

# **Speech by Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbithi at the 53rd Graduation Ceremony**



SPEECH BY PROF. PETER M.F. MBITHI, VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING THE 53RD GRADUATION CEREMONY HELD ON FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 4, 2015 AT THE CHANCELLOR&S COURT AT 8:00 A.M.

**The Cabinet Secretary, Education, Science and Technology**

- **The Chancellor, University of Nairobi, Dr. Vijoo Rattansi**
- **Your Excellences, the Ambassadors and High Commissioners**
- **Chancellors of Sister Universities**
- **Chairman UoN Council, Dr. Idle Farah Omar**
- **Members of the University Council**
- **Chairpersons of other University Councils**
- **Vice-Chancellors of Sister Universities**
- **Deputy Vice-Chancellors**
- **College Principals**
- **University of Nairobi Senate**
- **Graduands**
- **Staff**

## • Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning!

It is my pleasure to extend a very warm welcome to you all this morning. We are delighted that you have elected to honour us with your presence and to be part of our 53rd Graduation Celebration.

The 52nd graduation was one that filled me with great trepidation. I had just been appointed the successor Vice Chancellor. As I sat on this very podium and listened to speaker after speaker so eloquently advise, encourage and inspire us, I quietly wondered whether I would inspire with the same zeal that my forbearers had done on countless occasions. I became acutely aware of my own frailties that I would have to bridge to provide the leadership that this University deserves. I became alive to how many young lives we have been entrusted with to mould and how our privileged positions must at all times be applied in character formation, knowledge creation and dissemination and societal advancement. 9 months on, I am grateful to you all; fellow administrators, the faculty, non-teaching staff, students, government and other stakeholders for the support I have received. It has not been easy but your goodwill and support has given me fortitude, presence of mind and pillars to lean on when the going got tough.

Let me also thank you most sincerely Dr. Vijoo Rattansi for your endless inspiration. You have continuously insisted and demonstrated values that you hold dear such as duty of care, togetherness and teamwork. The virtues of team work in Africa cannot be more aptly captured than in the saying that it takes a village to raise a child. In an environment that is more challenging than before, I know these values will be invaluable to the success of this University. Dr. Vijoo, thank you very much! UON

Ladies and gentlemen, today's graduation holds a special place in my heart. We are greatly privileged to present to the world the pioneer crop of graduands under this administration. They have walked with us the very vision of our existence; that of a world-class university committed to scholarly excellence. Today we have in our stead graduands from the Colleges of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, Architecture and Engineering, Biological and Physical Sciences and Education and External Studies. 1 Doctor of Laws, 41 PhDs, 769 Masters and 2,972 Bachelors will be conferred; 17 Postgraduate Diplomas and 1,501 ordinary Diplomas will be awarded; a total of 5,301 graduands.

I wish to particularly congratulate Hon. Justice (Prof) Jackton B. Ojwangø judge of the Supreme Court of Kenya, on the conferment of a higher doctorate degree in Law (**LLD**). I am reminded of the words of Martin Luther King Jr that if a man is called to be a street sweeper, let him sweep so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well. Prof. Ojwangø you have breathed life into the words of Aristotle that pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work. In so doing, you have achieved a rare feat of excellence, the first from our School of Law and hopefully a great inspiration to other senior scholars to continue with their quest for knowledge.

In my installation address, I shared my dream for this University that of a top a top ranked, sustainable, world-class institution with enduring and valuable scholarly excellence. I shared a vision that whatever we set our hearts and minds to do, our delivery must bear the stamp of excellence.

Today I wish to salute our stewards of Excellence: the performance contracting team, for delivering an "Excellent" score in the just UON

concluded performance evaluation for all State Agencies for the financial year 2014/2015; our members of faculty, who have hoisted the flag of our University very high in Research, Knowledge Advancement and research kitty expansion;

Prof. Agnes Mwangombi (Principal, College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences),

Prof. Judith Bahemuka ( Department of Sociology),

Dr. Dalton Wamalwa (Department of Pediatrics and Child Health),

Dr. Anne Mathai (Department of Psychiatry) and Prof.

Godfrey Lule (Department of Clinical Medicine and Therapeutics) to mention but a few.

Our students have registered excellent performance in different activities: students from the School of Law emerged top in Africa and 10th worldwide in the International Law Moot Court Competition; 5th year Mechanical Engineering Student Taita Ngétich and 4th year Economics and Statistics student Brian Bett emerged 2nd best start-up for their innovation "**Mkulima Hodari**" at the Global Entrepreneurship Summit 2015. These are sterling reminders that the University of Nairobi continues to raise the bar for excellence in the region.

To confirm our leadership role in developing a vibrant national innovation ecosystem, the University held the first ever Nairobi Innovation Week in August 2015. The clarion call for all and sundry is that time is ripe for Kenyans to commercialize ideas. The University thus broke ground for the estimated Ksh. 500 million University of Nairobi Innovation Hub to be located at Chiromo Campus. This will house innovators and nurture great inventions into viable businesses.

We are also streamlining our systems for better service delivery. Guided by our revised strategic plan, we have implemented some priority initiatives like operationalization of Centre for Self-Sponsored UON

Programmes (CESSP) to manage the collection of academic revenue for self-sponsored programmes and repositioned UNES to exploit emerging business opportunities while delivering

greater value for the University. Plans are being finalized to operationalize the Graduate School and the ODeL Campus.

The University of Nairobi continues to invest in its image and competitiveness. We regrettably note the former has recently suffered a dent but we are committed not only to restoration of the brand but also internationalizing it. We recently hosted the Italian Prime Minister His Excellency Matteo Renzi for a lecture on *Building Bridges to Combat Extremism*. We continue to host international guest lecturers on topics that matter from within and beyond our continent.

As of May 2015, we have operationalized the Directorate of University Advancement on which we anchor fundraising, resource mobilization and sustainability strategies. We are cognisant that overcoming challenges of the future requires that we invest now. Like champions, we at the University of Nairobi will not really become champions when we succeed but in the hours, weeks, months and years we spend preparing for the future. We have woven one piece into our giant success loom with the founding of the Endowment Fund. We are grateful to our Chancellor for flagging us off with the first seed contribution of Ksh. 1 million. Madam Chancellor, let me thank you again. We hope to grow this fund to Ksh. 1 billion through partnerships with alumni, friends, philanthropists, corporate and development partners to help nurture innovators and trailblazers who will impact Africa running under the theme slogan *Stars for Africa*.

We are also in the process of mobilizing resources to create a Research Endowment Fund that will spawn and greatly enrich cutting edge

research. The PPP concepts have already been written and are undergoing scrutiny by PPP and legal experts. This will form the basis for continuous infrastructure development for teaching, learning, research, accommodation and revenue generation. A robust infrastructure together with collaborations with world's best universities and research institutes will attract the best student and faculty minds to our shores creating a truly world class university melting pot. It will also greatly enrich student's social and learning experience on campus and promote excellence in student centred service delivery.

As part of our continual investment in expanding our infrastructure, we will soon break ground for several development projects: the construction of the Wangari Maathai Campus funded by the African Development Bank and the Government of Kenya to the tune of KES 700 million, the Confucius Institute building estimated to cost KES 1.2 billion and construction of hostel blocks to accommodate 5,000 students thereby addressing the shortage of fit-for-purpose student accommodation.

Similarly, the University Senate has approved the setting up of the Centre for Pedagogy and Andragogy as the new centre for student mentorship. The University will also through partnerships promote structured Student's Service Learning Programs to encourage students to interact with and offer voluntary service to the communities. This sort of community engagement will make the University relevant in the social setup as well as build and enhance hands-on skills of students and graduates alike.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the wake of rising insecurity incidences in the country, the management has put in place comprehensive and

responsive measures to ensure lasting safety and security for all while on campus. Further, student support systems have been enhanced following the unfortunate stampede occasioned by an underground electrical cable explosion at our Kikuyu campus earlier in the year.

We continue to be knowledge partners with both government and policy makers to influence policy direction on matters related to security and terrorism. Recently the University held a well-attended symposium on *Countering Terrorism: In Search of a Grand African Strategy*. The University also played a key role in assisting families of victims of the Garissa University College terror attack identify their departed kith and kin. Let me sincerely appreciate our medical and disaster response teams as well as our faculty who selflessly volunteered their time, expertise and other resources during that difficult time. We showed the world that we have excellent human resource capacity that can be called upon to render solutions to complex societal needs.

University of Nairobi is not all about academics. We subscribe to the popular saying in town that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Sports and games are part and parcel of our DNA and play a big role in who we are. The world over and especially in the United States of America, Universities continue to invest in sports facilities that have seen significant revenue contribution through sport signings as well as arena leases for international sport competitions. Just this week Kenya led the world in the 12th International Amateur Athletic Federation World Championships in Beijing China. This is testament that with the right investment, far from providing good recreation opportunities for our students, we could tap the many talents that would earn Kenya the pride of place in international sport circles and provide gainful economic opportunities for our youth UON

The Student leadership arena is radically shifting. In the -80s and early 90s, the student leadership was informed by political ideologies in the clamour for multiparty democracy. Today, true leaders are those who not only canvass for the welfare of their members but provide a balanced voice of reason to enhance both service delivery and decision making. A new brand of leaders is therefore emergingí those driven by altruistic mission. To borrow the words of Richard Dawkins, *“The recognition that we are born selfish should drive us to teach generosity and altruism.”* Student Organization of Nairobi University (SONU) should therefore continue with this discipline of complementing the University Management as they have done to improve security and make this a little heaven for all our students. This kind of leadership that is repulsive to selfish interests, is embracive to mutual interests, is visionary and innovative is in very short supply in our societies today and must be hailed.

To the staff and faculty of the University of Nairobi, we thank you. You have shown great commitment to our University brand. You have also shown exemplary unity of purpose. The graduates who will walk out of our gates today are the very best in the market, thanks to you. We

have room for improvement but that does not belabour our recognition of your excellent contribution. I want to assure you that we are committed to continuously improving your terms of service. The fruitful negotiation of the new Collective Bargaining Agreement will soon be realized. We plead for your patience in the intervening period.

To the government, collaborators and donors, we thank you most sincerely. In the face of boundless competing needs, you have kept your faith with us. In the face of adversities and challenges, you have stood with us. It is easy to flee at the slightest sign of endangered reputation but true friends and agents of development stay the course until the

adversities subside and their beneficiaries are ushered into a new era of peace and tranquil. We are grateful that you have not left our side and continue to walk with us. Your support in both cash and in kind is greatly appreciated.

To our current and future corporate partners, the University is open for business. Let us engage in finessing a mutually beneficial relationship.

To our graduands, you have worked hard! You have burned the midnight oil! You have faltered, you have stumbled but you have not fallen! you have sacrificed personal time in your academic journey and so today you sit with your chins held up for you have been deemed worthy of academic recognition. We assure you that the quality you have received in this University remains unparalleled in the region. As alumni of this University, you are our strength and we have faith in you. Register with the Alumni Association today.

“I charge you,” in the words of the late Dr. Geoffrey William Griffin, “to never forget the great benefits you have received in this University and in time to come and according to your means, do all that you can to enable others enjoy the same advantage.” We now send you into the world. Gain industrial experience and come back in future as masters and PhD students to enhance your knowledge further. The experience you will gain out there will greatly enrich our classroom experience and faculty. In this constant engagement with the market, we will attain equilibrium where the University churns out graduates that are fit for immediate market absorption with minimal retraining. This will save time and resources for employers and will go a long way in providing quick solutions to the challenges afflicting our societies.

We therefore wish thee well in all you elect to do. Endeavour to care more than others think is wise, to risk more than others think is safe, to dream more than others think is practical and to expect more than others think is possible. Through habit, strive for excellence and excellence will speak for you.

We will support you. Talk to us when you need advice, knock on our doors when you need a reference. As your University we will never truly succeed if we do not help you succeed. May the Almighty bless you and may He bless the work of your hands.

God bless the University of Nairobi and God bless Kenya.

**Peter M. F. Mbithi, PdD, EBS**

**Vice Chancellor**

**University of Nairobi**