

Mount Kenya



University

SPEECH

BY

**PROF. SIMON N. GICHARU, CBS
FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN,
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

AT

**MOUNT KENYA UNIVERSITY 12TH
GRADUATION CEREMONY
HELD ON FRIDAY, 7TH JULY, 2017**

AT

HAPPY VALLEY GROUNDS, THIKA

Salutation

- Guest Speaker, Professor Olive Mugenda,
- Prof. Victoria Wulsin, Chancellor, MKU
- Madam Jane Nyutu, Co-Founder of MKU
- Members of University Board of Directors,
- Prof. David Serem, Chairman University Council
- Members of University Council,
- Your Excellences, Ambassadors and High Commissioners present,
- Honorable National and County Government leaders present,
- Prof. Stanley W. Waudu, Vice-Chancellor,
- Members of the Management Board and Senate,
- Members of Staff,
- Parents and Guardians,
- Graduands and Students,
- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

From the onset, allow me to thank Prof Olive Mugenda for finding time to be with us today. We are enormously honoured that she accepted our invitation to be our chief guest. Without doubt that she has made immense contribution in education, a field she evidently loves. The illustrious record of innovation she left at my alma mater, Kenyatta University as the vice chancellor speaks for itself. I can confidently say that she left a legacy that will not be easy to match. It is befitting that she is here with us today when our theme at this graduation ceremony is Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

- Before delving into the heart of my speech, allow me also to further commend Prof Mugenda for robustly engaging KU alumni in the activities of the university. This is how I

was privileged to be the chief guest during the launch of Bullets to Books, KU at 25.

Thank you Prof. for the good work you have done and continue to do to uplift the education standards in the country.

In fact, Nina Simone American singer and songwriter says that there's no excuse for the young people not knowing who the heroes and heroines are or were. We are privileged to have one in our midst today.

- Ladies and Gentlemen let me now focus on the theme of today's ceremony. You agree with me that today Innovation and Entrepreneurship are the key drivers of world economies. Countries that have placed these crucial aspects of development at the centre of their

economic growth, have made great milestones in transforming the lives of their people.

- Here in Kenya we have to quickly learn to develop, nurture and entrench the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. Kenya is known as the hub of innovation in the region. And indeed novel inventions such as M-Pesa and now M-Akiba have won the country global praise. There are other numerous inventions out there that are transforming lives. In short we are on the right track.
- The debate that we need to have now is how we can enhance and consolidate the gains we have already made. There are a lot innovative ideas out there that need to be made a reality full. I am sure a good

number of these graduands are full of amazing ideas. We need, therefore, to tap all those ideas, actualise them and ensure that they benefit the society. Believe me an idea can only be good and sustainable if it is of service to the society.

- The originators of such brilliant ideas need to benefit from their invention. This is where entrepreneurship comes in. The great ideas that we have must be turned into tangible useful products or services that are then commercialised. When people reap the benefit of their innovations, they are motivated to do more and be role models who encourage more people to aspire to innovation. This is the beginning of the establishment and entrenchment of a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

The best entrepreneurs today are those who are innovative. The businesspeople who deliver unique products to the global market are winners. Indeed bearing in mind the breath-taking pace of technology today, you will only survive as an entrepreneur by being constantly innovative. Companies and organisations that fail to be creative will simply be swept aside by the unforgiving winds of change. Greek philosopher Heraclitus says, the only thing that is constant is change, this is very true.

Think global

As you think of entrepreneurship you must think global because today the world has been reduced to a global village thanks to the advancements in technology. M-Pesa and M-Akiba are evident that we can do things locally that are a first in the world.

We are therefore capable of coming with world class inventions that not only provide answers to the local societal challenges but also to the wider global community's problems. Let no one tell you that it cannot be done in Kenya because it has already been done. We are blazing the trail in many realms and you graduands, you owe it to the society to continue and even strengthen this amazing trend of innovation.

Conducive environment

Although innovations and entrepreneurship ought to serve society by helping address prevailing challenges, the society has to develop a conducive environment for innovation. We have to ensure there is peace and harmony at all times. Currently there is some level of uncertainty about the August polls. Violence and instability are never

good for business and investment. A peaceful and calm environment is a fertile ground for giving birth to ingenious ideas. We must therefore jealously guard the unity we have, whether there are elections or not.

Right infrastructure

❖ We also have to ensure that there is in place a prerequisite infrastructure for innovation and entrepreneurship. And Universities such as MKU have a critical to play. They have to churn out graduates who are critical thinkers. It's through thinking that we can come up with original ideas, which can then yield innovative solutions to the society's myriad needs and challenges.

- ❖ I know there are graduands who will go on to invent things and in the process be famous entrepreneurs. And this will happen because of the quality of training they have attained here. As a society we need to ask ourselves how we will continue to hold the hands of such graduands with brilliant ideas to realise their full potential. They need mentors. The question is, are they available? They need funding. We need to ask ourselves whether they will get it. We have to help them build vital networks and partnerships.
- ❖ A culture of entrepreneurship ensures that good ideas are given a conducive environment to thrive. We must all work together towards such an environment.
- ❖ You graduands also have to know that it is not just enough to have a very brilliant idea, an experienced

mentor and funding. Far from it. Indisputably, these factors are key but the most determinant of the success or failure of your enterprise is you. The most prized asset that your business has is you. You need to put in a lot of work and hours. You got to be disciplined, persistent and resilient to make it.

- ❖ British Statesman Benjamin Disraeli said the secret of success is constancy of purpose. You have to believe in your idea and yourself even when no one else does. You should be ready to stand up when you fall, dust yourself and use the lessons learnt from the mistakes to propel your idea forward.
- ❖ There is a lot that we can say about innovation and entrepreneurship. Let's continue the discourse in other forums. Let's ignite debate wherever we are and work

to embed these two fundamental aspects of development in our economic agenda.

- As I finish I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Vice Chancellor Prof Stanley Waudu for giving me this opportunity to be here today. It is a privilege and honour.
- And I mean it when I say that because when MKU attained its charter, Prof Waudu wittingly told me that the university was now a body corporate. and that they would have the powers to invite me to such forums or not... Thank you Prof for the invite.
- Indeed I am glad that MKU is now running smoothly and does not need my constant presence anymore. Now you understand when I say this is a privilege and an honour.

- I am happy for this state of affairs. We need to build institution or business with our eyes focused on posterity. We have to set up organisations that outlive the founders and continue to serve one generation after another, such is the lesson we get from great innovators like Bill Gates. We can only achieve this by ensuring that there are watertight structures in place. I am happy this is precisely what is happening at MKU.
- I would also like to extend my gratitude to the government and His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta in particular. A lot has been done for the education sector in this country. We now have 27,000 young men and women studying in private

universities who are getting State funding. This is an important milestone as many of these students would not have had such a lifetime opportunity to pursue their dreams were it not for HELB's financial assistance. I myself is a beneficiary of government funding and look where I am and what I have done.

- I would also like to thank MKU board for the great work it is doing to expand spaces for students and enrich learning. The university as expanded rapidly giving an opportunity to thousands of students thirsty for knowledge. Our main campus here is now an academic citadel. Our branch in Nakuru is growing at a fast rate, so also is our institution in Kigali. All this is happening because of the hard work and vision of the board. It is important to note that in

our expansion we are driven at all times by excellence. Kudos to you.

- To graduands, go out there and make your dreams a reality. MKU has equipped you with all that you need to succeed and positively impact the society. The ball is now squarely in your court
- To students who are here, you made the right decision to choose MKU. You are right where dreams are turned into reality.
- Last but not least, today we are issuing 13 share certificates to subordinate staff. This means they will not only be workers but also owners of a piece of this institution. The share certificate, each worth Sh2million, is a way of expressing our deep appreciation for the exemplary services they have

rendered. The staff we are awarding are in security department and non-teaching staff. Some of them have been here since we started the journey of setting up this institution and they are part and parcel of the exciting MKU story. Without their contribution, this institution would not be what it is today.

Thank you all, may God bless you.