ADDRESS BY MR. SAMUEL M. KIVUITU, CHAIRMAN, ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF KENYA

ON

THE 29TH ANNUAL GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY (USIU)

11th AUGUST 2007
NAIROBI
The Vice Chancellor, Members of Council and Board of Trustees of the United States International University; Deans, Professors, Faculty and all Staff of USIU; Honorable Members of Parliament and Diplomatic Corps; Parents, families and friends of the Graduating Class of 2007 here present; Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to stand before you this morning especially you the class of 2007. I'm profoundly grateful and touched by the great distinction and honor accorded me by the authorities of United States International University to be with you today and to address you on this graduation ceremony. Today, we celebrate this joyful occasion because it marks the culmination of many years of hard work and study.

Naturally, all of you who are receiving degrees today will be participating here with great excitement and also with great anticipation. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to all of you. I also would like to express my appreciation for the hard work of all the members of the faculties, your teachers, and also the members of the staff who have all contributed toward your success.

Obviously the life you been leading in the University is different from the kind of life you will find out there. No doubt you expect to prosper. We all wish you well in that regard. Remember however that it usually takes time before you arrive at that stage. I do not want to tell you what I have heard others tell young people i.e. Life is difficult. True life is difficult. But so it was in the University. You did not walk over exams. You had to struggle to achieve your results. That is the same thing out there in the world. You will need to struggle - work hard, work intelligently, work diligently; that is if you eventually secure a job in the first place. But even before then you will have to struggle relentlessly to secure that job. I have been
impressed by University graduates who, if a suitable job is not forthcoming soon, take up casual jobs. I have even found some running kiosks in such interim periods. They however still continue with their pursuit for more suitable opportunities. These are commendable efforts. My point is that, please do not despair and in the process lose your mental or emotional balance. I always feel sorry when I meet University graduates who have lost faith in themselves and have become victims of drugs and the like. I repeat, the world out there is not too difficult. It has its own challenges. It also has opportunities. Youth Kitty is such an opportunity, if it exists. Face the first with determination and seek for the latter vigorously. Never give up. When you eventually succeed you will be a happy person - like you are today.

There are many publications on how to succeed in life. Some are fake. I found Dale Larnagie in his books entitled "How to stop worrying and start living" and "How to win friends and influence people" quite useful when I was as young as you are. However, the greatest guide of them all is the Holy Bible. Please read the following verses:

*Ephesians* 5:15
2 *Chronicles* 20:20
31:20 - 21
You will certainly be blessed.

Kenyans generally have great respect and admiration for the educated class. It is even more so if that education is a University degree. People believe the holder has great brains, has worked hard and has potential to make their lot a little bit better. It will serve you well if you endeavour to justify these expectations and goodwill. You do not need wealth to do that. They know you have next to nothing. Just show them respect and consideration.

People will look to you for leadership because you have university education. Please do not let them down. You have what it takes to be a leader. A leader does not necessarily have to be a Member of Parliament (MP). Indeed some MPs do not qualify to be called leaders. You can lead people by giving them advice and providing them with guidance with regard to their lives and
occupations. Indeed even for them to decide whom to elect as a local authority councillor or an MP they need your advice. You are the youth of Kenya and other countries and you have the duty to be interested in the public affairs of your country Kenya, like many other African countries, attained independence and sovereignty many decades in the past but it is sad to say they have nothing to show for it. These are your countries. You have more years to live in them than me and those of my generation, and others before us who are the cause of this unfortunate state of affairs. You have a duty to bring about change - change for the better. You are entitled to live well but that can only happen if you decide to be involved in the process of change. Let me quote some statements I read somewhere so as to demonstrate to you that I am not alone in my way of thinking - I quote

"...if the democratic system is based on election, the public has to be more conscious as to who they elect because their vote is sacred. And that capacity to mobilize the population towards participation is very broad avenue, which we have not pursued, which we have not managed to travel. Hopefully there are young people now who are going to motivate others so they might go down this road ... It's one where the people arise and vote and elect a person who will leave a precedent in the histories of native peoples. There is a key thing we must cultivate aside from our participation, and that is to take pride in our successes. There are successes ... on the part of young people, and by women. (Rigoberta Menchu'Tum - Quote Din Zajonc 2006)"

"The continent of Africa is faced by a wide range of challenges which have a direct relevance to the youth who constitute the majority population: communities are threatened by the struggle for power and limited resources; rural-urban migration has led to the mushrooming of poverty ridden informal settlements in the cities; unemployed youth are desperate and some have resorted to drugs and crime; weapons proliferation is leading to urban violence and cross border conflicts and insecurity have become rampant in urban and rural areas; dictatorships have muffled the voices of citizens who have lost rust in national leadership;"
“The future and deepening of real democracy in our continent rests firmly on the pillars of good governance. I am, therefore, happy that African countries have recommitted themselves to these ideals of democracy, good governance and economic prosperity for our peoples. Too many lives were sacrificed in the liberation struggle across Africa for us not to ensure that we create transparent and accountable system of government on all levels..... Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of shelter and clean water and HIV/AIDS remain some of the biggest challenges confronting our continent. (Mandela Speech on Pan African Parliament, Midrand, 13 Nov. 2006, p.1-2)”

“The presence of an energetic and youthful population in Africa does point to an opportunity for the continent to resolve some of its most pressing challenges. But for the youth to play their role to completion, they must be fully present to the tasks that face the continent and be committed to be courageous enough to engage the problems selflessly. They will need to be crusaders on a liberating mission. We recognize that the youth themselves are not homogenous; they are shaped by the political, economic, cultural and social contests in which they find themselves. They have a wide range of contradictions some of which are a consequence of Western individualism, materialism and decadence perpetuated by Western media. They cannot undertake the tasks if they allow themselves to be driven by forces that seek to tear the continent apart. This situation can be reversed and the youth can become genuine engines of change in Africa if they engage in internal and external inquiry. They must become “seekers” of knowledge about themselves and the destiny of the downtrodden, so well exemplified by the Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah in ‘The Healers’. Through systematic inquiry, they will be able to question political trends in Africa, as discussed in this volume. In doing so, they will also pave the way for the growth of a more visionary and responsive leadership in Africa.”

“Generally, leadership takes time to develop and involves commitment, sacrifice, programme development, discipline, and ability to organize and stimulate solidarity. Ideally, leadership
is geared towards a societal purpose rather than towards the satisfaction of self-interests. Traditional African leadership practices emphasized qualities such as wisdom, perseverance, selflessness, and moral rectitude. Today, the success of a national leader lies in the ability to secure political stability and continuity, socio economic development, and national integration for the benefit of the present and future generations”.

All these quotations you can find them in GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS QUALITY LEADERSHIP IN KENYA, edited by Kimani Njogu and GOVERNANCE AND TRANSITION POLITICS IN KENYA edited by Prof. P. Wanyande, Mary Omosa and Chweya Ludeki.

My appeal to you all is that, irrespective of what your fate is going to be in your hunt for a job or occupation please do not abandon your role as a citizen – as young citizens who has a great deal at stake in the future of your countries. I earnestly believe the Almighty God arranged that you be born at during these disappointing chapters of African history and that you graduate today so that your talents can be harnessed for the benefit of the people of your countries. National unity and prosperity should be your vision. Elimination of negative ethnicity and corruption should be part of your mission. You can start by being an example.

I plead for your pardon for becoming a preacher at this occasion.

Well, the class of 2007, I guess what I have been trying to say here this morning can be summed up by the old adage that "happiness is a journey, not a destination." Bringing joy and passion and optimism to your work is not what you get to do when you get to the top. It is HOW you get to the top. If I have had any success as an election manager, it's because I found a way to enjoy the journey as much as the destination. But more often than not I found ways to learn from, and enjoy, some part of my job. You can't bet your whole life on some destination. You've got to make the journey work too. And that is why I leave you with some wit and wisdom attributed to Mark Twain: Always work like you don't need the money. Always fall
in love like you've never been hurt. Always dance like nobody is watching. And always - always-- live like it's heaven on earth.

Thank you.

S. M. Kivuitu