



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

**SPEECH BY DR. VIJOO RATTANSI, OGW, CHANCELLOR OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, DURING THE 64<sup>th</sup>  
GRADUATION CEREMONY HELD VIRTUALLY ON FRIDAY  
DECEMBER 11, 2020 AT 8:00 A.M.**

**Principal Secretary, State Department for University Education, Amb. Simon Nabukwesi**

**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 joining us virtually from across the globe**

**Our graduands**

**All protocols observed**

Greetings and a very warm welcome to the University of Nairobi's 64<sup>th</sup> virtual Graduation Ceremony.

Today I have the distinct honour to admit into honorary doctorate, two accomplished scholars, former members of our faculty and who over the course of time have been magnanimous enough to dedicate their lives towards the advancement of humanity, scholarship, women empowerment and politics. They took the less travelled road that though diverged somewhere in the woods, earned each the pride of place as towering colossi within our borders and beyond. I am immensely proud to be associated with these two inspiring women of our time, women who continue to wear the virtue of humility with honour and personify modesty despite all their achievements. Allow me to recognize the kind presence of our Chair of Council, Prof. Julia Ojiambo, and Prof. Micere Mugo for the conferment of university honours!

50 years ago, our inaugural graduating class ushered Kenya into the era of a national university. Today, unlike graduations for yesteryears, bears a striking resemblance to our inauguration as a university as well as our first graduation. It has been carefully and deliberately planned to coincide with the eve of *Jamuhuri* Day, a day when Kenya like University of Nairobi celebrates both her formation into a Republic and independence from colonial rule a year earlier.

In probably the only event of its kind, our first graduation far beyond being graced by our first graduate, the founding Chancellor and our first President the Late *Mzee* Jomo Kenyatta, had candidates representing three interconnected universities: University of Manchester, the University of East Africa and the University of Nairobi. Of the 494 candidates presented for conferment of various degrees and diplomas, only 8 candidates presented for the Award of Diploma in Advanced Nursing were presented in the name of the newly launched University of Nairobi.

In the five decades that followed, we have grown in leaps and bounds to host six university colleges spread across 10 campuses. Average enrolment has grown from 3,000 at inauguration to over 60,000 today; graduating candidates from a paltry 8 to an average of 12, 700 per annum over the last 5 years. Additionally, we have grown our alumni numbers from the singular digits when we started to well over 100,000. Allow me therefore to recognize and sincerely appreciate and congratulate all members of the University of Nairobi fraternity on the attainment of these significant milestones.

On our founding as the first national university in Kenya, it was envisioned that the University would feed the technical and professional manpower requirements of the new nation. As such, student admissions were tied to the national manpower needs. Today to quote the words of our founding Vice Chancellor, the university is more than ever before gravitating towards her timeless objectives of serving the onward march of the human race towards higher ideals such as tolerance, humanism and reason, serving the cause of human progress by transmission of knowledge from one generation to another through teaching and finally increasing information and knowledge through relevant and meaningful research. This has the effect of moving a people towards the attainment of their aspirations including narrowing the widening gap between the urban and rural areas and the increasing unemployment and underemployment challenges.

At yesterday's commemoration of 50 years of the University of Nairobi's existence, I remarked that our future as a university undoubtedly depends on how we embrace change. The same holds true about our lives and change.

Today, our graduates officially join the labour market; some of them for the very first time. Unlike your predecessors, the challenges of a local and global labour

market in a state of flux is likely to be felt more severely. New life dynamics have attended the COVID-19 pandemic; economies of the world have been ravaged on scale never seen before; alternation of lockdowns and lifting of the same has resulted into hitherto unforeseen swings and lulls in human productivity. This has in turn affected demand and supply of both raw materials and services and of necessity the human capital attending these goods and services. Thankfully, a vaccine is on the horizon and with it, hope of return to some semblance of normalcy and improved odds of survival.

Beyond this pandemic, some of the good social habits that we will have picked up along the way will abide with us for the rest of our lives.

Considering all that is going on in the world and the changes, I urge our graduates to be patient. Further, I wish to echo the advice of our founding father that we all practice modesty, recognize our limitations and how different we all are and our fortunes. While a number of us will leave our gates to gainful employment of skills, it may yet be a long time to daybreak for some of us. In the intervening period, there will be opportunities to engage our skills and talent in the communities that we come from and to indulge in building the requisite communal resilience to weather this storm. A number of us will, from these humble beginnings, create niches for ourselves and from there nurture businesses that will flourish and withstand the test of time; a number of us will build onto our education such admirable skills that will be so invaluable to our societies which societies will do all they can to fully engage our time for a consideration; some of us may change how our communities manage themselves and in so doing have our services enlisted at a price for national and international benefit. This may best exemplify the words of the late Martin Luther King Junior that whatever your life's work is, do it well; do it so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn could do it no better. Examples of such men and women abound in our communities who when it best serves, have seized the current and led on to great fortune.

Finally, my graduands, allow me to tip the hat to you and to congratulate you! Allow me to also appreciate you families and sponsors that have selflessly walked this journey with you and your faculty and university support staff for applying themselves to support you in this journey. To all of you, I say thank you!

As I conclude, let me encourage you by invoking the words of Rudyard Kipling, words which could not be a better fit than for the times that we live in today:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss:  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much:  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it

May good luck be with you wherever you go; May your blessings outnumber the shamrocks that grow; May your days be many and your troubles be few; May you have the hindsight to know where you've been the foresight to know where you're going and the insight to know when you're going too far. May all God's blessings descend upon you and may peace be within you.

*Asanteni sana!*