



THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR SCIENCE,
TECHNOLOGY AND HIGHER EDUCATION,
HON. DR. PIUS NG'WANDU (MP)**

**DELIVERED AT THE CLOSURE OF THE SIXTH CONFERENCE OF
VICE-CHANCELLORS, RECTORS AND PRINCIPALS (COREVIP' 99)
OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES AT THE ARUSHA INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE CENTRE - 3RD FEBRUARY 1999.**

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(MP), AT THE CLOSURE OF THE SIXTH CONFERENCE OF
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Conference Chairman and President of the AAU, Prof. A. Siwela;
The Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam, Hon. Paul Bomani;
Secretary General of the AAU, Prof. Narciso Matos;
Regional Commissioner for Arusha, Mr. Daniel Ole Njoolay;
Deputy Minister of Education of Ghana, Hon. Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas;
*Chairman of the Dar es Salaam University Council, Ambassador Fulgence
Kazaura;*
Vice Chancellor, University of Dar es Salaam, Prof. M.L. Luhanga;
Vice President of AAU, Dr. Dorothy Njeuma;
Rectors and Principals from African Universities;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to acknowledge the honour which has been bestowed upon me by the conference organizers AAU and UDSM to close this very important conference that has brought together the Heads of African Universities under the overall co-ordination of the AAU. I wish to congratulate you all for the success of this sixth COREVIP meeting. It is my very sincere hope that in the future you will once again consider Tanzania as a venue for the forthcoming COREVIP meetings or indeed any other AAU organized functions.

Mr. Chairman,

I have been reliably informed that your conference has adequately covered the conference theme that is "REVITALIZING UNIVERSITIES IN

AFRICA: STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY.” It is my hope that this conference, the sixth of its kind organized by AAU, has provided you with a golden opportunity to exchange experiences and an excellent environment to learn from each other. The most important issue at hand is how should African Universities prepare themselves to enter the 3rd millennium with a clear vision and an insight that will make our people better equipped to face the challenges of the future. We do rely on your expertise in order for our governments to chart out a collective strategy for development and indeed averting the marginalization of Africa which, I am afraid to say, has taken place for too long. The new generation in Africa is impatient and tired of the status quo. Africa is searching for an enlightened leadership for its rebirth or renaissance. As the President of the United Republic of Tanzania has stated in his opening speech, an enlightened leadership into the future must be provided in a large measure by the African Universities and the academic community.

This is a serious challenge to you and all of us involved in the business of higher education. I am sure, Mr. Chairman, that your conference found time to seriously deliberate on the imports of President Mkapa's speech.

For the past three days you have also covered the other important themes of your conference and have come up with practical conclusions and resolutions. Your conference outcomes in the form of resolutions and conclusions should not only lead to a sustained debate on these important issues and challenges in higher education, but indeed should lead to the formulation of an action plan implementable by the AAU, the member institutions and the other partners in the process of revitalizing the African University.

Mr. Chairman,

I have mentioned elsewhere that Africa is impatient. Africa is impatient as regards her right to sustainable development. The challenge before us is to provide leadership in the process of social, economic, scientific, and cultural development. Let us not spend too much time on the debate as an end in itself. Let us move to action; action on the ground. Undeniably the debate is necessary to provide us with clarity of vision and aims which should sooner than later lead us to a shared vision and collective strategy.

More time and resources should be spent on charting out and defining the vision and strategy.

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Delegates,

I have had sometime now to read and study in some detail the papers presented in this conference by the most eminent scholars in the field of higher education. These, by any reputable standards, are very high quality papers. I am told that during the discussion sessions you accorded them the justice they deserve.

In this closing speech I will not attempt nor do I intend to summarize your deliberations. All I wish to do is to commend your diligent efforts in selecting and looking at the most relevant issues and demands related to university education and research as these evoke questions and responses to the challenges of the 21st Century. You have looked into the issues of demand and supply and associated problems of relevance and quality in higher education. You have also not neglected the crucial issues related to governance and financing of higher education as well as the topical issues on gender, access to and democratization of higher education. You have not been oblivious to the challenges in the revolution in information technology and how this relates to the changed role of the University. Indeed in most of the papers you kept on reassessing the role and mission of the University given these challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

Considering all these issues in three days was a monumental task. It called for the best minds and adept managerial skills to achieve what you have just done. The realization that this ought to be a partnership approach involving all stakeholders such as students, parents, governments, major NGOs, donor communities, private sector and the university community is a significant milestone.

We need to develop a new dynamism within our institutions of higher learning. Responsive and deliberate efforts at both the national and regional levels in order to stimulate growth and leadership in this sector need to be commended and sustained as soon as possible. The partnership calls for closer co-operation and interaction among and within the various institutions and stakeholders. The development of such close interaction amongst the various stakeholders is an essential feature of the revitalization

process. The outcomes of this conference, will fetch higher premium when they reach out and involve all the stakeholders in university education and research. Relevance of curricula, methodologies and other programs of the university becomes more significant now than before in the quest for the development of a collective vision and mission of the university in Africa. Any collective strategy must take into account the principle of subsidiary which allows programs initiated at the national/institutional/sub-regional level to be developed with the view of being integrated into the global or collective African University Education Program. For this reason action on the ground is essential if our programs are to be relevant. There is that urgent need to draw up revitalization programs within each of our institutions. These programs should give answers to the challenges of real and existing problems in each of our countries. The overall collective vision and strategy should act as our compass in co-ordinating our efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

The issues of drought, floods and other vagaries of the weather which often times lead to famine, disease, exposure, abject poverty and environmental degradation pose formidable challenges to all of us in Africa. Anyone single African country may not be able to deal with them successfully.

Is it not time for our universities and institutions of research in Africa to embark on relevant research programmes and to formulate/design relevant curricula to deal with these challenges? Is it not possible to restructure and revitalise our course offerings, for example, in hydrology, forestry, animal husbandry and others, so as to combat effectively the scourge of droughts, floods, locusts, famine and environmental degradation? How effectively can Africa use her natural heritage such as the vast lakes (Victoria, Tanganyika, Nyasa etc.) and the extensive rivers (Nile, Volta, Gambia, Congo, Zambezi, Limpopo etc.) to bring its peoples together for development? How should we exploit our mineral, petroleum and forestry potentials for our own development?

Will the revitalization process in our African universities lead us to facing up to these challenges more effectively than before? Close co-operation in meeting these challenges has an added advantage. It will surely lead to

the building of trust, confidence, respect and interdependence. This development should lead to the minimization, if not total eradication, of the regional conflicts now so prevalent in our continent.

Poverty, ignorance, disease, hunger and environmental degradation are not only serious constraints to our development efforts but indeed compound together to cause friction and even fratricidal conflicts among ourselves. It is thus important for the members of the fratricidal African academic community, their institutions and countries to address themselves seriously to these issues. I am confident, Mr. Chairman, that your conference has just proposed to do this.

Mr. Chairman,

Before ending my address I wish to underscore and ascertain that you reflect upon one other important aspect of President Mkapa's speech. In his opening speech, President Mkapa did at the very beginning allude to it and promised to say more about it later. It must have been purely for reasons and dictates of presidential modesty that indeed he did not amplify nor go back to the subject of language culture and communication. With all humility I wish to pick the subject from where he left it.

Distinguished delegates, you do recall President Mkapa's speech and his wish that were it possible he would have continued to address the conference in Swahili. Alas, this is not yet possible. President Mkapa in effect was referring to the need of adopting a language; mainly African in origin which is common or can be made to be common to all of us without a problem. Swahili is one such language. It does not belong to anyone single tribe or country in Africa yet it is African in origin and is spoken by more than 90 million people in East, Central and Southern Africa. According to the 1998 yearbook of Encyclopedia Britanica, Swahili is rated as the 6th widely used language in the World. Many world-wide radio stations broadcast in Swahili, examples of which are the BBC, Radio Deustchevelle, Voice of America, Radio Moscow, Radio Beijing, Radio Japan (NHK), RSA, Radio Tanzania, Kampala, Kigali, Bujumbura, Nairobi, Cairo etc.

Is it not time we reflected seriously on developing Swahili or indeed any other widely spoken African language so as to use one or both of them to communicate effectively among ourselves?

When we meet as Africans, we often find ourselves in the odd predicament of having to communicate in the language of our former colonial masters. There is nothing wrong in French and English which through history have established themselves as acceptable international languages enabling all of us to interact in this global world. Indeed it is more than necessary that we acquire expertise and competence in these languages so as to speed the acquisition and transfer of knowledge and technologies.

Yet if we are to liberate ourselves from the psychological and cultural dependence, we must deliberately forge an African identity. Language is one vehicle to forge such a cultural identity and self confidence.

There is more in a language than simple communication. During the outgoing century we in Africa had not done enough on this plane, let us try this tool now. Language unifies, language shapes personality and sharpens one's identity. I remember my tour of diplomatic duty in Japan, Australia and the Philippines. Whenever I addressed my audience in English I was well understood, but whenever I spoke in Swahili, even though I had to use an interpreter my listeners were spellbound. They admired the fact that indeed the African had a language after all. They were captivated I had an identity.

Mr. Chairman,

I am aware that the process of revitalizing the universities for the 21st century is going to be a difficult one calling for everyone of us to play our part. No single handed person nor institution nor even country can succeed without a helping hand from a neighbour.

On a light touch now and mindful of the need to galvanize our efforts and stick together, I wish to relay to you the following odd story that sometime ago I heard at one university graduation ceremony. The story goes as follows:

"A frog in the pond stroke friendly relations with two pigeons. The three often enjoyed conversations in the cool of late afternoons as the pigeons came to drink the water at the pond.

In the meantime, the frog marvelled the pigeon's ability to fly and wished also to fly. So one day he asked them if by chance they could give him a lift up and teach him how to fly. Alas, the pigeons said that they could not do that;

first because the frog has no wings and secondly he was too heavy to carry on their backs. Moreover, carrying him over their backs could impede their flying.

Mr. Frog was not to be intimidated. He had considered that all before! He had a bright idea. He suggested that since the pigeons had strong beaks there was no problem; all that was needed was to pick a dry twig on which the two pigeons would hold on with their beaks as they flew while the frog would hang on in the middle of the twig by using his mouth as well! This was agreed. The flight took off perfectly. Indeed, it was a spectacle, wonderful to behold as three creatures of different nature flying together with their mouths perched on a twig. People and other creatures wondered as to how this came about and asked: 'Whose idea?' For obvious reasons the pigeons did not say anything.

But the clamour for an answer became louder and more impatient. Mr. Frog, who was rather self conceited started fearing that the pigeons eventually would claim credit for the idea. He opened his mouth to tell the public that it was his idea. Alas, as soon as he opened his mouth he let go his hold on the twig and dropped down to his death. He was never to be heard." End of the story.

So, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen let us hang on the twig without opening our mouths during the revitalization process lest we let go our hold and fall to our death. Let us move forward from debate to action sooner than later, for the task ahead of us is monumental. It can be done, play your part!

Mr. Chairman,

I now once again wish to congratulate each and every one of you; all the participants in this conference. Your serious deliberations have led to practical resolutions which I believe will guide our academic institutions together with the relevant stakeholders in the revitalization process. I am also confident that you did find some time to relax and enjoy the tranquil climatic and social atmosphere in Arusha. I hope you still have some time to spare for a little tourist escapade.

Finally, I wish to thank all the parties involved in making this conference a success.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I now have the honour to declare this conference officially closed.

THANK YOU.