 13TH JANUARY 2007 AT THE MULTI PURPOSE HALL
Mr. K.S. Sudarshan, Chairman of RSS, India

Chairman of the Hindu Council of Kenya

Principal College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Dean, Faculty of Arts

Chairman, Dept. of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Heads of Departments

Members of Staff

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen
I am delighted to welcome you to the University of Nairobi and this seminar on Ancient Traditions and Cultures on African and Hindu Traditions organized by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies and the Hindu Council of Kenya.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the University of Nairobi’s mission is to become a world class African University and 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. To achieve this objective, the University needs to partner and collaborate with other institutions, organizations and persons committed to the enhancement of its core business – teaching and research. The Hindu Council of Kenya is one such organization.

The relationship between the Hindu Council and the University goes back to the pre-independence days and strengthened further after the participation of the Hindu Council of Kenya in a seminar organized by the then
Department of Religious Studies to commemorate the centenary celebrations of Swami Vivekananda who became widely known after his address to the first Parliament of World Religions in 1893 in Chicago, USA.

Following the Seminar and after joint consultations between representatives of the two organizations, it was agreed that an endowed Chair to be named Vivekananda, after Swami Vivekananda, be established in the Department of Religious Studies. The objective of establishing the chair was to promote teaching, research
and publications in Hindu studies within the broad frameworks of the University of Nairobi in the contemporary Kenyan and global context.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Hindu Society has played a big role in the development process in this country. This has been done through support of education by developing the Hindu Studies education curriculum; provision of books to schools and medical assistance to needy groups. Its blending with the African Community has been phenomenal in most aspects.
Its social responsibility programs have been diverse and target various underprivileged groups. The projects include water for rural communities, schools, visiting children homes, schools for the blind and homes for the disabled – all meant to assist in the uplifting of living standards of the less privileged.

Not to be forgotten is the role played by the Hindu Community in the establishment of the University of Nairobi. Its presence within the University shall forever
stand out through the landmarks it helped build—Gandhi Wing, Gandhi Memorial Library, Fountain of Knowledge, and many other projects constructed through the initiative and support of the Hindu Community.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the people of Africa and Indian Subcontinent have had a long history of contacts and shared ideas and trade. Both have a common history of British colonialism, exploitation and cultural domination. Africans and the people of India remain largely a very spiritual people. They have a strong sense
of the sacred which informs their relationship with the physical and the spirit world. This spiritual legacy has held us together and has been a great contributor to the resilience and survival of our people.

Of greater similarity, in both cultures is that religion and culture are inseparable. You cannot talk of culture without implying religion and you cannot talk of religion amongst the two groups without implying culture.
We all know that ancient traditions and cultures have been under great pressure from the new civilizations, so much so that some people have expressed doubts as to whether their relevance will last.

There is need therefore to engage in a meaningful dialogue on the role of the ancient traditions and cultures in the global village of the 21st century. We may wish to revisit our ancient beliefs, values and ideals with an open mind and, see how they may contribute to our
quest for solutions to the pressing human challenges of poverty, disease, conflicts and moral disintegration.

I take this opportunity to once again welcome you to this great University and wish you a very successful seminar. I hope your discussions shall lay a firm foundation for future discourse on ancient traditions and cultures.
With those few remarks I declare this seminar officially open and I also take this opportunity to wish you a prosperous 2007.

Thank you.