U.S. Ambassador Michael Ranneberger

Remarks at

Opening of the New United States International University Library and Information Center

Nairobi, September 24, 2007

Your Excellency President Mwai Kibaki, Assistant Minister of Education Mwira, Honorable Members of Parliament, USIU Vice Chancellor Professor Frieda Brown, members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, 

hamjambo!

We are greatly honored to have President Kibaki here with us for the opening of the new United States International University Library and Information Center. His presence testifies to his commitment to expanding education for all Kenyans.

Established in 1969, USIU has a distinguished history as the oldest private university in Kenya. Recently, I gave a speech on how respecting diversity, strengthening democracy, and fostering economic development are inter-related. USIU is an excellent example of this, because its student population and academic faculty come from all tribal, racial, regional, and religious groups. Of the student population of over 3,000, 55% are female and at least 10 percent are foreign students.

I want you to know, Mr. President and Madame Vice Chancellor, that I am doing my small part to help support USIU. I am delighted to say that my son Mark recently began attending USIU. I am certain that the rich diversity of this institution and high level of academic excellence will provide a very enriching experience for him.

Although accredited in the United States since 1982, USIU was independently accredited in 2005 by the accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). This is a regional accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Students enjoy enhanced
marketability by virtue of a degree respected and accepted world-wide. The University has shown remarkable success thus far, and the long waiting list of students eager to join is proof of the University’s value as an academic institution. USIU’s international stature, coupled with the strong faculty and administration, places this institution squarely in the forefront of academic excellence and national development. The university is playing a key role in the development of the country’s human resource capacity necessary in order to meet the country’s development challenges.

Expanding education is critically important both to bolster democracy and to promote economic growth. Mr. President, we recognize that, as a result of your government’s having made education a priority, over the past five-years enrollment at the primary level increased from 5.9 million to 7.6 million. Kenya has one of the highest levels of literacy on the African continent and is actively working towards the goal of 80 percent adult literacy by 2030. Further evidence of the entire nation’s commitment to education is reflected in the increased demand for enrollment at every level of education. Kenyan universities, specialized schools, and night schools are filled to capacity, and the demand continues to grow. Mr. President, your government’s increased budget allocations and expenditures are greatly expanding Kenyans’ access to education. Total budgetary allocations for the education sector have risen by at least 221.7% to the current budget of KShs 107.8 billion.

The United States Government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is working to assist Kenya to develop effective and high quality systems of education, accessible to all its citizens. U.S. Government assistance of $6,000,000 annually focuses on: (1) pre-primary education; (2) primary education; (3) policy development and reform; (4) teacher education and professional development; and (5) institutional capacity development. To that end material and technical support is provided for various Ministry of Education programs.

These efforts reflect the USG’s recognition of the crucial role education plays in the political, social, and economic development of a nation. Education is, therefore, one of the pillars of the strong and growing partnership between the United States and Kenya. That partnership is based on shared democratic values. The leaders of both countries recognize that an educated public is essential for enlightened democratic participation. Equitable access to education encourages a sense of national unity. Through education, all people learn that they share a stake in the peaceful resolution of disputes. A highly educated population will make better-informed choices as voters, and educated voters will be less likely to participate in political violence and to countenance corruption. In that regard, Mr. President, I want to take this opportunity to commend your leadership in speaking out unequivocally against electoral violence. I urge politicians across the spectrum to echo those sentiments and to have zero tolerance for electoral violence.

Education is also critically important in order to advance gender equity. Educated girls and women can more effectively exercise their political and legal rights, in settings ranging from voting, to signing business contracts, to understanding inheritance laws, to resisting domestic violence. I am pleased to note that, in addition to the assistance I cited
above, my Ambassador’s Girls Scholarship Fund is supporting thousands of Kenyan girls to attend secondary school.

There is a Swahili proverb which says: “akili ni mali kila mtu ana zake.” Knowledge is a resource and everyone has his/her own. It is also generally acknowledged that “knowledge is power” in the global economy of the information age, so one cannot dispute the necessity to have every citizen well-educated. Kenya is well on the way to achieving that.

The new library and information center which we inaugurate today will provide access to vast amounts of information and knowledge to students and faculty. The library has the capacity to hold over 300,000 books and periodicals. The modern design supports the use of laptops and incorporates individual study rooms, instructional laboratories, special collections, and archives. Flexible exhibition space will ensure attention to current issues in art and science. The USIU Library and Information Center is one of the largest libraries in Kenya.

A U.S. Government grant of $1.75 million, provided through the U.S. Agency for International Development, helped make possible construction of this magnificent facility.

The USG will continue to assist the Government of Kenya to implement the Kenya Education Sector Program, and will facilitate increased access to education for the most disadvantaged and marginalized populations. Through this partnership, education will help maintain Kenya’s positive momentum towards an even brighter future.

Again, Mr. President, Vice Chancellor, and distinguished guests, I am honored to be here on this very important occasion. I offer my sincere congratulations to the students, faculty, staff and friends of USIU on the opening of this wonderful new library and information center.

Asanteni sana!