SPEECH DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR GEORGE A. O. MAGOHA, VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, DURING THE OPENING OF THE TRAINING OF TRAINERS WORKSHOP OF THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM/AFRICAN NETWORK FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT (AFRICOMNET) ON 6th
MARCH, 2006 AT THE IDIS CONFERENCE HALL,
AT 9.00 A.M.

The Representative, International AIDS Alliance,
John Howsen

The Representative, Africomnet

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs)
Principal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Director, School of Journalism
Fellow Academia

Ladies and Gentlemen
I would like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome you to the University of Nairobi. This University is proud to be associated with the AfriComNet initiative, one of the three centers of excellence for HIV and AIDs communication. At this juncture, I would like to thank AfriComNet for recognising the School of Journalism, and indeed the University as a centre of excellence for HIV and AIDs communication.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we at the University have been at the forefront of research on HIV and AIDs. We have
recently launched our HIV and AIDS Policy, which has been described as ‘one of the best in the world’. We have also started teaching HIV and AIDS as a core course in the first year of study. You are, therefore, within among like-minded people.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the University is currently undergoing rapid transformation, in its endeavour to live up to the vision of world class excellence. The University, like most institutions in the public sector is greatly challenged to rethink, revisit and change its approaches in the face of internationalisation of programmes. This
initiative to offer short competence courses, responds to one of our core functions-that of community service. Our society expects no less from our University: to provide the much needed skills to tackle HIV and AIDS at the grassroots level through strategic communication.

The School of Journalism has made the bold and unshakeable decision to revitalise its programmes as part of its desire to be a school of distinction. This course and partnership with AfriComNet has the full support of my administration. Let me reassure you that we are looking towards the various units taking the challenge to develop
and implement ambitious, well thought out, exhaustive and linkages with the wider academic, and professional international partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen, HIV and AIDS has been described as the most critical development challenge, and was declared a national disaster in Kenya in 1999. Since then, valiant sustained efforts to address the challenge, have been made by the University from the medical, social, psychological, developmental perspectives. We at the University are proud that the communication intervention is now a reality, focusing on practitioners who require
communication skills to deal with the challenge. I hope you can also train a critical mass of University staff and students as part of our commitment towards enhancing our performance contract on HIV and AIDS interventions.

I note that the disciplines represented here are important for forging internal partnerships within the University. These include Sociology, Literature, and Law. I am pleased that the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC) is also represented here: we are now solidly on track with the merger process. This effort will contribute to the University’s determination to reach out and consolidate
lasting links with industry and in various sectors of society.

The University anticipates that this partnership with AfriComNet will be sustainable and cross-cutting, tapping even the often ignored disciplines like Engineering and the Physical Sciences. It is my hope that those trained at this workshop will ensure that they train other Lecturers and staff in the various departments, and even the students. I observe that the School will ultimately be offering ten short competence courses in covering various aspects of HIV and AIDS Communication. I would urge the
School and AfriComNet to be strategic and innovative, with the aim of developing higher academic programmes, with HIV and AIDS Communication specialisation.

This partnership offers a fitting opportunity for interaction between those in Academia and practitioners, some at the grassroot level. This interaction will prove to be mutually beneficial: those in Academia can source practical experiences and case studies, while those in practice can benefit from a theoretical and intellectual underpinning. This serves the University’s quest for outreach, shunning the ‘Ivory Tower’ image. Our students
at the University can specifically benefit from this interaction with practitioners.

I expect that the discourse from this programme created will enhance academic and professional debate, creativity, ultimately enriching the subject of HIV/AIDS communication, making the life of our students, Lecturers and staff especially meaningful and worthwhile. This discourse in turn, will be beneficial to the various sectors of society. In our quest for world class excellence, the University of Nairobi has taken a problem-solving approach, and we have accepted that we must change to
reclaim our position of pride, as a centre of academic excellence.

Let me thank you once again, for Honouring the University with your presence here. I have full confidence that this workshop “Training of Trainers on HIV and AIDS Communication will be pivotal in the University’s new approach and desire for academic and professional excellence guided by its motto of ‘World Class University’.

With these few remarks, it is now my pleasure to officially declare this workshop open.