



Dr. Vijoo Rattansi, Chancellor, University of Nairobi

Professor Julia Ojiambo, Chair of University of Nairobi Council

Council Members present

University Staff

Friends of the University of Nairobi

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning!

Madam Chancellor, thank you for graciously presiding over my installation as the 8th Vice Chancellor of this university. Thank you also for wishing me well in the journey I have begun to embark on. I confirm, with humility, that I solemnly and respectfully accept the honour to serve my country in this position.

To all of you, I am truly honoured by your presence this morning - albeit for most of you - virtually. What a privilege it is to commune with family, friends, colleagues, students, government representatives and well-wishers in today's ceremony. I do not take it for granted that

you've spared your precious time to join us in ushering in a new dispensation heralding restored hope and renewed expectations.

I wish, in a special way, to pay tribute to my lovely wife Teresa. Teresa, you have always supported me in prayers, always held fort and kept our family boat afloat; you have fervently kept faith in me and always wished me well; you have made home a place to unwind and seek refuge from the noise and haste of this world; you have been a towering pillar of strength and for all these and many years of companionship. I cannot thank you enough!

To my children Gitahi and Wanjugu, you have had to contend with many days of my absence while in the course of duty. Alongside your mum, you have never wavered in your belief in me and for this reason I am eternally grateful.

To my parents, the late *Mzee* Burton Gitahi Kabua and *Mama* Teresa Wanjugu Gitahi, thank you for sacrificing all you had to take my siblings and I to school; for instilling in us the ideals of hard work; for imparting in us the wisdom of staying the course until the task is done. My father who spent years in detention during the Mau Mau liberation war alongside such peers as Wang'ombe wa Kahure, Githogiri Kigucha and Mwangi wa Wangai among others because he prized liberty. His vision of freedom and self-determination was driven by the desire to see his own people excel and take leadership roles in order to transform the destinies of the locals. I have no doubt that had he been alive today his greatest joy would be that among many others, I have been given a chance to serve and change the fortunes of our very own.

Allow me to also thank my siblings, for their unfailing support towards many causes I have undertaken in life; for celebrating with me every achievement however small and for affirming the substance of the values our parents inculcated in us. These are values that have abided with me throughout my life's journey thus far.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful to my friend and mentor Professor Peter Gehr. Interacting with him in the course of my PhD studies in Switzerland, I got a new appreciation of life. I learnt to listen keenly, deeply and patiently and to tolerate and respect divergent opinions and stands. Beyond ensuring that I received the best exposure in my training, Professor Gehr opened his home to me where alongside his family, I enjoyed enlightening company.

To all who trusted me to serve in different leadership positions; to my students who gave me the opportunity to mould and mentor them; to those who quietly whispered a prayer for me and wished me well; to my nursery school teacher *Mama* Eunice who by teaching me how to read and write opened the world to me; to those who awarded me scholarships to study here and abroad, I say thank you. May the Lord continue to bless you and expand your bounties.

To my 7 predecessors, I salute you. In the larger scheme of things, your individual and collective contributions have borne the fruits that we enjoy today. I particularly wish to thank the astute administrator Professor Crispus Kiamba who despite my young age, had faith in me by appointing me the Associate Dean and Acting Dean Faculty of

Veterinary Medicine. Professor Kiamba, I hope I have not let you down.

My roll of gratitude will not be complete if I do not thank our Chancellor Dr. Vijoo Rattansi, Ministry of Education, the Public Service Commission and the Council for finding me worthy of appointment as the 8th Vice Chancellor of the University of Nairobi. You can count on me to stay truthful to the values and traditions of this institution.

As I reflect upon my life and the many ups and downs encountered along the way, I am reminded that whenever the going got tough, great men and women that I associated with stepped up and together we surmounted the obstacles. With your collective support, no obstacle will be too high to surmount, no barrier too big to overcome, no burden too heavy to bear and no storm too strong to withstand.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is not possible to share all the ideas that I have from the pedestal I have been afforded today. Allow me, therefore, to share just a snippet of my considered thoughts on the path we need to embark on to advance the University of Nairobi onto the trajectory to excellence.

In 2016, our Chancellor recommended a visitation of the university. The Visitation Panel, in its wisdom, observed that one of the constraints impeding institutional planning and management for productivity, efficiency and results at the University was the absence of a

coordinated university-wide data management and access system. We therefore need to invest our energies and resources towards setting up a comprehensive and integrated data management system. This will entail reengineering our business processes and embedding the use of technology in curriculum content delivery, human resource management, financial management, student management including the administration of exams, research grants management, timetabling, to name but a few. Data will change how decisions are made, optimize deployment of resources and improve overall systemic output. In the competitive environment that we find ourselves in, leveraging verifiable data to lower decision turnaround time, to seize time-sensitive opportunities and to make better predictions to outsmart competition cannot be gainsaid.

Secondly, the University has over the years grown in size and complexity. To stay in step with the needs of the university, I believe that there is compelling need to refresh our management, administrative, oversight and governance structures. This will entail elimination of redundant and overlapping systems, processes, structures and reporting centres; inbuilding of top-bottom flow of power, resources, responsibility and accountability to the lowest levels and institutionalization of efficient decision and policy making and implementation at every level.

Thirdly, we need to embark on the path of fit-for-purpose training. We need to relook at our university course offerings and to assess the level to which they respond to market, industry, societal and government needs as well as to weed out redundant and overlapping courses and programmes. Additionally, we should interrogate the depth of substance coverage in so far as delivery of curricula and inculcation of practical skills are concerned, integrate industry in our teaching and

research, review our research exploits to encourage vertical progression in pursuit of new knowledge, standardize and laterally integrate our curricula and integrate entrepreneurial spirit and culture throughout our programmes. Lastly, we need to recalibrate our metrics of world class-talent and to make deliberate effort towards internationalization.

The three proposed interventions should go hand in hand with financial reforms. These reforms are geared towards institutionalizing prudent financial management and controls, efficient and participatory budget formulation mechanisms, fiscal and budgetary discipline, efficient payment and receipts management and banking services and systems to check revenue leakage, optimal utilization of resources, cross cutting reduction of wastage and review of the financial viability of income generating units. It should go further to include reform of procurement functions to maximize efficiency, increase transparency and accountability and deliver value for money. An efficient and optimal internal financial ecosystem will allow the university to move with confidence towards scaling external resource mobilization with a high level of confidence that any cent received will, at the very least, render 100% value for money.

The net effect of these measures is an increased university value proposition making us the destination of choice for both local and international students, scholars, innovators and industry and the preferred knowledge partner for government as regards ideas, solutions, consultants and policy direction and critique.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the last few weeks, I have been asked how I will fix the financial short fall.

To answer this, we ought to view the university as the sum of her systems and processes. In my view, we should, internally, take a 3-step approach: (i) fix the leaking ship, (ii) trim our coat according to our size and finally (iii) grow the topline. With efficient systems, structures, processes, curriculum and financial systems, we will eradicate internal wastage and achieve optimal resource utilization, attract quality students to our classrooms and draw the best minds across the globe. Assuredly, the savings made will purposefully offset the deficit until such time that we break even and bring financial sustainability closer to reality. Externally, we implore the Government as the sponsor of public education in Kenya, to deliberately channel more resources into our universities.

Before I conclude, permit me some latitude to briefly take off my cap as head of administration and speak as a Professor and the Academic Head of the University.

By and within law, members of academic staff are accorded freedom in their teaching, research and any other endeavour, to question and test received wisdom, to put forth new ideas and to state opinions. The question that begs is, *“have these members of staff exercised this freedom for the benefit of the country?”*

The answer to this question may in some way explain the situation we find ourselves in as a country.

Allow me to tell you a story to illustrate what, in my view, is the prevailing situation.

A scientist placed five monkeys in a cage. In the middle of the cage and far beyond the reach of the monkeys, they placed a ladder with a bunch of bananas at the top. Every time a monkey went up the ladder, the scientist soaked it with cold water. Those that did not join in this adventure also received a similar punishment. After a while, the temptation of the bananas was too great, and another monkey began to climb the ladder. Again, scientists soaked that monkey, alongside the rest of the monkeys, with cold water. Soon, every time a monkey went up the ladder, all the others beat it up. After some time, no monkey dared to go up the ladder notwithstanding the temptation.

Thereafter, scientists decided to substitute one of the monkeys. The first thing the new monkey did was to go up the ladder. Immediately the other monkeys beat it up. After several beatings, the new member learned not to climb the ladder even though he never knew why. A second monkey was substituted and the same occurred. The first monkey participated in the beating of the second monkey. A third monkey was changed, and the same beating was repeated. The fourth was substituted and the beating was repeated and finally the fifth monkey was replaced. What was left was a group of five monkeys that much as they were never subjected to a cold shower, continued to beat up any monkey who attempted to climb the ladder. If it were possible to ask the monkeys why they beat up all those who attempted to go up the ladder, perhaps the answer would be...

“I don’t know...but that’s how things are done around here.”

Ladies and gentlemen,

we live in a society where those who dare question why or why not are running out of space to call home. Like the monkeys in my story, we are increasingly breeding men and women of great uniformity, lacking in the moral spine to question why things are as they are. The true purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one. Of necessity, we must regain this foothold in our universities and create an environment that fosters intellectual curiosity, one that nurtures the ability to question and test received wisdom in search for truth and one that accommodates divergent views. Together we can create a world that does not condemn independent and free thinkers to the very bottom of the food chain just because they hold views contrary to ours or contrary to how “things are done here”; together we can create a university that accommodates outliers. This would be the right environment for creating and fostering new knowledge and with it, solutions to human afflictions.

In recent times, infringement on and even attempt to stifle academic freedom and functional autonomy of universities through extra legislative and executive overreach have come to the fore. I am, however, happy to note that Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 stipulates that Government’s long-term policy is to provide a framework for a sustainable, competitive and autonomous national university system. It is my humble plea that all concerned parties will act in a manner that best fortifies the twin principles of functional autonomy and academic freedom as enshrined in our statutes.

Finally, as we now roll up our sleeves and get to work, I am conscious of the huge burden of responsibility weighing heavily on my shoulders.

I Stephen Kiama Gitahi, am neither a miracle worker nor one that possess the monopoly of knowledge; I am neither a magician nor one that can play God. I am just the leader of the band! I promise to serve you with honesty, diligence and humility. I promise to be firm and fair, to lend a listening ear to you and to your concerns and to, as much as is humanly possible, make decisions grounded on law. In return, I appeal to you staff and students to make every effort to recalibrate our collective culture and attitudes towards teamwork, upholding discipline and integrity, commitment to duty and scholarship, efficiency and excellence. With your support and dedication of time and energies in honest service to this university, we are set to reach the Promised Land and build an enduring legacy of academic excellence.

In faith, we will reclaim our glory and build an academic edifice that will inspire fresh hope and push the frontiers of university education locally, regionally and internationally.

If you allow, the University of Nairobi is sailing a new tide. And talking of times and their curious ways, Shakespeare couldn't have put it better when he said; *"There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on the fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat. And we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures."* Together, I am confident we can seize the tide and secure our ventures.

Let us now retreat to our stations of work and rededicate our efforts and energies in the spirit of pulling together - *unitate et labore*, unite in labour.

May God give us grace to serve.

Thank you and God bless you all.