



WELCOMING REMARKS

BY

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RECTOR: POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

THE 19TH GRADUATION CEREMONY

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09:00

AT

SAFARI COURT HOTEL

WINDHOEK

Honourable David Namwandi, Minister of Education, representing
His Excellency President Hifikepunye Pohamba
Ms Evelyn Breuer, Chairperson of Council
Distinguished Council Members
Distinguished Invited Guests
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen
All protocol observed

Every time we meet for this auspicious occasion, we are filled with the high emotions of joy and a fulfilling sense of achievement. And rightly so. In the big picture of global events, this is a rather small proceeding but a huge and defining moment for the individual graduate, for their families and communities, the nation and also for the world as a whole.

For the graduate it is the rite of passage to a professional life and the economy, which increasingly is requiring more applied knowledge and competencies. Graduation events this time of year all over the world have the cumulative effect to provide nations with the know-how needed to change the individual fate and that of humanity and nature. Indeed this makes graduation a special event and gives meaning to any university mandate as the definitive transformative force in socio-economic development. This is aptly captured in our theme for the year: ***Universities as Transformation Agents of Economies.***

It is for these reasons that I am privileged to welcome you all warmly to celebrate, and to extol the achievers and the roleplayers:

- a. **Honourable Minister**, welcome and thank you for representing His Excellency President Pohamba. Please convey our heartfelt gratitude for his kind support and also our best wishes.
- b. Our **guest speaker** for today, Mr Junius Mungunda, CE of Standard Bank, someone I have known and worked with for many years, for finding the time to be with us this morning. Thank you Sir, and we look forward to your inspiring message, especially to the graduates.
- c. The **Honorable Ministers, Members of Parliament, Public Office bearers, government officials in their various capacities, our partners, funders and sponsors**, as well as the **international community** represented by the officials of numerous governments and the diplomatic corps.
- d. the supporting and respected **parents, relatives and friends** who frequently surrender their life savings and sacrifice more, often seeing their only or first child graduating from a university.
- e. the **graduates** who have endured so much to triumph against all odds.
- f. the **professoriate and administrators** who on their part endure the challenges of crafting innovative systems and

solutions that formulate, create and impart new knowledge, thereby shaping society through the graduates, their published work and service to the community.

- g. And finally but least of all, the **media** for playing a critical role in the information and education cycles.

Please feel warmly welcomed all of you!

So everyone can see that this is truly a family affair, a large community of many members raising a child. But let us not rest on our laurels and become complacent, which is what really happens when we spoil our children and institutions by showering them with money while accepting mediocrity and demanding little or no better performance.

As is customary at this celebratory event, I must return to the vision and mandate of this university. In 2008 when we applied to government to change the name and mandate of this institution, we were conscious of the need to drive the national economy from a higher knowledge platform by creating a **world-class university of science and technology - a standard bearer for science and technology**. This is a global phenomenon - a global trend, that countries have dedicated their resources to create **drivers and enablers of scientific and technological innovations**, because these are **main pillars of any economy**.

Namibia needs to diversify its education system and must strengthen its foundation of these pillars through **focus, promotion and advancement of science and technology**. Consequently, in a few months' time the Polytechnic will be renamed as the Namibia University of Science and Technology.

The Cabinet's decision and directives of 2012 in this regard therefore are addressing the needs of Namibia in the context of **global dynamics and paradigms**, and are hallmarks of our President's vision and legacy.

Let me caution that this doesn't mean that the new university will focus solely on S&T, or cannot offer other disciplines such as the arts, business, the humanities or social sciences. In fact, **multi- and inter-disciplinarity** are focal points in our development, and these paradigms will be nurtured through the existing and new qualifications at under-graduate as well as post-graduate levels. This is the only way in which Namibia can address its development challenges and be a relevant player in the global economy. Our strategic and transformation plan addresses these challenges comprehensively and it is now the time for the government and society at large to support this university to the fullest.

World-renowned educationist Jamil Salmi presents in his book, ***The Challenge of Establishing World-class Universities***, the key characteristics of such universities. These are for example:

- i. an international reputation for teaching and research;
- ii. world-class departments;
- iii. producing ground-breaking research;
- iv. attracting most able students and producing best graduates who end up in positions of influence and or power;
- v. a very sound financial base; and
- vi. making a big contribution to society and our times.

Salmi further in his other book titled ***“The Road to Excellence: The Making of World-class Universities”*** (2011), presents his “recipe” for “world-class universities”. He prescribes three important ingredients, which must be aligned for a university to become world-class:

- a. **abundant resources;**
- b. **a favorable governance structure** (which encompasses a strong and supportive leadership team, full management autonomy), and
- c. **a concentration of talent** (such as faculty and students).

To His Excellency the President and the nation, we assure you that we are building a world-class university that will **spark and uphold our interest, participation, relevance and leadership in science and technology**. But this is only possible with the right

support and systems. Namibia needs such institutions to be a competitive nation: excellent universities can leapfrog the national development paradigms prescribed in its vision and development plans. Without these ingredients, our dream will forever be elusive.

This brings me to the challenges facing our transformation, the latter which cannot be speedily, fully or appropriately realized due to certain prevailing practices, including the current funding regime. To some extent the national system is beset with inefficiencies and inequitable resources allocation, which are stifling growth and innovation in the Polytechnic.

Six months ago at our last graduation ceremony, before finalization of the new budget, I cautioned about the outdated funding regime and under-resourcing of the Polytechnic. Today, I restate my concerns and of many others, because when we interrogate the recent allocations and medium-term funding for this institution, I am tempted or even forced to think that there is **a conceptual gap affecting the money supply chain through the bureaucracy, or even a lack of understanding at critical levels**, of what this institution has been needing, needs now and would need in the future to be a university of stature it deserves to be.

It is for these reasons that the conversation on this point must move from a certain boardroom in a unit to a higher level of government and the public arena. Unless addressed, these

practices will continue to suffocate institutional and national development and will cause deep harm to this and future generations.

If the Ministry of Education returns resources to the Treasury as it happened last year while the Polytechnic sorely lacks resources to remain a decent university; if the Ministry is not providing appropriate funding to this institution, then the system is indeed failing this and future generations. Even a well-planned transformation, without the appropriate resources, will remain a transformation in name only. I am sure this is not what His Excellency the President and the Cabinet have intended.

The evidence is there for all to see. Funding for programs, services, systems and facilities supportive of tuition and the well-being of the student has been discouraging. A comparison of subsidy funding for public higher education institutions in Namibia and South Africa - where the majority of Namibians are studying - shows that the Polytechnic has been funded at the lowest end, receiving a cover of about one third of cost-per-student compared to other institutions where funding covers two-thirds or the full cost of tuition and services.

It surely cannot be that the education we offer is of so much less quality and value than the others', and it cannot be because of our poor performance and lack of accountability. In fact, the contrary is true. As many of us know, it is not for lack of public resources that we are in this untenable situation.

Nevertheless, Ladies and gentlemen

We should never lose hope. Perseverance is a powerful tool in the victory formula, and we must therefore keep on pushing the limits of progress. Every day we must stand up and let our voice be heard: *"Applied knowledge: seek it; earn it; apply it."* And through consistent effort we shall produce the best results for which Namibia will be known, and for which the world would crave Namibia's products and services so much more.

Finally ladies and gentlemen

As we move forward with the renaming and transformation, I want to assure the nation that your engagement and support are highly appreciated and are the foundation for our success.

To the graduates we say, the world is your springboard to realize your dreams, our dreams. Our future is in your good hands, manage it well and we wish you eternal success.

Once again, welcome to you all. And I thank you for your kind attention.

- ***Ends.***

