

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT, HON. DANIEL T. ARAP MOI, C.G.H., M.P.,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The task of presiding over this climax of the Academic Year is to me far more than just the function of a Chancellor. I have deep personal satisfaction, in my capacity as President of our Republic, in being so closely involved with the important work of this University. In addition, I regard this as an appropriate opportunity for me to say a few words about Higher Education and our plans and purposes in that field.

However, before going into those matters, let me first touch upon the most fundamental objective of this present ceremony. Having just awarded an impressive number of degrees, in many different fields of learning, I must sincerely congratulate all those who have now emerged as graduates. And while we think of those now clutching new symbols of status, let us also pay tribute to the Academic Staff without whose continuing hard work, dedication and guidance we would have no graduation ceremony today or any other year. I assure all concerned that we truly appreciate their valuable contribution in our national building efforts, and we are confident that they will continue to render this valuable service even more effectively in future.

Turning back to you the new graduates, I am fully aware that this is a day of considerable emotion. You have spent some lengthy period in an environment that is not only challenging but also sheltered. What lies immediately ahead will be even more challenging. It will also be strange. Therefore, over the coming few years, much will depend upon your attitudes and approaches as you seek to find your place in our human community.

You may have noted that the advice which Chancellors offer to graduates, on these occasions, is of a more or less standard pattern. But it would be a great mistake for you to regard this as boring, or as too orthodox for the social scene of the 1980s into which you will now plunge. Proven wisdom is one of the greatest end-products of the human intellect, and the young must learn from those who understand what it is to be young.

I, therefore, say to you that, now you are equipped with some basic foundation of learning, your most profound anxiety should be to know even more, and to apply your knowledge with maximum effectiveness. As you now enter our society as independent individuals, you should be strengthened by grasp of perspective. Over the past few years, you have learned many theories and concepts which, henceforth, you must interpret and translate, seizing upon those which are relevant to local problems and conditions, and making their content entirely practical in application.

Above all, I urge you to recognise that the Honour of Graduation is nothing without the gift of humility. You have enjoyed and have well responded to the privilege of University education. But you must not expect to find any privileged class within the social fabric of our Republic. The efforts and sacrifices of the people of Kenya have made it possible for you to reach this moment of your lives. In consequence, and fundamentally, you must regard yourselves, just as I do, as servants of society.

Now turning to this University, I would like to say that it has made impressive progress since it was formally instituted nine years ago. For example, students enrolment has nearly doubled, and many facilities have been expanded. I wish here to express a word of commendation to Dr. Karanja, the previous Vice-Chancellor, to whom this academic body owes a great deal for professional administration over nearly a decade. Today we welcome his successor, Professor Joseph Mungai, a man with wide experience in the whole system of education. I call upon you all, staff and students alike, to give the new Vice-Chancellor loyal support during the coming years — the years when so much will be expected of this university.

What I said a few minutes ago about student numbers leads me to another point. It has not escaped the attention of my Government that there exists, in this Republic, an unsatisfied demand for Higher Education. The pace of progress and development in Kenya has been so rapid that this position has been reached far sooner than could once have been anticipated. We must recognise now that even the immense achievements of this University are not enough, and that, in consequence and as I said last year, a second University should be established. But those who believe that this may be done overnight, just by waving a wand, display their ignorance of many complex factors. On this occasion I will just remark that the matter of a second University is being pursued through the only sensible technique in a matter of this sort that is moving one step at a time.

As you are all aware, I spend a great deal of time travelling to various parts of our Republic. Everywhere I find a thirst for modern knowledge, our people have fully appreciated the need for mastery of Science and Technology. At the same time, there is burning interest in all the arts which can both inspire and explain human behaviour.

Therefore, one of the critical functions of this University must be to expand Higher Education on a countrywide basis. At the moment the situation is that when all available places here in Nairobi have been filled, many other candidates of great potential are simply unable to attend. In terms of equity and of national development, this situation must be regarded as wholly unsatisfactory.

We have been giving this problem a great deal of thought, and it is now hoped that in the near future the University of Nairobi will be in a position to offer external degree courses. This should open up new horizons of opportunity for those who would otherwise be deprived.

This, again, is easy to announce, but is not simple to accomplish. Such an undertaking requires meticulous planning, in terms of such components as finance, curricula, materials and personnel. However, detailed planning has already started.

In addition to this new development, we propose to strengthen the provision and administration by this University of correspondence courses and thereby give access to some formal and advanced learning to many more Kenyans. The whole question of manpower development is one which needs very careful planning. I expect the University of Nairobi, and the Government Ministries responsible, to be working very closely on this matter.

Correspondence courses will not, of course, replace regular methods of education. In this connection, I want to stress the critical importance of doing much more than at present to produce many more trained teachers for our schools. Further, it is not just a question of numbers, we must have high quality teachers — people who are committed to their profession, people who have self-respect, and people who see themselves as leaders in the local communities where they are working. This is a matter which I want the University, and the two Ministries in the field of education, to give urgent and adequate attention.

The other point I want to make now concerns financial planning for this University and the proposed one. I have reached the conclusion that we must introduce better procedures, for this purpose. I have decided that a University Grants Committee should be established as soon as possible. The principal task of that Committee will be to assist the Government in assessing financial requirements of the Universities. Further, this financial planning should be on a five year basis, the same period we use for national development planning. I am sure that such synchronisation of planning periods will be very useful not only in the field of finance but also manpower planning.

Finally, let me turn in more generalised terms to the whole University environment. I sometimes feel that Professors and Lecturers could be of greater use to our society if their initiatives, springing from knowledge, could be made more constructively apparent, and if their occasional intolerance could be transformed into something more helpful. We should be able to look upon our university as a fertile forum for dialogue, bridging gaps which may frustrate co-ordination between academic and practical experience. In all this, the academic contribution

should always be dynamic, though never patronising. Purely negative criticism will rob that dialogue of richness, leaving only what is futile.

As is now apparent in many countries, Universities tend to become breeding-grounds of ideology and political theory. Students are very vulnerable to indoctrination, during a period when they are crammed with so many new ideas and theories that judgment is at times engulfed by pressure. And often, at this rather immature age, relations impact of such concepts as genuine democracy, human rights and human respect, has less emotional appeal than the calculated dogma of such things as the so-called scientific socialism.

As a feature of the freedoms that we cherish, accepting the risk that they might now and then be abused, we at times see in some newspapers letters written in a smooth and glib academic style, glorifying some external ideology in a dialectic totally remote from African cultures and aspirations, and which indeed has no meaning in the modern world beyond disruptive propaganda. I want to make it clear today, to this University community and to the vastly wider audience of our Kenya society, that we have no use for, and no time for, the confusion of foreign ideologies. Kenya nationalism is the source of our strength. No imported ideology is going to solve our problems. All our experience since independence shows that there is no substitute for hard work, community discipline, practical management of public affairs, and the 'Harambee' spirit linking Government and people together in all our endeavours. Indeed, what is now happening in some other countries, including those previously committed to the so-called scientific socialism, indicates the immense sense of pragmatism instead of blind commitment to ideologies which invariably disguise more than they illuminate.

I, therefore, end my speech today by calling upon all Kenyans to concentrate their thinking on the practical problems, and opportunities facing our nation as we pursue our national objective of development for the benefit of all.

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT,
NAIROBI.