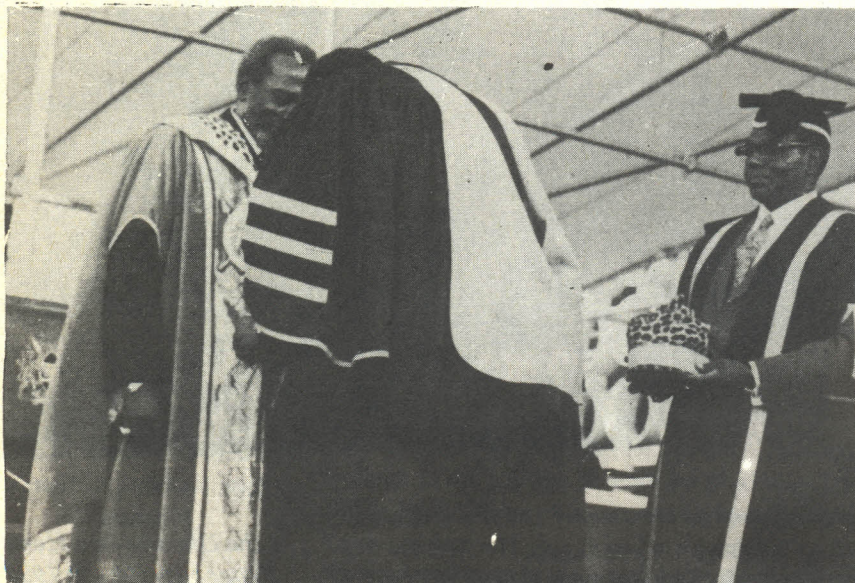


10th December 1970

University of Nairobi is Born

Speech by President Kenyatta at The Inauguration of the University of Nairobi and his Installation as the Chancellor



Above
1970: President Kenyatta being garlanded with the official regalia as Chancellor

Below
A salute for the Chancellor by the then Chairman of the University Council, B.M. Gecaga



It is a momentous day in the life of any nation when its own university is formed. Today therefore, I am proud and pleased to preside as Chancellor over this inauguration ceremony. The forerunner of this University of Nairobi was the Royal Technical College of East Africa created nearly twenty years ago to provide some higher education of technical nature for what were then the colonial territories. In 1954, that institution merged with the Gandhi Memorial Academy and the Royal College was formed on a relationship with the University of London and the first students at University level were admitted in October, 1961.

My gratitude is extended today to the Universities of London and of East Africa for having in that sequence served as academic midwives for the healthy infant whose birth we are assembled to celebrate today. A special tribute is due also to the pioneering spirit and the devotion to learning of all principals and staff connected with the previous institutions. Their far sighted work has made it possible now for this national university to take its full and proper place in the world academic stage.

Much has been said in the past about the role of any university as the custodian of truth. It may or may not be right to imply that a university has this monopoly, but I am sure that there are other vital functions or contributions to the nobility of the human sense, such a body must give full expression to the nobility of the human intellect. It must be in the fore front of inquiry and ambition on behalf of the surrounding society. It must undertake the testing and translation of all new discoveries or theories of emotional experiences in a manner which will encourage society to evolve and keep pace with all changes in the party and potential of human existence.

Some people suggest that in a rapidly developing country like Kenya, the main task of a

(Please continue on page 35)

university is to criticise whatever is observed or projected. An academic body like this is sometimes regarded as only custodian of intellect, and it is argued that a university therefore, has both the right and duty to represent opposition to any existing regime. This idea in its most extreme form can even cross the border line of arrogance. Mistakenly, it is then submitted that intelligence and wisdom which are very different things are only found within the university and that the public is supposed to pay university teachers for exposing and training of national leadership. However, within a young country, it is only national leadership which has truly sprung from and can really interpret the aspirations of our people.

I can, therefore, state that our Republic expects from this University of Nairobi much more than criticism. There is no point for example in condemning our medical services as inadequate unless doctors and research workers produced and inspired by the University make positive contribution to improve human welfare in this field.

It is not enough to discuss any so-called lack of economic independence unless engineers and scientists sponsored by the University can promote new phases of industrial advance.

Similarly, we want the faculty concerned to assist in devising new means of integrating customary laws with our statutory laws. We expect professors and students of political science to suggest means of perfecting structures and institutions which are relevant to Kenya and Africa. In all the faculties of Arts, we want the University to give a lead in codifying and transmitting our African culture while placing this in the full and valuable perspective of all philosophy and artistic strivings. In other words, while never ignoring or betraying the most precious function of an academic body, the University of Nairobi must gear itself at once, and with constructive zeal to all the needs and realities of nation building. This ceremony today has been deliberately included in the 1970 programme of *Jamhuri* Celebrations.

My Government and I wish to emphasize in this way that here is an institution of the highest importance, integrating into the life of our Republic. There must in the future be no mutual isolation of the university body and the executive centres of national design and decision. There must be the fullest use of resources within the University so as to secure the fruit of intellect and technology within the framework of our nationhood. I am confident that this university will abundantly justify the hopes and sacrifices of our people. I have given many definitions of what the proper academic contribution should be, and how the University of Nairobi must adapt itself to the features and short-comings of our nationhood. At the same time, any healthy university must govern more by freedom than by restraint. For

The Birth of the University



1970: Powers to read ... The Chancellor confers a PhD.

this reason, we have enshrined within the University Act the greatest possible autonomy in terms of organization, teaching and research. If the mind of the nation is to flower through this University the professors and lecturers must be free to teach their subjects while students and research workers must feel free to pursue the truth and publish their findings without fear.

To those who are graduating, or will graduate from this University, I would say this. Never forget the opportunities that have been created for you by your fellow citizens. Practice the act of modesty and recognize your limitations. Exert all your efforts to help your country and your people and let your work bring honour to this University. Many aspects of life here are rapidly changing. My Government while promoting every kind of urban and industrial advancement, is concentrating on development in the rural areas, which will carry economic opportunities and social justice to the masses of our people. Targets and techniques have been fully outlined in the development plan. However, we need more highly educated and professionally qualified people to ensure the fulfilment of this plan. You graduates will have a vital part to play in all this. Use your knowledge and your talent broadly and meet each challenge with imagination.

I invite you to join us, as Kenya nationalists in working for the prosperity at home and for the unity of Africa. Never look for any privilege, but be ready to assume leadership in the service of our people. I am confident that you will not fail us. I am sure you will all wish to join me in expressing our warm welcome to my colleague Dr Milton Obote who accepted our invitation to grace this ceremony. My expression of gratitude also goes to our colleague Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who although unable to be with us today, has sent his personal representatives. President Kaunda of Zambia unfortunately could not attend this function owing to state commitments.

In conclusion, I wish to congratulate all those who have been concerned with the preparation and success of this inauguration ceremony. I wish this University of Nairobi a long and honourable life in meeting all the challenges of nation building in the total context of all human thought and motivation.