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Speech by Dr. Simon Gicharu Chairman during Mount Kenya University 7th Graduation Ceremony

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Mount Kenya University

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SPEECH BY

Dr. SIMON GICHARU

CHAIRMAN

DURING

**MOUNT KENYA UNIVERSITY 7TH GRADUATION
CEREMONY**

ON DECEMBER 11TH, 2014

SALUTATIONS

- The Chief Guest, Prof. PLO Lumumba, Advocate of High Courts of Kenya and Tanzania and Director, Kenya School of Law.
- Your Excellences, Ambassadors and High Commissioners present
- Chief Executive Officer, Commission for University Education, Prof. David Some
- Honorable National and County Government leaders
- The Founder of MKU and Chairman, Board of Trustees, Dr. Simon Gicharu
- Members of the Board of Trustees
- Chairman and Members of the University Council
- Pro-Chancellor, Prof. Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha
- Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Stanley W. Waudu
- Members of the Staff and Students
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to join you today as we celebrate our 7th Graduation Ceremony. This is indeed an historic occasion, not only for our graduands but also for me in person. As it has been rightly mentioned, I was indeed accorded an Honorary Doctorate by Gulu University. I wish to thank Gulu University for this honour and at the same time, dedicate it to all of you. My success is indeed your success, and getting this award would not have been possible without your consistent support. For this, I say thank you.

Ladies and Gentlemen.....

As we assemble today, allow me to dwell on the role we as Mount Kenya University have played in *Steering Freedom of Thought* and the challenge ahead for graduates and young people in general if we are to achieve Socio-Economic Development.

I have been assured that you have acquired the requisite skills to enable you forge ahead and chart a path towards a successful destiny.

But often, I find that young graduands such as you just sit back and relax at home once they graduate. They are not pro-active. They wait for things to come their way. This is not the way to go about it. You must be pro-active. You must do something, even it means volunteering. In life, luck is when opportunity meets preparedness.

We have prepared you by giving you the academic certificates which you will receive today. Now, you must get out there and search for opportunity.

Allow me to tell you a short story to illustrate my point... ..

Once upon a time a daughter complained to her father that her life was miserable and that she didn't know how she was going to make it. She was tired of fighting and struggling all the time. It seemed just as one problem was solved, another one soon followed. Her father, a chef, took her to the kitchen. He filled three pots with water and placed each on a fire.

Once the three pots began to boil, he placed potatoes in one pot, eggs in the second pot and coffee in the third pot. He then let them sit and boil, without saying a word to his daughter. The daughter moaned and impatiently waited, wondering what he was doing. After 20 minutes he turned off the jiko. He took the potatoes out of the pot and placed them in a bowl. He pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. He then sieved the coffee and put it in a cup.

Turning to her, he asked. "Daughter, what do you see?" "Potatoes, eggs and coffee," she replied.

"Look closer", he said, "and touch the potatoes." She did and noted that they were soft.

He then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg.

Finally, he asked her to sip the coffee. Its rich smile brought a smile to her face.

"Father, what does this mean?" she asked.

The father explained that the potatoes, the eggs and coffee had each faced the same adversity-the boiling water. However, each one reacted differently. The potato went in strong, hard and unrelenting, but in boiling water, it became soft and weak. The egg was fragile, with the thin outer shell protecting its liquid interior until it was put in the boiling water. Then its inside became hard. However, the coffee was

unique. After it was exposed to the boiling water, it changed the water and created something new.

“Which one are you?” the father asked his daughter. “When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a potato, an egg, or a coffee bean?”

Ladies and Gentlemen.....

More than one year ago, we started an entrepreneurship training and mentorship programme called the Enterprise Academy. We started with only eight alumni and I’m happy to report that this initiative has taken off. The alumni, whom we gave Ksh800,000 each are now employing more than 20 people and their businesses are thriving.

We are going to invest in this Academy as a strategy of tapping entrepreneurial talent, first and foremost among our graduates, and then roll it out throughout East Africa.

As you are aware, the government has set aside 30% of all tenders for the youth. The Enterprise Academy will help the youth garner these slots by giving them the right entrepreneurial skills.

I wish to call upon the banks to set aside some money for bid bonds and tender guarantees to enable the youth fulfil these lucrative government tenders.

I would also like to challenge employers and the government to consider adopting the concept of subcontracting, as opposed to just hiring more employees. Subcontracting is the trend worldwide, and its ripple effect is huge. It creates more jobs and more opportunities for more people.

Ladies and Gentlemen.....

In the recent past, there has been an increase in the number of strikes by students at universities and other institutions of higher learning. These unrests suggest a break down in civilised channels of solving problems and disagreements. When students go on strike, they stop being good role models in the society. They are also not good brand ambassadors for their institutions.

But have we ever paused to think about the amount of time and resources wasted through these strikes? I once visited a very old public university in Europe and in their history dating back over 100 years, there has never been a single strike on record. How do they solve their problems?

I would like to challenge the management of all universities to come up with strategies that will arrest these strikes before they take place.

Ladies and Gentlemen.....

Moving into a new year 2015, I would like to reiterate the Board of Trustees commitment to continuously improve infrastructure throughout our network of campuses. We will also support the university management's initiative of establishing local and international linkages for benchmarking and learning from the best in the world. I would also like to thank the Vice-Chancellor for utilising the resources given to him by the Board of Trustees to develop the university. That over 6,000 people are graduating today is

clear evidence that these resources have been put in good use. I also wish to thank to the University Council, Senate, Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor and all staff members for your support and selfless commitment in making this university a success.

I also wish to thank the county Government of Turkana for allocating the university 100 acres of land free of charge. We promised them that the land will be used for educational purposes, and come April next year, we will commission a new Science and Research centre, which we have built at a cost of Ksh200 million.

Ladies and Gentlemen.....

I must also mention that I'm proud to serve as the Chairman of the Rural Electrification Authority. Whenever I visit a remote village in the country and meet people who are happy because they have access to electricity, my heart lights up with joy. This is because electricity opens up endless opportunities and has a great effect on the economy.

One of these opportunities is the upcoming laptops for primary schools project by the government. On this note, I would like to challenge our IT graduates to be at the forefront in utilising the opportunities that will come about as a result of the roll out of this project. These opportunities include servicing of the laptops and developing new applications.

In my capacity as the patron of the Enterprise Academy, I will be personally willing to assist our graduates who will come up with new, world-changing ideas such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc.

Ladies and Gentlemen.....

As I conclude, I would like to mention that we have invested in infrastructure estimated at about Ksh20billion, for the sole purpose of enabling our young people develop their potential. As an alumni of this university, the best gift you can give back, given that it is privately-sponsored university is to take the following steps in-order to harness your potential:

1. Master yourself

To achieve major success in life, you must assume 100% responsibility for your life. Nothing less will do.

2. Don't live someone else's dreams

You can't hire someone else to do your push-ups for you. You must do them yourself if you are to get any value out of them.

3. Don't die with your potential

Thomas Edison, the man who invented the light bulb once said that "If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves."

Have a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year, 2015.

Thank you and God Bless You all!