

THE KENYA POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

SPEECH BY

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DURING THE GRADUATION CEREMONY

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- The Chairman of the Kenya Polytechnic University College Council, Prof. Francis Gichaga;
- The Chairman of the University of Nairobi Council, Mr. John Simba;
- The Representative of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology;
- The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, Prof. George Magoha;
- The Principal of the Kenya Polytechnic University College, Prof. Francis Aduol;
- Members of the Kenya Polytechnic University College Council;
- Members of the University of Nairobi Management Board;
- Staff of the Kenya Polytechnic University College;
- Students of the Kenya Polytechnic University College;
- Graduands;
- Parents, Guardians, and Sponsors of students;
- Distinguished guests;
- Ladies and Gentlemen!

As we participate in this inaugural graduation ceremony of the Kenya Polytechnic University College, it may be appropriate to reflect back on the foundations of this institution. The predecessor of this institution, the Kenya Polytechnic opened its doors to its first students in 1961. The Polytechnic had been established to take over the Diploma programmes that previously had been offered at the Royal Technical College of East Africa, which had just become a degree awarding institution under the name, the Royal College Nairobi. The Royal College as we are all aware went on to eventually become what today is the University of Nairobi.

The Kenya Polytechnic was established to offer training to technicians at the Diploma level and would in particular provide opportunities for those already in employment to attain further skills in their areas of expertise. Considerable emphasis was placed on practical training with a firm policy to have students acquire practical experience in industry before graduating. Over the years, the Kenya Polytechnic became the premiere institution in this country for the training of technicians and technologists. The Polytechnic has accomplished this with great admiration and in the process acquired great respect within the Government and among the public and employers.

In August 2007, His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Kenya, through a Legal Order, elevated the Kenya Polytechnic to the status of a university college. The institution was now established as the Kenya Polytechnic University College and a constituent college of the University of Nairobi. In the Legal Order no effort has been spared to provide that the institution shall focus its education and training in technology. This elevation of the institution to university college status was firmly within the Government's policy framework to focus on technological education and training in national development.

Distinguished guests, graduands, ladies and gentlemen!

Since independence our government has continued to grapple with the technological gap in our national development. Various strategies were put in place to address this need through national development plans and successive policy declarations. However, the growth in demand for technical skills that would catalyse economic productivity in our national development far outstripped the availability of key personnel for this purpose. If anything, the supply of the human resource with these skills continue to decline and dwindle as the needs of our society became more complex and sophisticated.

To address the current challenges of national development, the government has launched the Vision 2030. The Kenya Polytechnic University College must position itself as a strategic player within this framework if it is to execute its mandate successfully. I expect the College to be a leader in the training of manpower with the necessary levels of technological skills to manage the process of transforming our country into a middle level income nation where poverty and backwardness no longer inhibit our aspirations.

It should be clear to many of us already that no country can break away from the yokes of poverty, disease and ignorance without technological progress. But for technological progress to set in, a country must be prepared to invest heavily in the development of human resource in technology. Thus, if Kenya is going to realise sufficient technological progress to allow it to move on to the next level of economic prosperity, even as envisioned in Vision 2030, it will have to invest in technological education and training and also to demand of the very highest quality and standards from its institutions of technology and science.

In our own times, several countries have transformed themselves from low level technological economies to sophisticated industrialised nations. We have seen Singapore transform itself from a little swamp into an industrialised, economic, giant; we have seen Israel rise from a desert to become a world power in technology; we have

seen South Korea move over from a low level economy at the same level with Kenya in 1963 to become an industrial giant; and we have seen a country like Germany survive the devastations of two world wars to pick itself up and continue to be a world economic and technological powerhouse. We must ask ourselves; how did they achieve this, and what can we do as a nation to get there.

A quick look at the developments of countries that have moved over from low level technological economies will show that such countries invested heavily in technological transformation. This technological transformation was in the first instance driven by appropriate, well designed, and implemented technological education and training. Europe came to this realisation in the early part of the nineteenth century and systematically established colleges of technology and Polytechnics that soon developed into today's universities of technology. This concept subsequently found its way into the United States America giving rise to such famed institutions as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, California Institute of Technology, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Virginia Institute of Technology.

Before our very own eyes today, we can see the development of higher technological education playing itself in Malaysia. We are aware of many Kenyans who today are going to Malaysia to seek modern technological education. When Malaysia declared their Vision 2020, they began with a dedicated effort to empower their universities and more so the universities of technology to offer high level education and training in technology. Today, one of Malaysia's leading universities is the Technical University of Malaysia.

If our country is going to move forward in technological development, and hence move on to the next level of economic prosperity, then we shall have to make certain hard decisions concerning the way we approach our education and training in technology. Today in Kenya, we have several of our institutions of higher learning offering education

and training in quite a diverse collection of areas of technology and science. However one would quickly note that in spite of this we have on one hand that Kenya is still relatively technologically backward and on the other hand several of our graduates in technology are jobless. Surely there must be something we are not doing right, for ordinarily we should not at the same time be having a shortage of technical personnel while our graduates in technology are jobless.

Distinguished guests, graduands, ladies and gentlemen!

We are here today to witness the inaugural graduation ceremony of this institution in its new status as a university college. This ceremony should only be the beginning of a long journey that we all must expect this institution to take as a major player in the development of this country. To this extent we must be alive to the fact that “Vision 2030” will only be realised if institutions such as this play their part effectively through the production of needed technical manpower.

In the past, Kenya has established institutions of higher learning that were meant to dedicate their focus to technology and science. Sadly many of these institutions quickly abandoned such stated objectives and directed their best energies to other areas of study, which in most cases were already covered relatively well by other institutions. With this latest establishment of the Kenya Polytechnic University College as an institution meant to provide education and training in technology and science, we can not afford to repeat these mistakes. The Kenya Polytechnic University College shall be expected to unflinchingly focus on its mandate as an institution for the development of manpower in technology and science.

The Kenya Polytechnic University College in fact today finds itself in a very enviable position amongst most of the institutions of higher learning in this country. First, it is coming in as an institution meant to offer education and training in technology in this

country, just when the country has declared that it wishes to move towards technological progress in a dedicated, systematic, manner. Secondly, it is coming into this position with quite a respected reputation in the training of technicians and technologists. Thirdly, it can learn from the several unsuccessful efforts to establish universities of technology in this country. And fourthly, there are several successful universities of technology worldwide that it can learn from. With all this, the Polytechnic is in an excellent position to design much more clearly the route it should take in order to realise greatness as an institution of higher learning in technology and science.

Distinguished guests, graduands, ladies and gentlemen!

This institution has been established as a constituent college of the University of Nairobi. The Government expects this institution to be a fully fledged university in the shortest time possible. To this extent the University of Nairobi has been given the mandate to mentor the institution. I wish to urge the management of the University of Nairobi to work diligently together with the management of the Polytechnic and the Council towards this goal. While the Council of the Polytechnic is expected to put in place appropriate governance and management structures towards this goal, the University of Nairobi Senate is expected to ensure that high academic standards are maintained.

As the College embarks on the journey to becoming a fully fledged university of technology, it is important to underscore the fact that the steps and direction taken now will determine the destiny of the College. The leadership of the institution must therefore remember that their greatest responsibility is not only to avoid the pitfalls of institutions which were initially established with similar mandates, but also to create structures and systems that will enable the College truly achieve its vision.

The Polytechnic will have to identify with much diligence the areas of discipline that it

should focus on. Once this has been done, the institution must seek to impart such knowledge to her students in the most innovative of ways. The graduates of the Polytechnic will be expected to come up with new innovations to drive our technological development while at the same time being practically minded as to provide leadership in the actual production of designs. The institution must strive not only to produce thinkers, as indeed expected of any university, but also doers who are ready to soil their hands to produce practical results.

I look forward to this institution producing graduates who will be equipped with the knowledge and skills to make machines and equipment as well as develop systems that will compete globally. The College will only make a difference if the staff are able to mould personnel who will go out there not to look for employment for the sake of it, but to design and offer practical solutions to society's problems. It is the capacity of the graduands to find answers to our daily problems that will set them apart from the rest of the pack. The Kenya Polytechnic University College must conduct its affairs in a manner that will make the leading institutions of technology acknowledge it with admiration.

However to achieve this, the institution will need maximum support from the Government and other stakeholders. The college will need considerable resources to realise this dream. The investment to transform a middle level polytechnic into a top rated university is enormous and if we have to demand the best from the institution, we must as a nation prepare to invest our best in this institution. Looking at this institution it is clear that there will be a major need to expand on the facilities and equipment needed to bring it to the level of a high quality institution of technology. Beyond this, the institution will have to attract and retain quality staff that can be relied upon to help it realise the vision of being a top rated university of technology.

As a young institution operating in a competitive and fast globalizing environment, the temptation to take short cuts and ignore issues of public good is real. The institution

must put in place management structures that will allow it to function efficiently and with effectiveness. It is imperative that the College embraces the practice of good corporate governance at its formative stages. The management must eschew corruption and be steadfast in aiding the efforts of the Government to tackle the vice. The leadership should be sensitive and responsive to the special needs of the community in which we operate and therefore should establish a policy on corporate social responsibility that will enable the College to operate as a respectable corporate citizen.

Distinguished guests, graduands, ladies and gentlemen!

Let me now turn to our graduands today. I would like to sincerely congratulate you for your achievement. This is the culmination of dedicated work in which you denied yourselves many pleasures of life in order that you may acquire knowledge to prepare you for careers into the future. It is surely a crowning moment of efforts of many days and nights that you will for sure look back to with admiration for the rest of your lives. However I should like to caution you that this must just be the beginning of a long journey in your lives in the careers you have chosen and in which you graduate today.

As a professional and expert in your field you will be expected to continue to upgrade your knowledge if you have to keep being relevant in your field. I urge you therefore to continue reading and seeking knowledge. One of the objectives of upgrading the Polytechnic to a university is to provide opportunities for those who have graduated from the middle level colleges to continuously upgrade their skills and knowledge. I urge you take advantage of these opportunities and come back to the Polytechnic to acquire further training and education in your fields.

Distinguished guests, graduands, ladies and gentlemen!

As the Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, and hence the Chancellor of this institution, I wish to assure you and the institution, of my total support to ensure that this institution starts off on its journey as a university on a sound footing. We shall seek to build a model institution of technology in this region and we believe that with the commitment of all those involved there is no reason why we can not create out of this, a highly rated institution of technology. I have had the chance to tour this institution recently and having seen the potential that there is within the institution, I have no doubt that the objective to be a top rated university of technology is indeed achievable.

Distinguished guests, graduands, ladies and gentlemen!

Thank you very much and may God bless you!