

VC's speech during the 54th graduation ceremony

SPEECH BY PROF. PETER M.F. MBITHI, VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING THE 54TH GRADUATION CEREMONY HELD ON FRIDAY DECEMBER 4, 2015 AT THE CHANCELLOR'S COURT AT 8.00 A.M.

- The Cabinet Secretary, Education, Science and Technology, Dr. Fred Matiangi
- The Chancellor, University of Nairobi, Dr. Vijoo Rattansi
- Your Excellences, the Ambassadors and High Commissioners
- Chancellors of Sister Universities
- Chairman of the University of Nairobi Council, Dr. Idle Farah
- Members of the University Council
- Chairpersons of other University Councils
- Vice-Chancellors of Sister Universities
- Members of the University Management Board
- University of Nairobi Senate
- Graduands
- Staff
- Students
- Parents and Guardians
- Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the University of Nairobi, let me welcome you all and ask you to feel at home. We are grateful, especially to parents, guardians, spouses and partners, that you have chosen to share your time with us this morning as we celebrate our 54th Graduation.

Dr. Fred Matiangi, you once lectured in the great halls of this University. I am therefore delighted to warmly welcome you on your first visit as Cabinet Secretary in charge of our line Ministry; the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. We are grateful for the support of the government you represent today are ready and willing to work with you in your new station.

I know many of us have read and heard negative things from the grapevine about the University. It therefore follows that many of us are understandably anxious! Allow me to allay thy fears! I did indicate in my graduation speech of September 4th this year that our transition has been painfully laboured. With all the splendid beauty of the blossom of new roses, attendant thorns emerge. It is therefore impossible to mention a rose without a thorn in the same sentence. For this reason, challenges have been many but like diamonds best made under pressure, the University of Nairobi will emerge stronger. With that in mind, rest assured that this University is edging back her firm footing and is yet to compromise her mandate or gold standard.

Invariably, the image of the University has suffered a beating but like the proverbial Phoenix, look out for the University's renaissance in the coming days as she reclaims her rightful place in the hearts and minds of all who share the love for this great University. Like Van Gogh we shall proclaim, "In spite of everything we shall rise again! We will take up our pencils, which we had forsaken in our great discouragement and we will go on with our drawing!"

As a state corporation, we will continue to be guided by government rules in tendering and continue to practice prudent public financial management. This remains a legitimate expectation in the delivery of our mandate as a university.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Colleges of Health Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences and other colleges in small measure have the honour to present today's graduands. 8, 861 graduands will be conferred with various degrees and awarded diplomas. Out of these, 84 are PhDs, 2,549 Masters, 5,502 Bachelors, 76 Postgraduate Diplomas and 647 ordinary Diplomas. This is a crowning moment for you graduands for all the sacrifices you have made in pursuit of knowledge. We are, as all your families and friends are, very proud of you. In graduating, you have vindicated our belief that the thrust of true education is that of a closed mind yielding ground to an open one. Please receive my very sincere congratulations on your achievements.

This ceremony may be an end to many of you but for those who maintain intellectual curiosity, there is a lot more to learn about the universe and beyond. Amongst earned PhDs today is Geoffrey Gitahi Kariuki, more popularly known as G.G. Kariuki; senator for Laikipia County and a decorated public servant. At 76 years of age, he is living testament that indeed the quest for knowledge knows no time. It is never too late. I therefore urge you not to stop here; our country needs you to conduct research; our Universities need you to teach and train; our families need you to unravel the next discovery and make theirs a better world

to live in. I promise you, dear graduands, that our gates will remain open and render respite to all who dare embark on this pilgrimage in search of knowledge.

Ladies and gentlemen, a people without a vision perish. A vision without drive is a shipwreck in waiting. The recognition of the twin requirements of vision and drive has necessitated a review of the University's Strategic Plan resulting in the production of a short-term implementation plan and priorities for the financial year 2015/2016. This plan now guides the budgeting and performance contracting. I am certain that we are recording significant improvements in all milestone measures. Fruitful implementation of this plan will secure the trajectory that will bear to fruition my dream of "a top ranked, sustainable, world-class institution with enduring and valuable scholarly excellence".

Madam Chancellor, in my 53rd Graduation Ceremony address I indicated that my standing vision remains that whatever we set our hearts and minds to do, our delivery must bear the stamp of excellence. It may therefore please you to note that our dedicated faculty and students continue to raise the bar for excellence in both local and regional arenas. This year Prof. Charles Okidi was honoured, by the IUCN Academy of Environmental Law, for outstanding contribution to the

field of Environmental Law. Ms. Irene Kendi, 2014's most enterprising female student leader in Africa, bagged the award for the most outstanding female mentor in Kenya as awarded by Women and Girls Lead, Global (WGLG). Prof and Irene, I tip my hat to you for hoisting our flag so high! At home and abroad, UoN's pedigree continues to shine unbridled. The team's stellar accomplishments continues to add that much needed oomph to our University profile!

This year, our premier research institute, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), celebrated its Golden Jubilee. The celebration was graced by experts, luminaries, partners and dignitaries with a view to "Rethink Development and Development Studies in the Post 2015 Era." For 50 years, IDS has contributed positively to the development of both nation and continent. I dare proclaim that the region and more particularly the UoN, through IDS, remains the Centre for the recently launched Sustainable Development Agenda.

Madam Chancellor, no institution of higher learning worth its salt can claim excellence without a solid research portfolio. I am pleased to note that our University research fund currently stands at Ksh. 4.5 billion. This is a direct result of the high-level research activity by our staff members and collaborators. Let me therefore single for praise the following for exemplary service in research thereby making a significant contribution to our research kitty this year:

- Prof. Winnie Mitullah - Director, Institute for Development Studies
- Prof. Florence Olubayo - Department of Plant Science and Crop Protection
- Prof. Daniel Olago - Department of Geology
- Prof. Patricia Kameri-Mbote - Dean, School of Law

Thank you all for the good work.

Over the years, universities in this part of the world have stood accused of training graduates who cannot find a glove fit in the industry. We are slowly but determinedly changing this narrative. All our programmes are now developed in close collaboration with stakeholders. This approach allows us to integrate the needs of respective industries and to produce graduates with skills that match the needs of the industry. We continue to build in experiential learning in all our programmes, equipping students with the hands-on experience and skills.

Further, the University Senate is implementing a student mentorship programme and has operationalized the Centre for Pedagogy and Andragogy. These approaches do not vacate workplace experience but augment classroom knowledge with real world application. I therefore plead with our industry partners to give our graduates a chance to polish and internalize skills gained at the university through employment or placements, and to continually render feedback to us on performance of our graduates. This is the only way to enrich our measure of industrial preparedness of our graduates.

As a University, we continue to invest in our networks with like minds in knowledge advancement. This year, we have negotiated and signed 147 Memoranda of Understanding with institutions of higher learning as well as government agencies. These memoranda are now being

given life through implementation and will go a long way in enriching our faculty and student experience on campus.

After we have taken care of our horses, that is the students and our stakeholders, we must take care of our men, the staff! This University is committed to continually improving the welfare of our staff within the confines of law and practice. Dialogue and mutual understanding between the unions and management is the Holy Grail on matters staff welfare. This is a continuous process with the best interests of staff at heart. Let me thank each and every member of staff for the support I continue to receive from you in discharging the mandate for which this University was founded and also for your diligent service. My doors remain open to address your issues.

Madam Chancellor, allow me to thank you most sincerely for your continued guidance as we steer this University to greater heights. Your abiding values of team work and care for humanity continues to inspire us every day.

I am truly humbled by the kind gesture from both the government and the Catholic Church in whose stead we hosted the historical celebration of the Holy Mass by Pope Francis on this very ground on 26th November 2015. Your resolute faith and trust in the University of Nairobi has exposed us to great honour. I am sure your faith in us was rewarded with rich and pleasant memories shared by millions across the country and around the world.

Finally, let me address my graduands one last time. Today you leave our gates and head out into the world. We have prepared you as best as we could. Only one thing will elevate you to greatness, character. I therefore beseech thee my graduands, to heed the wisdom of Lao Tzu thus;

“I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness, the second is frugality and the third is humility which keeps me from putting myself before others. Be gentle and you can be bold; be frugal and you can be liberal; avoid putting yourself before others and you can become a leader among men”

Go ye in peace to serve all.

I wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year 2016.

Thank you

PETER M.F.MBITHI, PhD, EBS
VICE CHANCELLOR
AND
PROFESSOR OF VETERINARY SURGERY