

# Speech by Prof. Peter M.F. Mbithi during his installation as Vice-Chancellor

- Cabinet Secretary for Education, Science and Technology, Prof. Jacob Kaimenyi
- Chancellor, Dr. Vijoo Rattansi
- Other Chancellors present
- Chairman of Council, Dr. Idle Farah
- Other Chairs of Council present
- Outgoing Vice-Chancellor, Prof. George Magoha
- Other Vice-Chancellors present
- Council Members
- University Management Board
- Senate
- Members of Staff
- Students
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the University of Nairobi and most importantly to this function to witness my installation as the 7<sup>th</sup> Vice-Chancellor of this august Institution. This is a momentous occasion for this University as we usher in a new era in governance and leadership. It also accords us the opportunity to commend the outgoing Vice-Chancellor for his outstanding stewardship of this University over the last 10 years. I am happy that the Cabinet Secretary, Chancellor and the Chairman of the University Council have found it appropriate to commend him for the excellent achievements. I personally thank him for a job well done, full of landmark results. I wish him the best as he pursues his academic and other endeavor

I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Government and the University Council for appointing me the 7<sup>th</sup> Vice-Chancellor of the greatest and most prestigious University in the region. I am astounded by the enormous goodwill and support that I have received from Council members, colleagues, students, members of staff and our stakeholders. I truly thank you all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on the journey to my appointment, I competed with three of my worthy colleagues – Prof. Isaac Mbeche, Prof. Lucy Irungu and Prof. Agnes Mwang'ombe – all top managers. From my experience with them in management, they are all competent. However only one vacancy was available. I was the one who was appointed. I therefore, thank them for taking part in the recruitment process, and most for the support that they have accorded me in the past and remarkably since my appointment was announced. I reach out to you, all staff, students and other stakeholders. It is time for us to join hands in building this University as epitomized in our motto: *Unitate et Labore*. Indeed, our first task is to remain united and to focus our energies on running the University.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the word 'University' derives from Latin, 'Universitas', meaning a kind of universe and a self-contained whole. By the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, the word 'universitas' had come to refer to the idea of a self-regulating community of scholars and students whose corporate existence was sanctioned by civil or ecclesiastical authority.

The idea of the university's separateness, independence, autonomy and entitlement to a special kind of freedom is one of the enduring articles of principle we subscribe to. It is these tenets that we hold supreme, advocate and wish to defend with renewed focus and zeal in the next phase of the transformation of the University of Nairobi. My assurance to you is that I will defend the university's tradition and rights of autonomy, independence, and academic freedom within the tenets of the law establishment.

I am determined to ensure that the University of Nairobi becomes the ultimate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, university today is regarded by society as the home for the pursuit of truth and independent oracle, to which the Government and Industry find answers to meaning, and values that propel societies to prosperity. University is expected to take on the role of moral loadstone, an ideal the University of Nairobi under my firm stewardship will endeavour to align with.

Ladies and gentlemen, the history of this university since 1970 is replete with ideas on how the management has surpassed hurdles and forged ahead with the agenda of the University. My six predecessors had their own challenges and all of them have recorded in the annals of history great achievements during their times in office.

The late Dr. Josephat Njuguna Karanja, the first Vice-Chancellor between 1970-1979, when I was a student in my formative undergraduate studies, is remembered for his defence of intellectual freedom. The late Prof. Joseph Mungai (1979 to 1985), is remembered for opening up the administration to students.

Prof. Philip Mbithi (1985–1991), is remembered for being a great organizer who worked through small teams to achieve corporate goals.

Prof. Francis Gichaga, the fourth Vice-Chancellor (1991-2002) left his footprints in the sands of time by increasing access to higher education and diversifying revenue streams of the University through the introduction of module II programmes.

The fifth Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Crispus Kiamba (2002–2004), is remembered for enhancing student and staff awareness and involvement in the governance of the University. More importantly, staff and student organizations became an integral part of the university governance system.

My immediate predecessor, Prof. George Magoha, Vice-Chancellor 2005-2015, will be best remembered for many structural and infrastructural developments, among them the University towers, which is nearing completion.

A reflection on these achievements of my predecessors over the past 45 years, accounts for the present University of Nairobi.

As the 7<sup>th</sup> Vice-Chancellor, I set the tone by quoting Cardinal John Henry Newman who had great ideas about university education. He said “the University teaches to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical and to discard what is irrelevant.”

For this University to continue producing quality products, we must compete with the very best in the world.

My vision thus is to ensure that we become a top-ranked, sustainable, world-class institution with enduring and valuable scholarly excellence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my reform agenda will revolve around ten (10) major strategic issues:

1. World class University Status
2. Fundraising, Resource Mobilization and Sustainability Strategy
3. Infrastructure Development
4. Graduate Skills Enhancement Program
5. Students' Experience in Campus
6. University Research
7. Develop Visionary, Innovative and Creative Leadership
8. Image and Competitiveness of the University
9. Our Alumni, Our Strength
10. Community Service

My immediate priorities will shape the alignment to achieving the strategic objectives.

My first priority is to ensure that the University of Nairobi produces quality and holistic graduates in diverse fields of study to meet the expectations of the market and to provide solutions to the challenges affecting our society. To achieve this, my administration will review academic processes in order to ensure quality programmes and increase the relevance of our graduates to industry. The areas that we will target include: upscaling the integration of ICT into teaching and learning, in-building experiential learning in all our programmes, implementing all-round student mentorship by faculty, and sustained faculty training on pedagogy and pedagogy.

My second priority is to enhance the quantity, quality and relevance of research. In the past 10 years, the University research fund has increased tenfold from KES 350 million to KES 4 billion, due to increased research activities by our members of staff and collaborators. With more support and increased focus on this function, the research docket should experience exponential growth in the University and especially given the many challenges that our society is facing. It will thus be necessary for interventions by researchers in almost every facet of life, and therefore to achieve this goal, my administration will focus on enhancing the capacity of researchers, improve the management of research funds, enhance dissemination of research outputs to society, incubate research efforts and partner with industry to commercialize research outputs. Indeed, in the course of this year, we intend to hold a conference for industry stakeholders in research to exchange views on how to grow research at the University. My administration also intends to increase internal research funding starting with at least KES 1 million funding to any staff with a fundable proposal.

My third priority is to improve academic and social facilities for our students with more attention to student mentorship, orientation beyond classroom extracurricular activities and social life. In addition to refurbishing existing student hostels, we shall construct hostels to accommodate over 5,000 students through the Public/Private Partnership, to address the perennial problem of inadequate accommodation for our students. Also lined up for construction through the same model is the School of Law tower at Parklands, which will

house the increasing academic activities of the School, and give it the profile befitting its status as the leading Law School in the region; construction of a building for the Computing Centre of Excellence and incubation lab (C4DLab); construction of the University of Nairobi teaching and referral hospital to specialize on chronic diseases and of course completion of ongoing projects, among them the University tower. Apart from the physical revamping of facilities, we shall also focus on an effective structure for their management and also progressively evolve governance.

My fourth and last priority around governance. We will professionalize resources management, including human resources and facilities, in order to increase staff productivity as well as to improve institutional efficiency and effectiveness; we will automate all core business processes and ensure managers make decisions informed by computer-based information and analytics. We will devolve more power, resources and decision-making to the University basic operating units. We will ensure total compliance to policies and standards.

Ladies and gentlemen, all these proposals in my administration's four priorities require financial resources which we intend to enhance through the establishment of endowment funds, creation of a university foundation, partnering with the private sector to finance capital projects and increasing involvement of alumni in fundraising for the alma mater.

My administration will also work very closely with the Government and lobby her to support our reform agenda, and preferably increase capitation to cater for the payroll in order to free some of our internally generated funds to be used for revamping our facilities.

Ladies and gentlemen, the task ahead of us is challenging yet, the University will not relent in its endeavor to realize a horizon of opportunities for exploiting and competing with reputable universities worldwide. As we move forward and into the future, we need to build synergies, based on our various strengths and experiences, to place UoN in a prime spot on the global map.

### Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, As I conclude, I reiterate that we are aiming for the skies and are determined to be daring with caution, wisdom and history informing our steps. We are not afraid to re-imagine the prospects of the University of Nairobi afresh without side-stepping the University act and conscious choices. Together, I have no doubt we shall conquer the barriers that limit our innovation and creativity, tower head and shoulder above others in academic, research and community service and claim the primacy of place in excellence across spheres of human endeavour.

To our government and donors, we'll be your strongest and most reliable partner in achievement of vision 2030. We are ready to contribute in providing solutions in such areas as national security, cleaning our cities, tapping the huge body of energy in our youth, population growth, research and policy formulation and chronic traffic jams among others. We intend to make the University of Nairobi a hub of higher education in the region and in Africa.

To our corporate entities and the private sector, we invite you to be our partners through endowing research chairs and improving our physical infrastructure via public private partnerships and philanthropy.

To our alumni, help us in nurturing and developing the next generation of leaders through students' mentorship, sponsorship and internship.

To our students, you are the only reason we are here. Your welfare will be put first, academically, physically and spiritually – through student centered programmes.

As I conclude my speech, I leave you with another thought from Cardinal Newman, and which captures the value of what we do.

“University training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society... It is the education which gives a man a clear conscience, view of his own opinions and judgments, eloquence in expressing them and a force in urging them.” I truly believe that you and I can make the University of Nairobi to deliver this product to our society.

- God bless our labour in search for knowledge, in search for truth and in search for excellence.
- God bless the University of Nairobi, Our staff, Our students, Alumni, Partners, Friends
- Our stakeholders spread throughout the world.
- God bless our motherland and our home land of Kenya.

Thank you.