

# Watchdog bogged down

## DOUBTS ON PIC'S UNIVERSITY RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Parliamentary Public Investment Committee, charged with overseeing spending in public institutions and parastatals, has continued to be bogged down by late submission of audited accounts.

PIC has no legal provision to force institutions to make their submissions in time. For instance, the last meeting convened on 25th January, 2001 to discuss the audited report for the University of Nairobi dealt with accounts for the year ended 30th June 1997, while the last PIC Report, already adopted by Parliament dealt with accounts ended 30th June 1996.

Recently, the Committee, chaired by Ochilo-Ayacko retreated to Mombasa to make their report. It is doubtful whether their recommendations on the audited accounts of the University of Nairobi will have any positive impact, since they will be working on the 1996/1997 accounts.

These delays undermine the role of PIC as most of the issues discussed have been overtaken by events.

Appearing before the Committee in September 2000, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, Prof. Francis Gichaga was upbeat, predicting that the university would get out of financial doldrums in three years. Facts do not bear the Vice Chancellor out. Since 1996, the university has been, "doing Kshs. 1.4 billion as deficits," he said.

Much of the discussion focused on personal emoluments and housing allowance. The Chairman of the Commit-

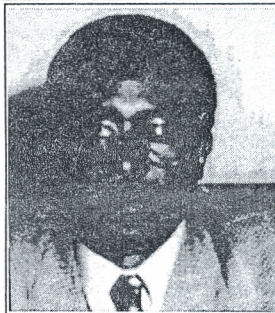


*Prof. Francis Gichaga*

tee, Ochilo-Ayacko, queried how it was possible to have a deficit in definite items like allowances, while the Auditor-General (Corporations), S.M. Maluki questioned why the estimates were lower that year than the previous one. Prof. Gichaga absolved the university of any blame and asserted that it is the Ministry of Education that had scaled down the budgetary allocation.

M.P. G. M. Parpai, a member of the Committee, wondered why the university had asked for about 36 million for personal emoluments and housing allowance in the last financial year and only spent Kshs. 26 million, reflecting an under-expenditure of about Kshs. 10 million. The Financial Officer, M. Karue, explained that allocations are based on the number of established posts. However, sometimes, the posts are not filled, occasioning the disparity.

After a lengthy grilling by the Committee, Prof. Gichaga admitted "that it is a survival strategy, because at the end of the day, we want to make sure that the



*Prof. C. M. Kiamba*

institution actually survives. It is much easier to get personal emoluments because they are based on the number of established posts..."

To make a financial turn-around, the University of Nairobi Enterprises and Services Limited (UNES), was set up in 1996 by the Senate, to engage in income generating projects. Its main project is the parallel programme started in 1998 with an MBA course in the Faculty of Commerce. Other projects include floriculture, coffee and poultry farms and a bakery.

During the commemoration of the 28th year of graduation at the university, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Prof. C. M. Kiamba, said that the money raised from the parallel programme has been mainly used to offset 60 percent of the institution's utility bills amounting to about Kshs. 10 million a month.

In the financial year ending 30th June 2000, Prof. Kiamba added, "the institution generated about Kshs. 500



*Mr. Karue*

million. "The University of Nairobi, once the pinnacle of higher education in East Africa, is now a shadow of its former self.

The situation has been blamed on financial neglect by the Exchequer. Although the university has the richest pedigree as a trainer of manpower in some specialised areas, most of its learning facilities are inadequate and outdated. For instance, the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library still uses a manual cataloguing system and a lot of the material in it is mutilated.

According to economic survey reports for the period between 1990 to 2000, the number of students in public universities has shot up by about 54 percent, and the money allocated by Government over the same period increased by 123 percent. However, if inflation is factored in for the last 10 years, purchasing power of the shilling has actually declined leaving these institutions the worse for it. Treasury insists universities should make up for the shortfall. ■