

SPEECH BY THE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF EMBU, PROF. PAUL MUSILI WAMBUA DURING THE CELEBRATION OF CHARTER AWARD AND INSTALLATION AS CHANCELLOR, HELD AT UNIVERSITY OF EMBU ON SATURDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2016

Governor Embu County, H.E Martin Wambora

Senator Embu County – Hon Lenny Kivuti

Chairman of Council, Dr. Margaret Gikuhi

Members of Council,

Acting Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Daniel Mugendi

The Management Board,

Members of the University Senate,

Vice Chancellors of sister Universities,

Members of County and National Government,

The Entire Embu County Leadership,

Staff and students,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

I feel greatly honored to stand before you today to make this address at my inauguration as the first Chancellor of the University of Embu.

At a personal level, this is indeed a great moment. At no time did I imagine being appointed Vice-Chancellor of a University leave alone a Chancellor. The appointment came to me as a pleasant surprise. I want to assure you that

I have formally accepted the appointment by H.E. the President to serve because education is indeed the greatest gift we can bequeath our future generations. I therefore feel privileged to have been given a chance to lead this young institution through the journey of achieving its full potential.

First, let me start by thanking God for his mercies endure forever. Through Him, in Him and with Him we are gathered here today for this great and historic occasion.

Secondly, I wish to express my appreciation to the President, His Excellency, Uhuru Kenyatta through the Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology for finding me worthy of the position of Chancellor. I also wish to thank all my family for the valuable support they have given me throughout my life which has enabled me to reach this far.

Thirdly, allow me to thank the Chair of the University Council, Dr. Margaret Gikuhi and the Acting Vice-Chancellor Prof. Daniel Mugendi for the warm reception and cooperation that they accorded me right from the time it was announced that I had been appointed the Chancellor. The appointment was announced while I was a visiting scholar at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Immediately after the announcement the Ag Vice Chancellor contacted me on phone and since then we have been in constant communication with him and the Chair of the University Council and through the interaction I have come to learn a lot about this great University within a very short time.

I have no doubt in my mind that the team led by the Chairperson of Council and the Ag. Vice-Chancellor is a strong and committed one. This makes me

feel at home and confident that I am joining a team of focused and visionary leaders. I assure you all that I have found the two very pleasant to work with and I look forward to their continued support in order to take this university to greater heights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have served as the Associate Dean of the School of Law at the University of Nairobi Parklands Campus for 6 years and as Dean at Kabarak University School of Law while on my sabbatical from the University of Nairobi. I am therefore familiar with the operations of the University as well as the challenges facing public Universities, especially the newly established and upcoming ones.

I therefore, have an idea of what is expected of me as the Chancellor. However, I must state that I do not underestimate the responsibilities of this role. We live at a particularly challenging time for universities in this country and charting a successful path through the next few years will require the dedicated effort of everyone involved in the management of the institution.

During the last 10 years our universities have been subject to far-reaching changes ranging from the way they are funded; to the rules and constraints that apply; to the way the landscape in which the universities operate has become competitive due to the establishment of about 70 public and private universities and constituent university colleges in Kenya.

The strengths and opportunities available to The University of Embu must therefore be nourished and fully exploited in the face of all these challenges

so as to survive and make an impact in the contemporary competitive environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Exactly a week ago I visited the University for the first time since I was appointed the Chancellor and had a cordial and fruitful meeting with the Members of Council and Senate. We had a detailed tour of all the physical facilities of the University, and I was really impressed by the numerous achievements the University has recorded so far. Specifically, I was very impressed by the fact that the University team is fully aware of the vision and mission of the University as evidenced by:

- excellent scores in performance contracting and embracing quality management systems in all operations,
- growth of student population from just 123 to over 4000 in under 4 years,
- development of new facilities and growth of infrastructure and,
- the sense of teamwork and commitment shown by staff.

I salute the University Council and Management for remaining steadfast in their commitment to intellectual formation and research. I have noted that since establishment, the students' enrollment has been on the increase, meaning that more and more prospective students are choosing to come to University of Embu. In this regard the University must continue to improve its infrastructure, human resource capacity and welfare facilities for staff and students, among others components.

I would also like to recognize and commend the students of the University of Embu for being the best learners that any university would desire to have. I have browsed the internet in search of stories on unrest at this University and I have not come across any. This is what it means to be in a good University. We must embrace dialogue as means of resolving any disputes that may arise between the students and the University Administration. The days of rioting and destruction of public property are long gone. The society we live in now is more open, transparent and democratic.

The expectations of students continue to change dramatically. Gone are days when students just went to the university in order to obtain degrees to secure employment. Today's student demands exposure to an education that will assist him/her to fit well in the job market or be self-employed if the student so chooses. The challenge, I think, is to develop and maintain a balance between the pursuit of knowledge *per se* and industry relevance. Although it is not entirely proper to narrow curricula on vocational lines, it is very important to broaden the minds of the learner and sharpen their intellectual skills through both theory and practical skills. In this regard a good modern university should be able to impart skills relevant to the job market, which include oral communication, problem solving, and innovativeness.

The university must remain an institution where academic freedom is wholly cherished. All of us, I am sure, support the principle of diversity within the university; but one of the most important aspects of this principle is diversity of opinion. Diversity of opinion should be encouraged at all levels of the University including the student body. In this regard, I see our universities

playing the key roles of teaching; conducting research; fostering and nurturing new ideas; and, most importantly, engaging with the general community to help address the needs of our people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Demand for University education has been on the upward trend over the years. There are more students seeking to join the University even as the government seeks to expand tertiary education to accommodate the rising number of students qualifying to join higher education. This has been happening against a backdrop of dwindling government funding to Universities.

The negative aspect of this, of course, has been to make university education less affordable: but given the greatly increased numbers now attending university, the increasing budgetary cuts by the exchequer, means that Universities must look for alternative revenue streams to make ends meet. I believe it is unlikely that the Government will feel able to bear a higher proportion of university costs.

There is another development over recent years that has made life more complex for universities and that is: hand-in-hand with making new funding sources available, the Government has tightened its system of central control. Public universities are faced with the precarious situation where the tertiary sector is being deregulated while the individual institutions are being further regulated. Extensive regulation leaves little room for innovation and operational flexibility.

This situation becomes a huge problem in the context of two further developments in the higher education sector, namely globalization and the rise of private education providers.

Today our universities are being ranked in global league tables which, whatever one thinks of their validity, increasingly have an effect on enrolments. I am glad to learn that the University of Embu has continued to score impressively in the webometrics global ranking of Universities and we should continue with that spirit so that we can reach the highest level of ranking both locally and internationally.

On the other hand public universities are threatened by private ones as they attempt to compete for self-sponsored students in the market. It is likely that the competitive landscape will change dramatically in the years ahead especially because the government has now started to sponsor students to private Universities.

This competition requires the University to adapt effectively to the changes if we are to survive and prosper. It also requires us to more precisely define the type of persons we seek to welcome into our family of students. The persons admitted to our university should be talented people who value an academic education which is informed by relevant research conducted within the institution; but they must also be people who want more than just a degree. They are people who want preparation for leadership; as an academically excellent credential is but one element of this.

And what of the university's vision to be a world-class University of excellence; is that realistic for an institution based in Embu? I strongly believe that it is.

However to achieve this, we need to welcome change as a new opportunity and be prepared in turn to change the way we operate in order to compete effectively. Above all we need to ensure that quality remains at the heart of everything we do.

When His Excellency President Kenyatta was awarding this charter to us on October 7, he painfully reminded us of the glorious past of Kenyan universities. Mark his words well - **glorious past!**

He reminded us of the golden age when, in his words, professors published papers regularly, universities advanced knowledge in areas that mattered to Kenyans and budgets were made and administered prudently.

“Students were taught well and went on to achieve international standards in their careers,” he said.

I say painfully because some of us have been witnesses to this measured death of our public universities. My contemporaries who are here can indeed attest to the days gone by when universities excelled in their roles of molding quality students for national duty.

From the days when universities churned out nationalists from parochial and ethnic minds presented to them on the first year to the current spate when universities are overturning the nationalists presented to them on first year into parochial minds.

From the days quality easily - you could say naturally - superimposed over quantity to the current obsession with numbers and disregard for quality. To date, it is all about how many students a university has, how many satellite campuses and how many students are graduating.

From the days students fully enjoyed their four year stay in the university to the current situation where students are rushing through their time in university and glossing over the other essentials of university life.

I am talking of the days gone by when exams were viewed- by students and lecturers- as genuine tests of preparedness to face the market and offer solutions out there. Today, exams are viewed as a hindrance- an obstacle- to quick access to academic papers hence the propensity to cheat.

From the days university students weighed in on important national matters and they were listened to- because they had something to say. To the days now when the students voice is feeble, uncoordinated, inaudible and almost meaningless.

I could go on and on ladies and gentlemen. The long and short of this is that that we have fallen short of our expected standards. We must begin from the point of acknowledging this failure on our part before we can even dream of charting a fresh start.

Time is out of joint and collectively as administrators, students, leaders and community, we must set it right. As the president rightfully pointed out on that day, we have a great opportunity as a freshly-minted university to start afresh and restore honor to the exalted place of a university in our society.

The wish of our President cannot be taken for granted. It is indeed a historic and important call that demands responsive action from all of us who are tasked with management of our universities. We want to begin this journey right here in Embu!

Our country is yearning for quality young men and women who can confidently take over the industries and run them successfully. There is great demand for industrious and virtuous young professionals with the right work ethic and necessary ethos for modern day challenges.

The experiences of the 2008 post-election violence exposed our false narrative that we are no longer one nation but many nations in one. Embu University must lead the way in responding to the ideals of the 2010 constitution which sought to shatter the myths and ghosts of the 2008 violence.

It is not enough to have national values in our constitution and in paper alone. We must teach our students to live these values both for their own good and for the nation's good. I want to tell you- without fear of contradiction- that this nation will rise and fall on values!

From this early point, I want to us to make values the cornerstone of our training in this university. If we were to excel in imparting correct values and ethos demanded of us by our constitution, we would have achieved 80 percent of our work.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In heeding the President's call to restore the lost glory of our universities, we must change tact with regard to generating income for our universities. It is

an obvious fact that overreliance on capitation has led us to the deep hole we find ourselves in.

We must now confront the challenge that faces us; and which is to generate income to run the university without necessarily looking at the numbers.

In this regard, I wish to remind you of this university's checkered history from 1947 when it was founded as Agricultural Institute of Agriculture (EIA) from 1990 to 1993 it was renamed to Agricultural Staff Training College and from 1993 to 2012 it was the Embu Agricultural Staff Training College (EAST) and thereafter it became Embu University College. Today we have a fully-fledged University called The University of Embu. Indeed we have come from far and we are headed further.

The running theme and specialty all through these transformations for us has been agriculture. As a new university, we must take the agriculture specialty and run with it to the hills. We must maximize on this specialty and make it our excelling point.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen,

My message to us all is that we have a big task ahead of us and we must fasten our belts and get ready for take-off after the charter award and the initial ceremonies. The road may be bumpy and rough but together we will succeed.

Earlier today I met with the Members of the University Council and the Senate and we discussed many issues that are important and urgent as we seek to move this University to greater heights. I am confident that we have a great

team here and if we just re-double our effort, I am sure that we will scale the heights of success and prosperity as an academic institution.

As a way of encouraging our students, members of staff and stakeholders to contribute to the success of the university, I wish to announce that in the new year I will initiate '**The Chancellor's Prize**' to be awarded annually to the selected individuals and institutions in the three categories of participants. I will communicate the details of the guidelines for the award of the prize to the university management in due course.

I trust that the service I am now expected to provide as Chancellor, and honoured to give, will be worthy of this truly great university and that together we will come back here once again to take stock of our achievements in the coming days, months and years.

With those remarks, I once again thank you for your warm welcome and for accepting me to be your Chancellor.

I wish you all God's Blessings.

Thank you.