

Vice Chancellor's Address to the September, 2021 Freshmen

Deputy Vice-Chancellors,

Deans of faculties,

The staff of the University

The Freshmen and Women,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin my remarks by congratulating you for having passed your exams and choosing to pursue your dreams through our 61 undergraduate programs. No doubt, your presence here today is proof that you are the finest among your contemporaries because the University of Nairobi admits only the best.

It is also my honour and privilege to welcome you to the University. This is the UoN! Officially, you are now members of the UoN family, and we are happy to have you with us. The University of Nairobi will be your home for the next 4 or 5 years depending on the program that you have been admitted into.

I want to reiterate that you made the right decision by choosing to study here, as you will discover with the passage of time. I want to thank each and every one of you for the honour of recognizing our great institution. I am aware that many of you have harbored the dream of joining the University of Nairobi since childhood. I was in that same situation myself many years ago, for I am a product of this University. Many of my fellow professors in this University also pursued their dreams in this place.

You are joining a university that has produced many of this country's great men and women. They include the Deputy President of the republic of Kenya, Dr. William Samoe Ruto, Chief Justice Martha Koome; Speaker of the National Assembly Hon. Justin Muturi; Senate Speaker Senator Kenneth Lusaka; and several cabinet secretaries. Renowned psychiatrist Dr. Frank Njenga; cardiologist Dr. Betty Gikonyo, Attorney General Justice Paul Kariuki Kihara, and Equity Bank Group Chief Executive Officer, Dr. James Mwangi were also students here. You also need to know that in this region, only the University of Nairobi has produced a Nobel Laureate in the name of the late Prof. Wangari Maathai. Who knows? Any of you could be the next Nobel laureate.

We look forward to adding your name to the list of UoN's great alumni so that you can also inspire others. You will interact with many of these individuals in the course of your studies at the University of Nairobi and benefit from their advice, mentorship, and the programmes under the University of Nairobi Alumni Association.

You have begun a new journey where you will be laying a foundation for your future. As your Vice-Chancellor, I want to assure you that we shall give you all the support that you need to succeed and become what you aspire to be.

The University of Nairobi is the leading University in Eastern and Southern Africa. We have a reputation for consistently being ranked among the top Universities in Africa. According to the recent Times Higher Education, UoN is among the top-ranked 600 universities out of over 30,000 Universities in the World. UoN is a world-class University and the characteristics of a world-class University are a high concentration of talents (of Staff and students) and their positive impacts on the community.

While here, you will have the chance to be taught by our highly qualified and very experienced lecturers. The University of Nairobi's academic staff has the highest concentration of professors and PhD holders compared to any other university in the country. Many of our lecturers are internationally recognized as experts in their own fields. You have a chance to soak in the knowledge that your lecturers will offer you. Engage them in meaningful discussions to enhance your learning.

The University has just celebrated its 50 years having witnessed tremendous growth and memorable achievements. In 1970 we graduated only 200 and today we graduate an average of 10,000 graduates per year. Our current convocation stands at about 240,000 graduates.

Enjoy the exciting campus experience in our 8 campuses –Main Campus, Chiromo Campus, Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH campus), Kenya Science, Kikuyu, Upper Kabete, Lower Kabete, Parklands, and our two satellite campuses in Kisumu and Mombasa.

I am aware you have been introduced to your Deans of faculties. We have 11 faculties headed by Deans and Assisted by Associate Deans and under each faculty, we have teaching departments and research centres.

The University has a strong 1,500 academic staff and about 3,000 administrative staff.

The University will take care of both your academic and emotional development. The Dean of Students will take care of your career development and placement, Counselling services, Professional Associations, leadership developments, and work-study programs. You will need to keep close contact with that office and get skills beyond the classroom academics.

We take cognizance of the abundance of talents in this University. We have excellent facilities for various sports disciplines like Rugby, soccer, Karate, basketball, net-ball, hockey, and athletics. Our teams play in Rugby league 1 and basketball league 1. Our students excel in sports and creative arts (UoN Travelling Theatre). At this juncture , allow me to introduce Mr. Ferdinand Omanyala who is a Second year Bachelor of Science Chemistry student at this University. He is currently the fastest Man in Africa and record holder for both national and continental record in 100 M sprint at 9.76 Seconds. He recently represented Kenya in the Tokyo Olympics and achieved the fete of being the first Kenyan to reach the semi-finals in 100 m sprint. He ran 10. 00 seconds at the recent Tokyo Olympics.

He has since then improved his time and run 9.86 seconds in athletics meeting in Austria. This Week on Sunday 19th September 2021, Omanyala smashed both the national and continental records during the Kip Keino Classic continental tour at Moi Kasarani Stadium. We are very proud of him.

The University of Nairobi is the home of talents. I challenge all of you to go through a process of self-discovery and discover the many hidden talents that you have. Take advantage of our supportive environment. We are going to expose you to experiential learning and seek to impact on you so that you leave the University as a different person-completely refined and transformed. We will train and repackage you. We will ensure that you are fully branded Just like one would process ordinary water and package it to become a leading mineral water brand like Kireng'et or Dasani water.

Today we admit you as Okello and we expect you to leave UoN as an architecturer, you join as Wanjuki and leave as a doctor and surgeon, You join as Kemunto and leave here as a veterinary doctor, You come here as Mohammed and leave UoN as an accountant, you join UoN as a simple Sanapei and leave here as an economist, You come here as a Patel and leave our gates as a pharmacist, Join as Nafula and exit as a lawyer, a sociologist or archeology. That is the transformation that I expect you to undergo. With our student population of over 60,000, this university is also a rich source of learning about other cultures and improving your student experience and outlook in life.

The University of Nairobi through the office of the dean of students continues to offer career mentorship programs to our students so that our graduates leave the University with competence and skills that are required at the workplace. We will impart you with communication skills so that you are able to express and communicate your ideas effectively. Listening is a very important skill that all of you must learn. You must reflect on what you hear before speaking and engaging your other faculties.

I want to encourage you to develop problem solving skills and creativity in contemporary challenges facing our society. Getting involved in online learning is one way of developing resilience and getting in tandem with the global trends.

Upon graduation we expect you all to be armed with 4Cs. That is communication skills, Creativity, Critical thinking and Collaboration skills. We will also strive to empower you with ICT skills that are needed today and in the future.

Our University is very resilient and we want to train you to be equally resilient and adaptable to the changing environment.

The University has a lot of opportunities for students. There are opportunities to practice leadership and hone your skills for future leadership roles outside the University. Student leadership at the University of Nairobi is always a training ground for national roles. I therefore urge you to start learning to be responsible and accountable for your actions. Many leaders of our generation are hypocrites who demand accountability from others and give lip service to principled leadership.

What do we expect from you?

The University will expect a few things from you as a student. Attend all your lectures. Sit for and pass all your exams. Be a responsible student. Be a responsible citizen of this country.

Our degrees must be earned, not given. For this reason, you will be expected to put in the time and hard work in your studies. We do not compromise on our academic standards because this is what makes us stand out as a reputable university.

The university gives you the freedom to make your own choices about almost everything. You will succeed if you exercise responsibility in your decision-making. Many students are usually overwhelmed by too much freedom and end up making bad decisions. They get into the wrong company and pick up unacceptable social behavior.

We shall expect you to adhere to the University regulations to guide your conduct as a student. The regulations also form the basis for resolving conflicts between you and the University. Take your time to read, understand and practice them for your own comfort.

As our students, you are our brand ambassadors and we expect you to represent us well at every opportunity.

We expect you to be a responsible citizen who respects the laws of the land. You will not use your status as a student of this university to cover for unlawful behavior.

The university is a bastion of freedom. One of our core values and guiding principle is academic freedom. Academic freedom means freedom of inquiry. Freedom to be able to probe issues according to one's own interest, knowledge, and conscience. Freedom of expression and its accuracy is an integral component of scholarship. Always get your facts right and never abuse the freedom accorded to you. Enjoy your freedom and keep away from negative distractions. Avoid the many temptations in the capital city because the prize could be too costly to manage. The location of this University in the City of Nairobi is both good and bad for you as a student. Pick up the best that the city can offer you and shun the vices. Do not fall for the quick fixes and many get-rich quick scams. Avoid criminal activities. Choose your friends wisely. Ensure you keep good company and let your personal safety be your number one priority. Goodness is the only investment that never fails.

Avoid drugs like a plague because once you get hooked your wellbeing will be compromised. Many students continue to struggle with challenges like mental health, HIV/AIDS, gender based violence and teenage pregnancies. We offer support to our students and always try to help them overcome such challenges. Sometimes when you get overwhelmed by personal issues that your friends and colleagues could be unable to solve, simply walk into the office of the Dean of Students for support or the University health services. We care about all our students and we have experts who can handle all your social problems.

We will be launching a project called the O3 plus project tomorrow. The O3 Plus means O-our rights, O-our health, and O-our Wellbeing. The University of Nairobi will be working with

UNESCO and four other Universities in Africa to improve the wellbeing of students in higher learning institutions. This is because we value our students and we believe they are the most important stakeholders in the University.

College is the best place to cultivate dignity, sincerity and style. Enjoy your stay here but don't lose your dignity.

Thank you and once again, Welcome to the University of Nairobi.

PROF. STEPHEN KIAMA GITAHI, PhD

VICE CHANCELLOR.