

Mount Kenya



University

ADDRESS

BY

GUEST SPEAKER

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POLAROLA, Ph.D*

**CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION FOR UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION**

**DURING 15TH GRADUATION CEREMONY OF
MOUNT KENYA UNIVERSITY**

ON

7TH DECEMBER, 2018

Salutations:

- Prof. John Struthers, Chancellor, Mount Kenya University,
- Prof. Simon N. Gicharu, Founder of Mount Kenya University (MKU) and Chairman, Board of Directors,
- Madam Jane Nyutu, Co-Founder of Mount Kenya University,
- Members of the University Board of Directors,
- Prof. David K. Serem, Chairman, University Council,
- Members of Mount Kenya University Council,
- Chairman and Members of Makerere University Business School Council,
- Honorable National and County Government leaders present,
- Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Stanley W. Waudu,
- Members of Management Board and Senate,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Alumni Representative,
- Members of the Staff,
- Parents and Guardians,
- Graduands and Students,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am extremely delighted to be here during this auspicious occasion of the 15th Graduation Ceremony of Mount Kenya University. It is an honor; and I cannot fail to pass my gratitude to the Mount Kenya University's Management and its entire fraternity for the invitation as a Guest Speaker.

To the Graduands, I applaud you all for the conquest and accomplishment in the academia.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am particularly blissful to meet the new Chancellor of Mount Kenya University, Prof. John Struthers.

I join others in appreciating you, the Chancellor, to have accepted to serve as the Chancellor of Mount Kenya University; an institution that has shown relentless commitment towards unlocking infinite possibilities for the public good.

In deed when I had an encounter with Prof. Struthers, a Professor at University of West of Scotland, United Kingdom, I recalled the ongoing agenda of the Kenyan Universities: namely the internationalization agenda. Having a Chancellor from an overseas University with international experience, will certainly serve as a catalyst towards promoting a holistic internationalization at MKU.

Therefore, Mr. Chancellor, allow me also to sound a word of appreciation to MKU for the choice of today's theme, **"Promotion of Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development."** This theme is both timely and relevant.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Commission for University Education where I serve as the Chairman organized a conference one month ago under the theme of *"Positioning Universities as the Nexus of Research, Innovation and Technology for Socio-economic Transformation."*

Looking at today's theme for the 15th Graduation Ceremony of Mount Kenya University, I find a significant similarity. You will agree with me, a time has come when the universities both locally and internationally have to do all they can to promote research and innovation so as to catalyze growth in the local and global contexts. Research and innovation will surely spur growth and development in our communities. And this is the way to go.

Secondly, allow me to critically analyze with you step by step on two legends, who made a significant contribution to the world through their innovations in 1903.

These innovators were the Wright brothers; Wilbur Wright and Orville Wright who on 17th December 1903 at 10.35 a.m. gave to the world the innovative gift of, "*The first ever heavier-than-air powered machine,*" that did a maiden powered flight of 12 seconds. This was a gift that for sure revolutionized the world of travel, back then and up to date. And we can attest its countless benefits through the aviation industry.

Quoting the words of two commentators, Bruce Kasanoff (2016) and Patti Johnson (2015), who wrote about the Wright brothers, there are several lessons about innovation to be learnt from the Wright brothers.

And therefore, ladies and gentlemen, today as we pass out these graduands to go conquer the world, I would like to share with you a few of these lessons:-

1) Innovators have a vision; and they must remain focused on their vision and above all be resilient. They should not pay attention to criticism for indeed, the final proof of greatness lies in ability to endure criticism without wavering. According to available literature, the Wright brothers once heard their father who was a Bishop saying, “that it is a heresy to imagine people can fly and God never made a mistake in creating man without wings”.

This did not discourage them from spearheading their innovation.

2) Innovators must appreciate that an innovation takes time to develop its prototype to a commercial product. Borrowing from the Wright brothers, they produced the first prototype glider in 1900, followed by the second one in 1901 and another one in 1902 only to get to a breakthrough in 1903.

3) Innovators should not be threatened by competition. During the same period when the Wright brothers were working on their innovation, there were other researchers who were also trying the flight invention. This did not make them quit.

As Nancy Pearcey posits, competition is a good thing; it forces us to do our best. Competition will always be there, however, strive to adopt a superior strategy that gives you a winning edge over your competitors.

4) Innovators should not be afraid of failing. Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts. Therefore, innovators must ensure that they learn from their mistakes as they excel from one prototype to a more superior one. In deed the worst mistake is to expect instant success. Innovations require time to develop to completion.

5) Innovators must seek help whenever necessary. They must research on their ideas and seek help from experts. The Wright brothers too looked for advisors to help on the theory and practice of their innovation.

Ladies and gentlemen as we continue, it so clear that universities need to establish innovation, entrepreneurial incubators and accelerators, where they attach professors to students of various levels to work persistently on innovations. It is at the incubation centers and accelerators that they will develop ideas to patentable prototypes and forge on to final products that can be commercialized.

At such incubation centers and accelerators, funding could be sought from various government and non-governmental agencies as well as from individuals or philanthropists.

I have been informed that the Board of Directors Mount Kenya University established the Graduate Enterprise Academy (GEA) way back in 2013 which serves as a business accelerator for alumni who have business start-ups. Through Graduate Enterprise Academy, Alumni's start-ups are supported to enhance their survival and growth into big organizations.

I have also learnt that, Mount Kenya University in collaboration with Kenyatta University, the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (KNATCOM-UNESCO) and Leuphana University of Germany have put in place modalities of collaborating with various Counties in Kenya to train youth on entrepreneurial skills with a primary aim of jobs and wealth creation. This is a novel idea and an innovation in itself, which should be embraced by more universities and in all the Counties in Kenya.

As we are all aware there are many graduates and non-graduate youths who are desperately looking for jobs.

It is therefore, our responsibility as universities to work with these youths, help them change their mindset from white collar job mentality to job creation through practical-oriented training. They have to roll up their sleeves and practically do it in order to emerge as successful entrepreneurs who will not only create best paying jobs for themselves but also for many others. For that reason, I commend the aforementioned KNATCOM-UNESCO led consortium for assisting the youths create jobs.

Now to the graduating students, the world you are joining today is a world of competition for limited available jobs.

Take the opportunity availed by Mount Kenya University your Alma Mater, join the Graduate Enterprise Academy, enroll for the Mount Kenya University-Kenyatta University-Leuphana University entrepreneurial promotion program, learn to be job creators and create your own wealth.

Dear graduands take advantage while you are still young and you will never regret. However, remember that, to be a successful innovator and successful business persons, this does not happen overnight. Get started today.

Ladies and Gentlemen regarding the KNATCOM-UNESCO consortium, I urge the partners to seek development partners to join you in your joint initiative of youth training on entrepreneurship at the Counties. This will be a sure way of enhancing sustenance and expanding access to more and more beneficiaries at the Counties.

I am also aware that at times, you may have a program that targets the youth but they do not enroll due improper sensitization. The County Governments should help Mount Kenya University and Kenyatta University to sensitize their youth on this initiative for a higher uptake.

Mr. Chancellor, the Government of Kenya has a policy of 30% of all government supplies set aside as a special reserve for youth and Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWDs) which is commonly referred to as “Access to Government Procurement Opportunities - AGPO). I am sure the joint effort by Mount Kenya University and Kenyatta University, KNATCOM and Leuphana University will go a long way towards youth skills empowerment to increase uptake of the Government procurement opportunities by the Kenyan youth.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, in support of students’ innovations, the Commission for University Education encourages exhibitions of students’ innovations during the CUE conferences.

I therefore, urge all universities in Kenya to put in place modalities that allow patenting and commercialization of the products emanating from our students' innovations. In this way, universities will be able to get third stream revenue funding, students will earn good payments from their own efforts and the country's economy will be transformed as envisioned in the Kenya Vision 2030.

To the graduands, congratulations, once more! Go overcome the world, create jobs and apply the aforementioned principles in the world. Now to you ladies and gentlemen allow me to conclude by thanking you again and again for your attention.

May the Almighty God bless you and do you good.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Thank you 18