

**ADDRESS BY PROF. STEPHEN AGONG', PHD, FAAS, VICE-CHANCELLOR, JARAMOGI OGINGA ODINGA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNIVERSITY'S THANKSGIVING DAY HELD ON MONDAY, 15<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2013 AT THE ASSEMBLY HALL**

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Our Chief Guests – Members of the Clergy

Prof. Washington Olima, Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Planning, Administration and Finance,

Prof. Benson Estambale, Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research, Innovation and Outreach,

Deans and Directors

Coordinators of Institutes and Learning Centres

Members of the Academic Staff

Members of the Administrative Staff

Student leaders and the entire student community

Invited guests

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

I take this opportunity, first, to thank most sincerely the members of the clergy who have kindly granted our request to them to lead us on this solemn occasion of thanks giving. We feel most honoured by your presence amidst us as we gather here to give thanks to God for all that He has done for us over the years as members of the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology family.

We cannot take for granted the unending Mercies and Grace that He has shown and given us in the course of our work to make this University the dream institution of higher learning.

As we humble ourselves before God today, we hope and pray that He grants us His strength and wisdom that we may continue to serve humanity in His Name.

Second, I wish, at the onset, to thank all members of staff and students of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology for your outstanding individual and collective contributions to making this University what it is today. Together, we have made tremendous progress and we need to take celebrate and take pride our achievements.

Only four years ago, we started the momentous journey of making this University what it is today. Together we have journeyed in our noble mission to fulfill our dream to make JOOUST the *University of Choice*.

Ladies and gentlemen, the history of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology is one major source of inspiration to me. In it I see a guarantee of the University's future success. Guided by the unfailing hand of God and His enduring love, we have built the University on a firm foundation that can stand the test and turbulence of time.

Four years is a short time by any standards. It is amazing how much we have accomplished together as a team. The University has grown steadily and accomplished many feats – at time outshining even long established institutions, which, ordinarily, should be our mentors. We have realized tremendous growth both in size and scope. Key highlights of this growth include:

- Establishment of 13 Schools
- Establishment of four Directorates ( Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Performance Contracting, Research and Outreach, ICT, Postgraduate Studies
- Establishment of two Institutes and Centre (Institute of Cultural Heritage and Material Science, East African Community Integration Institute, and Centre for Gender Mainstreaming and Development
- Opening of five Learning Centres (Kisumu, Kisii, Kosele, Busia and Nairobi)

In addition to these, we launched our Strategic Plan in October 2011, and in June last year, through our collective effort, our dream to attain the ISO certification was realized.

I cannot forget to mention that last year, we witnessed the graduation of our first lot of students who are now carrying the flag of JOOUST as they render valuable service to the Nation in different capacities.

Our Vision 2030 flagship, projects, which include the 1,000 student-capacity hostel, the state-of-the-art library and the science complex, are right on course. Already the hostel is partly in use. I wish to assure the student community that work to complete the remaining part is going on and soon the entire facility will be fully in use.

Dear colleagues and students, these are major milestones that we could not have achieved without the loving presence of God in our midst.

However, as we enumerate and celebrate our achievement so far, I would like to pose a challenge to all of us to think of the JOOUST that we want in the years to come. With the grant of Charter that gave us the fully-fledged university status, we now move into another phase as far as this University's development is concerned.

As we embark on this phase, what is your dream JOOUST?

From my perspective, the JOOUST that I think of is one where everyone counts.

I dream of a JOUST where no one is too small or too junior to contribute his or her idea.

I think of a JOOUST where no idea is too inferior to warrant consideration.

I dream of a JOOUST where no idea is too superior to be constructively challenged.

I want a JOOUST that cherishes and facilitates the meeting of minds to produce ideas that contributes to the social, economic and spiritual wellbeing of not just the members of the University Community, but the entire humankind.

Together, we should build a JOOUST where our net worth is judged by our contribution to fulfilling the University's mandate to the Nation and academia.

This will involve embracing the principle of plurality of opinions and views. It will involve a team spirit as an ideal that we all cherish and encourage.

I imagine that the task of leading Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology is akin to that of directing a boat in a long journey. This boat does not have an engine but uses paddles to propel it. There are many paddlers and for this boat to move fast and in the right direction all the paddlers must do their bit. The paddling must also be synchronized in order for the journey to continue. I wish to appeal to everyone in this University to be a part of our boat's crew.

I dream of a JOOUST where excellence is the buzzword for all of us; where staff compete to produce the best results; where students fight to outshine each other in their academic work and in research; where our interaction is not informed by malice and the wish to "finish" one another, but by our commitment to growing a university that we are all proud to be a part of.

Dear Colleagues and Students,

From my perspective, I envision a JOOUST where research and innovation form the bedrock of our activities; where all our outreach programme seek to make life better for the disadvantaged members of the community. For this to happen, we must aim to research at the highest international levels of excellence while our output remains geared towards finding solutions to the problems in the local communities.

Our efforts to attract and satisfy more and more postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers in all disciplines must remain on course. It is only through this that we shall sustain active research programmes that assure us of our future academic excellence and competitiveness.

In this short period of our existence, we have grown our student population to over 3,000. This number must continue to grow in order for us to open up more opportunity for those in need of university education. As we grow the population, we must, nonetheless, ensure that this growth takes place simultaneously with quality enhancement and value addition. This calls for conscious planning in order to assure our stakeholders of long-term sustainability and stability.

Creating the capacity for this anticipated growth is an obvious challenge, especially in the current economic circumstances. However, not embarking on this growth path is not an option, because failure to do so will weaken our future competitiveness.

I am persuaded that together, our innovative and resourceful minds will lead us to best ways of fulfilling our mission. As the Chief Executive Officer, the main force and resource that I shall rely on, as we embark on creating the JOOUST of the future, are the current members of the University - the staff and students, who are gathered here today. As colleagues, as a united family, as people who have the same goals and aspirations, who share respect and trust for one another, I believe we shall be able to make our home – JOOUST – the lush *Oasis of Knowledge* and scientific discovery that we all aspire to make it.

This calls for new innovative ways of meeting our obligations. Key among these obligations is the financing of our various activities. With the dwindling State funding, we must now use every avenue at our disposal to secure funding for the University. One such avenue is research. I would like to reiterate my appeal particularly to the academic staff to aggressively pursue research funding.

As we do this, we should think of ways of forging links with the industry. I would like all of all of us to start exploring ways of forging links with the related industries. Let us identify industry-specific innovations that can attract funding for specific programmes.

Moreover, the sheer scope of the JOOUST that we want to build and grow will require wider collaboration internationally. Our research and international strategies should also be developed and expanded in tandem. The importance of international engagement, in order to build and enhance our research potential, cannot be overemphasized. We must ensure that the few engagements that we already have are kept active while we work aggressively to bring in more.

Another avenue is as I have said growing the student population. This calls for aggressive marketing of our programmes to prospective students. We must embark on this not as an on-and-off undertaking, but as an integral part of our calendar of activities.

Ladies and gentlemen, our current development agenda is clearly spelled out in the Strategic Plan for the period 2010 -2015, which we unveiled just over one year ago. This Plan acknowledges the weaknesses and strengths that we have as an institution and identifies the challenges facing us as well as the opportunities available. Together, we shall build on our strengths and together work to surmount the challenges in the years ahead.

Our preoccupation must be the strategic priorities detailed in Plan which include: academic programmes, research and innovation, community outreach, partnership and networking, staff welfare, student services, resource mobilisation and management, and quality assurance and enhancement.

My dream JOOUST is that where quality take precedence over everything. We must think of quality in everything we do especially in our core areas of academic and research. Our absolute priority must be the improvement of the quality of teaching.

This implies improving not only the quality of teaching and learning facilities, but also the mode of delivery.

Dear colleagues,

We have today the noble goal of building this University into the Oasis of knowledge, the heart of research and innovation, and the citadel of academic excellence that we dream of. I believe that individually and collectively we have the largeness of mind, the singularity of purpose, the firmness of belief in ourselves, the commitment to duty, and the abundance wisdom to guide us in the execution of our duties towards accomplishing this goal.

As we do this, we must not lose sight of one thing – our values. Our firm commitment to fairness, professionalism, transparency and accountability, integrity, meritocracy and equity. These, coupled with our steadfast relationship with the society, our commitment to academic freedom and to nurturing talent – must together form the unshakable pillar of JOOUST as a family – a family that puts God first in everything we do. These are the value that must guide our actions in good and challenging times alike.

In conclusion, dear colleagues, I wish to say that the task of building the JOOUST that we want is a noble one that we must be proud of and committed to. Let us all take it as a duty and a responsibility that we must carry for the sake of generations to come. We owe it to fellow Kenyans and humanity at large. I call upon all our stakeholders to join the boat. Let us paddle together.

Thank you. God bless JOOUST, God bless you all