REMARKS BY PROF. PETER M. F. MBITHI, VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING THE FIRST KENYA ORGANIC FOOD FESTIVAL CELEBRATIONS AT THE WANGARI MAATHAI INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES, HELD ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2018 AT 10.30 A. M.
CONFERENCE ON ENHANCING THE TEACHING
OF CRITICAL THINKING
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I want to begin by thanking the organizers of this conference for inviting me to address you on this important subject: Enhancing the Teaching of Critical Thinking.

The University of Nairobi is a world-class University. And we are not just boasting, international rankings have said so. Our institution is an academic powerhouse in Africa, and indeed in the world. And like other world-
class universities we need to put critical thinking at the Centre of our teaching and research. As you have seen in our Vision and Mission statements, our academic programmes rest on three pillars: critical thinking, creative thinking and problem solving. But in my view, the foundational goal of a world-class university such as ours is critical thinking.

Why do I see critical thinking as the bedrock of the academic enterprise? It is critical thinking
that makes us see the gaps in what we hear and what we read. It is critical thinking that enables us to question the authority of those who would wish to impose their ideas on us. It is critical thinking that shows us the difference between what is true and what is false.

It is critical thinking that compels us to discriminate between good and evil. Finally, it is critical thinking that inspires the creation of
new knowledge, which then leads to the betterment of our lives on this planet.

Ladies and Gentlemen:
Let me relate this problem to what we are experiencing at the University of Nairobi. Sometimes, my office gets inundated with complaints about cheating in examinations. Students who commit this crime have to bear the consequences of being expelled. This is an unfortunate waste of our human and national
resources. But one of the causes of this occurrence is the fact that we set questions that require memorization and recall.

So, the candidates can walk into the examination room with unauthorized materials, or write possible answers on their sleeves or skirts. This can and should be avoided if we set questions that compel the students to think on their feet, in other words, if we set questions that test their critical thinking and problem solving skills.
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Allow me to touch on the link between critical thinking and teaching of values. Just recently, the Department of Literature in conjunction with the School of Education launched a book called *Value Creating Education: Building a Humane Society*.

I didn’t come to the launch but I sent Professor Enos Njeru, the Principal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, to represent me and read
my speech. The book has strong arguments about the need for teaching values to our children in schools and universities. I want to say there is a link between these values and what we are talking about today, namely, critical thinking.

There is more we can say, but the least is that a critical thinker has the potential to be a good human being and a good citizen. Critical thinkers reflect on what they do and what they
say. They know that choices have consequences. They are good listeners. They have empathy. They can step into the shoes of the other person and see the world from his or her point of view.

Further, they don’t follow their peers blindly; they don’t have the herd mentality. On the whole, therefore, critical thinkers can contribute positively to the good of humanity.
Ladies and Gentlemen:

As the academic and administrative head of the University of Nairobi, I want to point out that our standing as a world-class University and our ability to contribute to knowledge through our research are a function of our critical thinking.

If you are not a critical thinker, you wouldn’t notice any gaps in existing knowledge. And if you don’t see gaps and inadequacies, you can’t generate new knowledge. Our researchers
should, therefore, sharpen their critical thinking skills so that our institution stays ahead in this highly competitive knowledge industry.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I want to conclude my speech by once more thanking the organizers of this conference for inviting me to share my experiences and my thoughts with you. And as you continue with your deliberations, I want you to remember that
our goal is to produce independent, critical thinkers and not robots.

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